

## A Nordic Platform for the professional development of School Leadership

### 1. Introduction

The world faces significant challenges. Global warming, deteriorating security, polarization in public debate, and growing difficulties in distinguishing correct information from AI-generated influence are some of the changes that affect both society, and especially education in our preschools and schools. It is more important than ever that schools remain strong and capable of developing and furthering education that fosters the knowledge and skills required to navigate in today's and tomorrow's world.

Union representatives for school leaders in the Nordic countries agree that investments are needed to secure professional development within the school leadership profession. Many challenges are common across the Nordic countries and can only be met by providing school leaders with the conditions they need to actively manage and lead their operations towards set goals. National leaders need to step up and take responsibility for offering school leaders opportunities to strengthen their knowledge base and professionalism.

Through this joint Nordic platform, we hope to contribute to making such an investment a reality.

*Being a school leader is highly stimulating, but the conditions need to improve.*

School leaders in the Nordics unanimously agree that the school leadership role is very enjoyable and stimulating. Most would make the same career choice again. However, there are areas that need improvement, particularly regarding workload. School leaders work far too much and do not get the necessary recovery time. School leaders also need a salary that reflects the significant responsibility they bear. Many school leaders experience a lack of balance between tasks, available time, and compensation for their efforts. These basic conditions must be in place if the school leadership career is to continue being an attractive professional choice for skilled teachers.

### 2. Investment in Professional Development for School Leaders

The missions of school leaders and teachers are intertwined in many ways, and both leaders and teachers naturally focus on the education and upbringing of children and students. However, school leadership has a deeper area of responsibility. School leaders' mission can be briefly summarized in the following three areas:

- Ensuring the quality and equity of education in a school/educational unit. As a school leader, you have a significant responsibility to organize your school so that teachers can and want to collaborate on the quality assurance of teaching in all classrooms.
- Ensuring functioning student health services and that students who need special support also receive it. As a school leader, you have the overall responsibility to ensure that the school takes its compensatory role.

- Ensuring a safe and secure school for both students and staff.

If a task does not clearly fall under any of the three aforementioned areas, it should not by default be assigned to the school and the school leader.

#### *General Tendencies and Challenges for School Leaders in the Nordics*

There is a general perception among school leaders in the Nordic countries that the school's mission tends to expand, making it increasingly difficult for school leaders to focus on their role as leaders of the educational development. Often, serious societal challenges underlie the new assignments to schools, and as school leaders, we have no problem understanding that society needs to act. However, we want to warn that the growing difficulty for schools to maintain focus on the core mission can, in the long term, make the efforts counterproductive. Completing the school with a full education remains the best preventative action against ill health, crime, and exclusion.

School leaders in the Nordic countries are increasingly burdened by administrative tasks. This, in the long run, risks resulting in school leaders losing contact with the daily work in the classrooms. We see this as a risk for both the quality of education and the attractiveness of the teaching and school leadership profession.

There is also consensus that the autonomy of school leaders is being increasingly curtailed, and politicians and other authorities want to micromanage operations, while they lack to provide a general, holistic framework. The professional experiences and knowledge of school leaders are not utilized, and their ability to take responsibility as leaders and managers is significantly limited when operations are micromanaged.

The digital development, including AI, holds both opportunities and challenges for schools. School leaders would like to be part of the discussion and development instead of just having to adapt to political positions that lack connection to the reality of schools.

*To ensure quality and attractiveness in the school leadership profession, we would like to see the following changes:*

- National initiatives to strengthen school leaders' pedagogical mission and school leadership competence by creating systems for continuous professional development within the profession.
- Politicians and authorities at all levels showing courage and leadership by daring to protect the school's educational mission.
- Politicians refraining from increased micromanagement and ensuring autonomy and a clear professional scope of action for school leaders to organize their operations in the best possible way.
- Clearer incentives and career paths for school leaders linked to merit and professional development to secure the profession's status and legitimacy.
- Elevating the national discussion on the digitalization of schools, including AI, to a more general level and allowing local decisions regarding the school's learning environment to



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remain a matter for the profession. Nordic school leaders wish to participate in the discussion on AI's impact on society in general, and schools in particular and secure that freedom of speech is protected and overseen by schools and their leaders as a prerequisite for democracy in the area of AI.

The mission of preschools, schools, and adult education to provide children, young people and adults with the necessary knowledge and skills to take responsibility as democratic citizens has perhaps never been more important than it is now. Our society is facing significant challenges. Let us give ourselves the opportunity to handle them by investing in our education systems. School leaders and teachers are central in nurturing and protecting our democracies.

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*Stig Johannesen*, President, **Norwegian School leader Association**

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