



# The Curriculum Renewal in Process: Leadership, Governance and Support Resources

Summary of Report no. 5

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## **Summary**

This report concerns the ongoing work on realizing the renewal of the Norwegian national curriculum “Læreplanverket for Kunnskapsløftet 2020” (LK20/LK20S) at the county, municipal, and school levels. It focuses on the realization of LK20/LK20S in autumn 2021 and spring 2022, examining how schools and local authorities work in this phase. The report presents how representatives from the local authorities, together with the actors at the school level, work to realize the intentions of LK20/LK20S. Three research topics form the basis of the survey and report. First, we examined what characterizes governance and leadership in the work to realize LK20/LK20S. Second, we considered the role that supporting resources and external actors play in the realization work at the municipal and school levels. Third, we identified challenges and dilemmas and how they are handled in practice. The data material included in this report is four cases that include interviews with representatives from the local authorities and school principals, as well as video observations of leadership meetings and teacher meetings. The data were mainly collected in autumn 2021 and spring 2022. Quantitative data collected through “Questions to Norwegian schools” in spring 2022 about the realization work are also included in the analysis. Research and theory on reform and change work, leadership and accountability in reform work, and leadership, strategic work, and micro-political work have been central to our analyses.

### **Characteristic features of governance and leadership in realizing the LK20/LK20S**

The analyses show that governance and leadership in realizing the LK20/LK20S take place through long-term and continuous use of external competence environments to ensure progress in the work on curriculum renewal. This is the case in two out of four municipalities. Governance and leadership also occur through the engagement of key people in various roles, functions, and positions in and across schools and municipalities to support the middle leadership of the local work on curriculum renewal. The target group for this work varies. Actors with different roles and functions are engaged to support the schools and exercise leadership at “arm’s length.” Governance and leadership also occur in the expectation that schools realize the curriculum renewal and requests for reports given by the local authorities. The schools report to the municipal level via digital platforms but also through physical meetings with school principals and dialogue meetings at the schools where work on curriculum renewal is on the agenda. Governance and

leadership are also present when representatives from the local authorities try to gently “push” the schools in the desired direction without micromanaging the details. This approach is justified by the significant attrition among staff at the school level. However, local authorities remain uncertain as to whether the municipality is “on track,” whether the intentions of the subject renewal have been understood correctly, and whether suitable strategies have been chosen. Leadership and governance take place through so-called “network leadership” by engaging middle-level leaders who can act as links between the municipal and school levels.

The principals report that, from their perspectives, governance and leadership in realizing LK20/LK20S frequently occur by the principal leading the local work. The principals are granted significant autonomy and room to maneuver by the local authorities to choose how to implement the curriculum renewal locally, regarding, for example, which structures are established and whether the work is led and directed from above or within. Governance and leadership are ensured by using the professional community as an arena to develop a shared understanding of the concepts and principles in LK20/LK20S. In this work, resources from the Norwegian Directorate of Education as well as from external experts, such as actors from the higher education level, are engaged. Responsibilities and tasks are also distributed to various actors, with middle-level school leaders and teachers included to help motivate the teachers and connect the intentions behind the curriculum renewal with local school practice. There is significant variation in the structures that have been introduced to realize the intentions of LK20/LK20S. In one approach, the structures are partly laid from the outside through collaboration with external university actors and others, while in another approach, the structures are built from within, based on the school’s needs. The analyses show that leadership within the school and between the local authorities and school level takes place in both direct and indirect forms.

### **The role of support resources and external actors in the realization work**

While online support resources from the Directorate of Education continue to play a role at the municipal and school levels, this role appears to be weaker than in the first phase of introducing the LK20/LK20S. There is variation in whether there are municipal guidelines for the use of support resources, or it is up to the schools to decide what role these resources should play. Some external actors have developed their own online resources or competence packages, which are

more prominent in the data material than the online resources from the Directorate of Education. As part of the governance and leadership of realizing LK20/LK20S, a range of tools are used to ensure that the rate of introduction of the curriculum renewal is maintained. In addition to various modules developed by the Directorate of Education and external competence environments, the software platform Teams appears to have become an important information and reporting tool for coordinating work, as well as for checking that planned work is carried out. In our observation data, we find that external actors from the university and college sector play a relatively large role in two of the municipalities.

### **Identifiable challenges and dilemmas and how they are handled**

In our interview and observation data, it appears that interpretations of the curriculum renewal's central concepts have not yet "landed" in the schools' second phase. The schools are still in an "exploration phase." The many actors involved in realizing LK20/LK20S, including external actors, make the school leadership work particularly demanding. The fact that there are numerous actors involved in the work ("diversity of actors") in and across levels and contexts makes it challenging to achieve a common understanding. Actors with different frames of reference may have different understandings of key terms in the curriculum renewal. Several of the challenges are linked to collaboration with external actors from the university sector. This applies, for example, to the university sector acting as a "security guarantee" for the realization of LK20/LK20S and also requiring schools to "deliver" what is requested by the external actors. While the schools' formal leaders usually exercise leadership with known content, leaders in collaboration with external actors are challenged when they have to lead with partially "unknown content." Leadership of the curriculum renewal seems to be partially "outsourced" to other external professionals. Dilemmas also arise in the ongoing processes to realize LK20/LK20S. For example, the local authorities are faced with the dilemma of supporting the schools in their work and making demands. Another dilemma concerns how the collaboration with external actors is designed in terms of the plans and phases these actors create: should the schools follow the plans and phases of external actors, or should the schools follow their own plans and phases? The creation of numerous functions and roles can cause challenges in local practices, particularly as it can shake existing dynamics and power relations within and across levels.