



The Norwegian Superintendent *Administrative context and work role*

ECER Helsinki, 26th August 2010



Important reform trends in Norway

- ç Local Government Act (1992): Decentralization of powers and authorities from the state to the municipalities
 - ç Local autonomy in administrative and political structures, including leadership positions
 - ç Municipalities have freedom to change the local school board and the superintendent position
- ç New Public Management rhetoric: Leadership competencies *not* situated in professional knowledge
- ç Education a promoting theme on the national agenda
 - ç PISA, TIMS and national test data
 - ç Curriculum reform – Knowledge Promotion (2006)
 - ç Indirect “soft governance” from the state



On this backdrop we

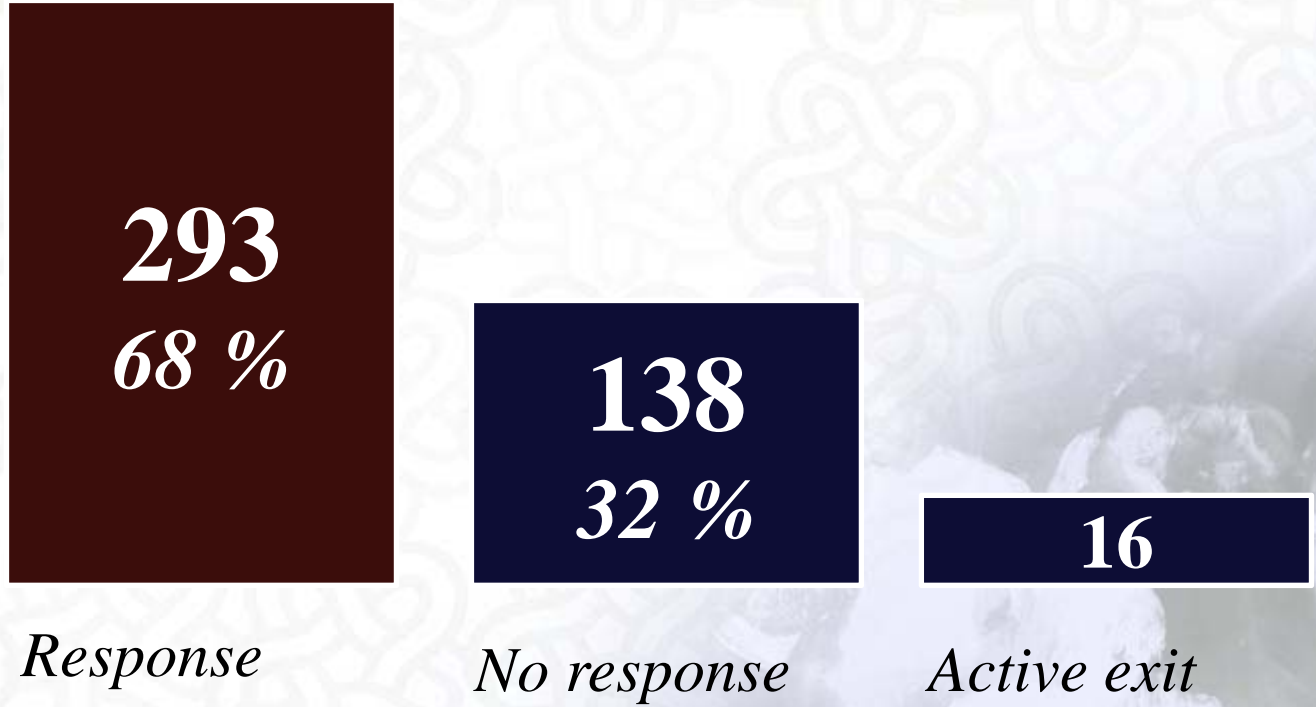


- ☞ Mapped the landscape
 - ◆ **Administrative design:** A central and functionally specialized school office in Norwegian municipalities
 - ◆ **Political structure:** A political board with major responsibilities for local school policy making – and control
 - ◆ **School superintendent position:** “holder of a position in the municipality’s administrative hierarchy between the chief executive officer (CEO) of the whole municipality and the school principals”

- ☞ Try to explore the nature of the identified changes
 - ◆ **Hypothesis 1:** New forms of school governance and municipal school management
 - ◆ **Hypothesis 2:** Mostly symbolic changes – inspired by “fads and fashion”
 - ◆ **Hypothesis 3:** “Traditional modernism” - strong institutional pillars of professional norms that is supplemented in minor

- Will analyze leadership profiles

Response Rate 2009



The main pattern

- ¶ Most municipalities have maintained a central “school office”
- ▶ Stable hierarchical unit - specialized in school administration
- ▶ Small scale: 1-3 full time positions
- Ë Policy board responsible for primary education
- ▶ Many names – similar policy content
- ▶ Coupled to policy domain in the “neighborhood” of schooling
- 20 % of the municipalities in our sample (N-60) operate in a “holding company” context
- ▶ Two-level structure



The main pattern

- 1 The data identifies a formal superintendent role conceptually close to our working definition
 - ▶ Administratively responsible for primary education within the entire municipality
 - ▶ Superior manager of the school principals (unit of command) – 77 %
 - ▶ Directly subordinated to the CEO – 81 %
- 5 Variation in formal descriptions
 - ▶ Job title of the school superintendent
 - ▶ Responsibility for other civil service areas in minor part of the position
- 6 Traditional recruitment and career path
 - ▶ Teacher background
 - ▶ Career bound to the educational sector



Supplements in work role

- ¶ School superintendents members of the senior leadership team (SLT) of the municipality – 71 %
 - ▶ Perceive positive impacts from their SLT engagement on various job domains
 - ▶ Perceive exerting influence on central decision making processes through their SLT work
- Ë Relative high scores on personal empowerment items
 - ▶ Goal autonomy and decision making autonomy
 - ▶ Perceived impact on school development
- „ High scores on “classical” administrative instruments
 - ▶ Planning, budgeting, change management, implementation
 - ▶ Accompanied by “soft” pedagogical leadership rhetoric



Three potential leadership arenas

**SLT of the
municipality**

**Leadership
dialogue with
school principals**

**Professional
network
engagement**



To be continued.....

- ¶ Multivariate analysis of leadership variables
- ▶ Modeling robust variables
- ▶ Modeling relationships
- Ë Cross-country comparisons
- ▶ Similarities and differences
- ↳ Matching organizational level data with register data
- ▶ More robust assumption of the work context of superintendents
- 1 Paper writing



