

SUPPORTING THE TEACHING PROFESSION DURING TIMES OF CRISIS

NCEE'S REPORT FROM THE 2020
VIRTUAL INTERNATIONAL SUMMIT ON
THE TEACHING PROFESSION



I. INTRODUCTION

Educators around the world are asking themselves how to safely and responsibly open schools, but also grappling with the reality that as the coronavirus pandemic continues in much of the world, schools may never look the same as they did just months ago. Even as many educators are acknowledging the value of in-person learning, many are also accelerating discussions about what education should look like in the future.

NCEE has been thoroughly exploring how high-performing education systems have adapted to distance learning and how they are thinking long-term about future education redesign. NCEE participates regularly in global convenings of academics, educators, and thought leaders to anticipate what the future may hold, and to translate their thinking into actionable policy and practice recommendations for our partners.

On June 2, 2020, NCEE's President and CEO Anthony Mackay moderated the 2020 [International Summit on the Teaching Profession](#) (ISTP). This event, originally intended to take place in Valencia, Spain, was instead convened virtually by Education International, the Organisation for Economic Co-operations and Development (OECD), and Spain's Ministry of Education. The virtual meeting brought together education leaders from government and teachers unions from 35 leading countries: the 30 highest performing and five fastest improving on the [Programme for International Student Assessment](#) (PISA) exam.

Four key themes emerged from the discussion:

- First, high-quality, mutually respectful collaboration between governments and the teaching profession has been essential to respond to the pandemic.
- Second, there have been many promising innovations that have emerged in response to the need for distance learning, but the pandemic has also reinforced the value of in-person schooling.
- Third, teacher collaboration has become even more essential as teachers have been forced to transition to unfamiliar virtual learning spaces, and policies to enable teachers to work together as professionals will be crucial.
- And fourth and most important, the pandemic has exposed longstanding inequities in education to a degree that has been eye-opening for all of us, and systems must adapt to become more inclusive and equitable moving forward.

This report will summarize NCEE's key takeaways from the 3-hour discussion of Ministers of Education and teachers' union leaders. In addition, short "Snapshots" will highlight what several of the participating jurisdictions have done to promote teacher professionalism, and the role their unions have played in that process.

II. SETTING THE STAGE

ISTP Moderator Anthony Mackay opened the convening and described the summit agenda. After expressing his regret that the pandemic made it impossible for participants to travel to Valencia, he turned the floor over to Spain's Minister of Education Isabel Celaá, representing the host country, to welcome participants.

The Minister acknowledged that before the pandemic, when the convening was still to be held in person, this year's topic was intended to be equitable and inclusive education. She argued that the pandemic had uncovered enduring inequities in education systems all over the globe. In shifting the focus to how countries were responding to the coronavirus, ISTP had not really changed the topic – only decided to approach it from a different, and much more pressing, vantage point. In Minister Celaá's view, even though education systems were all searching for emergency solutions to guarantee the right to education to all students during a period of prolonged distance learning, it was crucial for policymakers to keep a longer-term goal in mind: becoming more resilient, equitable, inclusive, and capable of continuous improvement in a changing world.

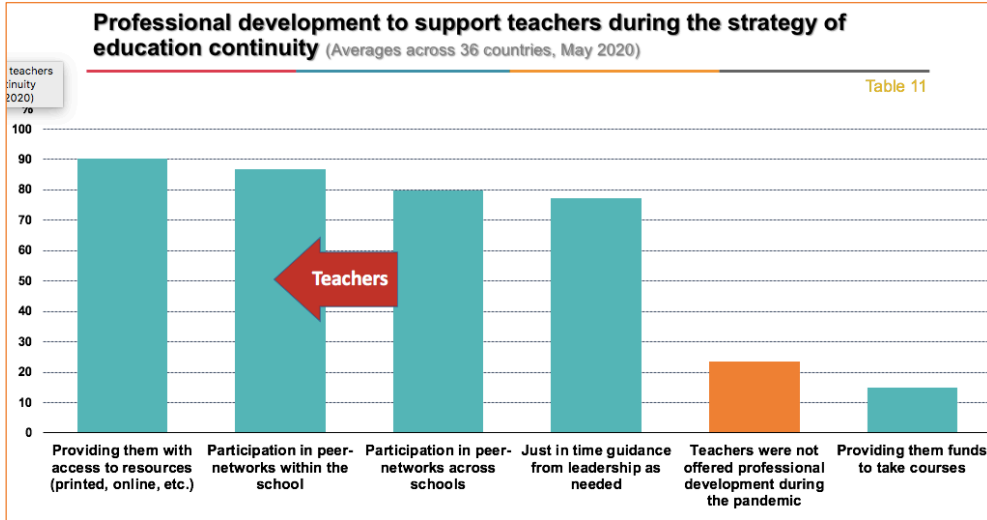
Minister Celaá pointed to five specific lessons Spain's education system had learned in the wake of the pandemic. First, despite new possibilities for distance learning, in-person schools are irreplaceable, and provide a unique environment for students to communally develop the necessary skills to thrive in life. Second, despite unprecedented investments, too many children still lack consistent digital access, and more work remains to be done. Similarly, systems still need to invest more in teachers' digital skills and developing their knowledge and comfort level with using technology in teaching. Rigid and outdated ways of organizing schooling were impeding progress, and systems needed to do more to enable adaptability. And finally, systems should never lose sight of inclusivity and equity as “both the goal and the method.”

Following Minister Celaá's welcome, the OECD's Director for Education and Skills Andreas Schleicher and Education International's President Susan Hopgood provided additional remarks to give context to the proceedings. Their remarks drew on two key papers prepared in advance of the meeting: the OECD's *Schooling Disrupted, Schooling Rethought* and Education International's *Education & Covid-19*.

Snapshot on Policies for Professional Teaching: SPAIN

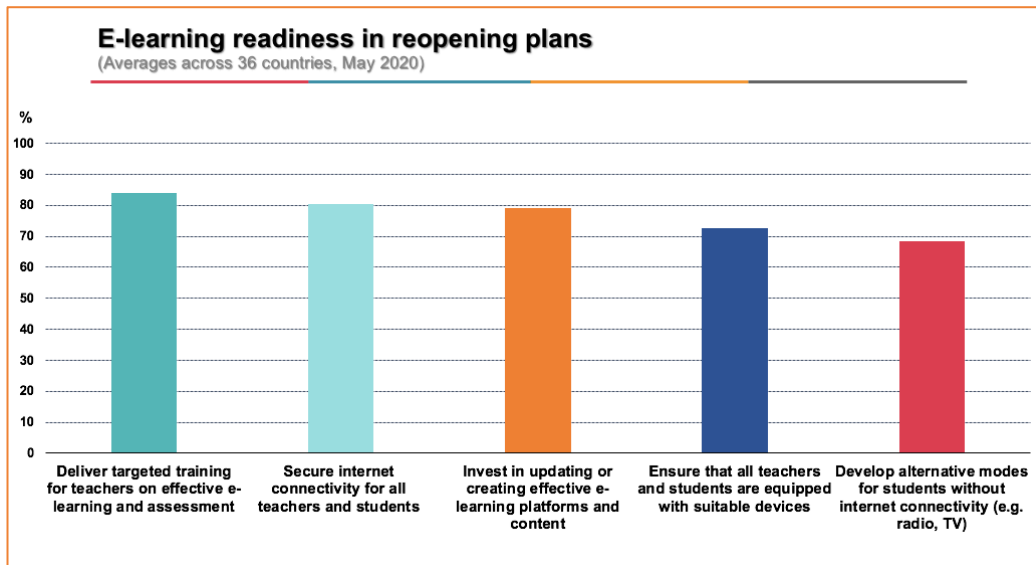
Teacher recruitment, training, and support in Spain is a balance between national guidance and local control of the autonomous communities. The national government sets guidelines and priorities for teacher recruitment and development, and the regional governments implement them. The 2006 Law on Education in Spain highlights the importance the government places on teacher development. The National Institute of Educational Technology and Teacher Training (INTEF) determines the priorities of teacher training. The regional governments then create specific Annual Plans for Teacher Training (PAFP) which are aligned with the larger state guidelines. Teachers unions in Spain play a key role in offering teachers professional learning opportunities and advocating for the rights of their members. The two biggest are the Federation of Teachers, associated with the Workers Group, and the Federation of Workers in Education, associated with the Socialist General Union of Workers.

Schleicher argued that despite the undeniable challenges posed by the pandemic, real change often happens in deep crisis. He urged participants to consider the possibility that school doesn't just get back to "business as usual" when a vaccine is developed. One and a half billion students have been locked out of schools, and we have found out that education systems are not as resilient as we might have thought they were. In his view, distance learning can and must work better in the future. This is not to say that systems did not offer teachers a range of supports to promote their professional growth during the pandemic. As the chart below shows, across 36 countries, 90 percent of teachers reported that they received some resources to transition to distance learning from their school systems. Eighty percent reported that they had the opportunity to engage in peer-to-peer learning across different schools, and somewhat less than that reported that they received regular, timely guidance from their leadership. While these numbers are encouraging, they suggest that more could be done to support teachers' professional growth in this challenging time.



Source: Andreas Schleicher, OECD

Nevertheless, no matter how well-prepared teachers are to teach students at a distance, online learning will never be able to adequately mimic the crucial social function of schools. Furthermore, Schleicher made very clear that distance learning had uncovered many inequities in education. Students lack consistent and equitable access to broadband, and systems have not done enough to support all teachers to teach using technology and to elevate the most experienced teachers so that they reach the most challenging classrooms. As schools prepare to reopen in the fall, they will need to do more to prepare for possible returns to distance learning if and when the pandemic has a second wave. As the chart below shows, many of these necessary strategies are being implemented – but they are clearly not reaching all students. More will have to be done to ensure equity.



Source: Andreas Schleicher, OECD

Representing Education International, Hopgood struck a slightly different note. She recognized that workers in both the public and private sectors have faced incredible challenges and very real danger. Despite widespread adoption of online learning, the learning gap between students with consistent digital access and those without has rapidly widened, and many students have not developed social and emotional skills during this year. She called on all countries to conduct a rigorous “equity audit” as the new school year began, and to temporarily suspend standard annual evaluations of education systems in order to focus exclusively on whether the needs of the most vulnerable have been met. Hopgood also stressed that these audits should take place in partnership with teachers and school staff, and result in actionable strategies for teachers to help the most vulnerable populations specifically.

In addition, she sounded an alarm that many stakeholders in favor of “disrupting” traditional forms of education would attempt to use distance learning as a rationale to defund education systems. In her view, more funding was necessary, to support vulnerable students at risk of losing a year of learning and to enhance teacher professionalism and capacity to respond to unprecedented challenges in the wake of the pandemic.

Snapshot on Policies for Professional Teaching: ESTONIA

Both Estonian policymakers and practitioners see it as a priority for their country to recruit a world-class teaching force. To do that, recent policies have emphasized improving the professional standing of teachers by raising pay and professional working conditions. This is highlighted by the Lifelong Learning Strategy of 2020, which focuses on developing competent and motivated teachers and school leadership. To attract more highly qualified applicants to initial teacher education programs, Estonia eliminated tuition, raised the standards of admissions, and added a “professional aptitude” component to teacher education applications. The Ministry promotes continuous education of teachers, and teachers are encouraged to conduct self-analysis of their own practice against these competencies to identify areas of growth and development. The Estonian Educational Personnel Union (EEMU) has been integral in working to professionalize teaching by supporting increases in salaries and providing seminars for members.

III. ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

Following the opening remarks, delegates from each of the participating countries were given the opportunity to describe how their systems had responded to the pandemic. Specifically, they reflected on how they had supported their teachers to create a more adaptable teaching profession with the knowledge and skills to respond to the distance learning challenge. And many debated if and how the pandemic would cause longstanding changes to the education system moving forward.

All participants pointed to the enormous value of social dialogue and mutually respectful collaboration between governments and the teaching profession. All said that a goal during the pandemic had been to further develop that trusting collaboration. Successful strategies for deepening trust between government and the profession included formally recognizing the unions as a source of expertise and actively listening to constructive criticism from teachers in an effort to improve. Many systems noted that some of their most productive innovations and investments in response to the pandemic resulted from teachers drawing attention to the issue – even if the criticism was at times harsh, it was also valuable. For that reason, participants stressed that communication between ministries and unions needed to be regular and systematic. Feedback loops are crucial.

There was more debate about the value of innovations that have emerged in response to the pandemic, and how much education systems would change long-term as a result. Many felt that more than anything, the pandemic had reinforced the value of in-person schooling. While teachers had made the most of an unpleasant situation by teaching from home, many systems worried that it had created unrealistic pressures on teachers to be permanently connected to students. Work-life balance and burnout had become serious concerns for many educators. Others cautioned that too often, stakeholders were making forecasts about the “new normal” of education with insufficient evidence. Before systems adopt fundamental, long-term shifts to the nature of teaching and learning, more data need to be collected. Several speakers urged participants to ensure that technology was serving as an enabler of effective pedagogy. Too often, they warned, teachers are forced to change pedagogy merely to adopt the latest technology, without first asking whether the change is good for students’ learning.

Snapshot on Policies for Professional Teaching: FINLAND

In Finland, the quality of teachers is not measured by external standardized tests. Instead, the Ministry of Education and Culture prioritizes the autonomy of and trust in the professionalism of teachers. To help ensure this professionalism, the country's only teacher preparation programs are housed at eight highly selective research universities and educators are required to hold a master's degree. The preparation focuses on developing three core skills of high-quality educators: 1) drafting curricula; 2) creating assessments to measure student growth, and 3) providing equitable supports for all students. In 2009, the Ministry established the *Osaava* program to promote professional learning to continue building these competencies. This program provides a continuum of professional learning for teachers at all stages, mentoring for new teachers, and professional development opportunities for school leaders. Participation is voluntary and the program is designed to create natural communities of learning to enable teachers to collaborate and grow with each other. The Trade Union of Education in Finland (OAJ) works closely with the Ministry to promote this high level of teacher quality and represents almost 95 percent of teachers.

Nevertheless, many pointed to promising shifts in their thinking that they hoped would endure past the life of the pandemic. First and foremost, across education systems, public recognition of teachers' invaluable expertise and professionalism is at a high point. Many systems have been able to capitalize on that show of support by building in new policies to create more supportive working environments for teachers. In many places, facilitated by technology, teachers have more opportunities to plan, collaborate with their colleagues in school and across schools, and develop themselves professionally. In addition, the pandemic has prompted more widespread appreciation for the value of schools as pillars of their communities. In many places, schools serve as centralized hubs for community resources, social supports, and access to enrichment activities, and that function will not be replaced by distance learning.

In addition, many initial teacher education programs are taking advantage of the pandemic to rethink their offerings. They are offering prospective teachers more competency-based programs, more practical experience in using technology to teach, and more job-embedded, real-time feedback. In some places, enhanced recognition of teachers' skills and contributions has enabled unions to successfully earn pay increases. In other jurisdictions, teachers have earned other kinds of incentives, such as stipends or reduced workloads for taking on new responsibilities like developing new curriculum content and mentoring their peers. These emerging structures draw on some of the principles of some of the most successful teacher career ladder and professional growth systems globally, like in top-performing country Singapore.

Snapshot on Policies for Professional Teaching: SINGAPORE

Singapore clearly defines the attributes of high-quality teaching professionals in the Teacher Education Model for the 21st Century (TE²¹), including describing their necessary values, knowledge, and skills (V³SK). These values fall into three categories: learner-centered values, teacher identity, and services to the profession and community. Key to teacher identity is striving for constant improvement and aiming for high standards. Policies critical to the high level of teacher quality include having one highly selective teacher preparation program, a clear professional career ladder, high levels of compensation for teachers, allowing teachers time to collaborate with their colleagues during the work week, and teacher-led professional development. The Singapore Teaching Union (STU) was integral in creating this professional development system by supporting the creation of the Academy of Singapore Teachers (AST). The AST provides teacher-led support for other teachers, offers wide courses and workshops, and promotes professional learning communities within schools. Representing the vast majority of teachers in Singapore, STU also offers its own professional development courses and teacher wellness workshops to ensure the development of high-quality teachers.

There have also been widespread efforts across many countries to harness teachers' professional expertise to create, curate, and distribute a variety of new distance learning tools and programming. These include online platforms of digital learning materials linked to curriculum, videos of effective teaching and learning, simulated digital learning environments where students can explore real-world scenarios, and dedicated television stations for students to watch and learn content.

In addition, many participants reflected that the pandemic has also drawn renewed appreciation for the often-overlooked work of allied professionals. Students across the globe have been isolated, deprived of social opportunities with their peers, facing stress related to their families' employment uncertainty, and coping with fewer opportunities to exercise. Helping young people to cope with these kinds of unprecedented challenges is far beyond the capacity of even the best-prepared and most well-meaning teacher. But as participants in the meeting noted, these paraprofessionals, including school psychologists, social workers, and experts in learning exceptionalities, are well-positioned to do so. Many jurisdictions are thinking about ways to invest more in this crucial resource and to leverage their talents more strategically.

Despite these notes of optimism, participants unanimously agreed that the pandemic had exposed deep and distressing levels of inequality across every society – and threatened to widen those inequalities even further. Too many systems lack the resources to ensure that every child has access to a digital device. Many students who can access the internet can only do so from their smartphones, which makes completing complex tasks difficult. Even in the systems that have done the most work to make broadband internet accessible to all and to get digital learning materials in the hands of every student, challenges remain. Many students who have consistent access to devices may not have quiet and comfortable places to work. And in all jurisdictions, teachers have stories to tell about a student they have not been able to reach, or have not been able to motivate from a distance.

While there was much optimism in the room about positive, creative innovations in the wake of the pandemic, there was also a shared acknowledgment on the reality of these challenges. All acknowledged that despite their best efforts, the quality of students' distance learning experiences had varied widely. As Schleicher noted in his closing remarks: "Inclusion is now the central challenge in education." Harnessed properly, technology can promote inclusion, but there is also a risk of leaving some groups of students behind if technology is not used well. These points were echoed by Education International's David Edwards, who called for using the pandemic as an opportunity to rebuild education systems for equity – and to do so with humility and an understanding of all that we do not know.

As ISTP Moderator Anthony Mackay remarked while adjourning the meeting and thanking participants: "This is a collective endeavor and we commit ourselves to achieving a deeper level of learning for all young people." The scale of this challenge demands creative collaboration between professional educators and system leaders now more than ever before. NCEE is glad to be able to assist our partners in that crucial work.

V. APPENDIX: LIST OF PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

Spain (<i>host</i>)	Switzerland	Austria
Singapore	New Zealand	Russia
China	Norway	Czech Republic
Japan	Denmark	United States
Estonia	Poland	Latvia
Canada	Belgium	Italy
Finland	Australia	Georgia
Korea	Vietnam	Albania
Slovenia	United Kingdom	Peru
Ireland	Portugal	Moldova
Germany	Sweden	
Netherlands	France	