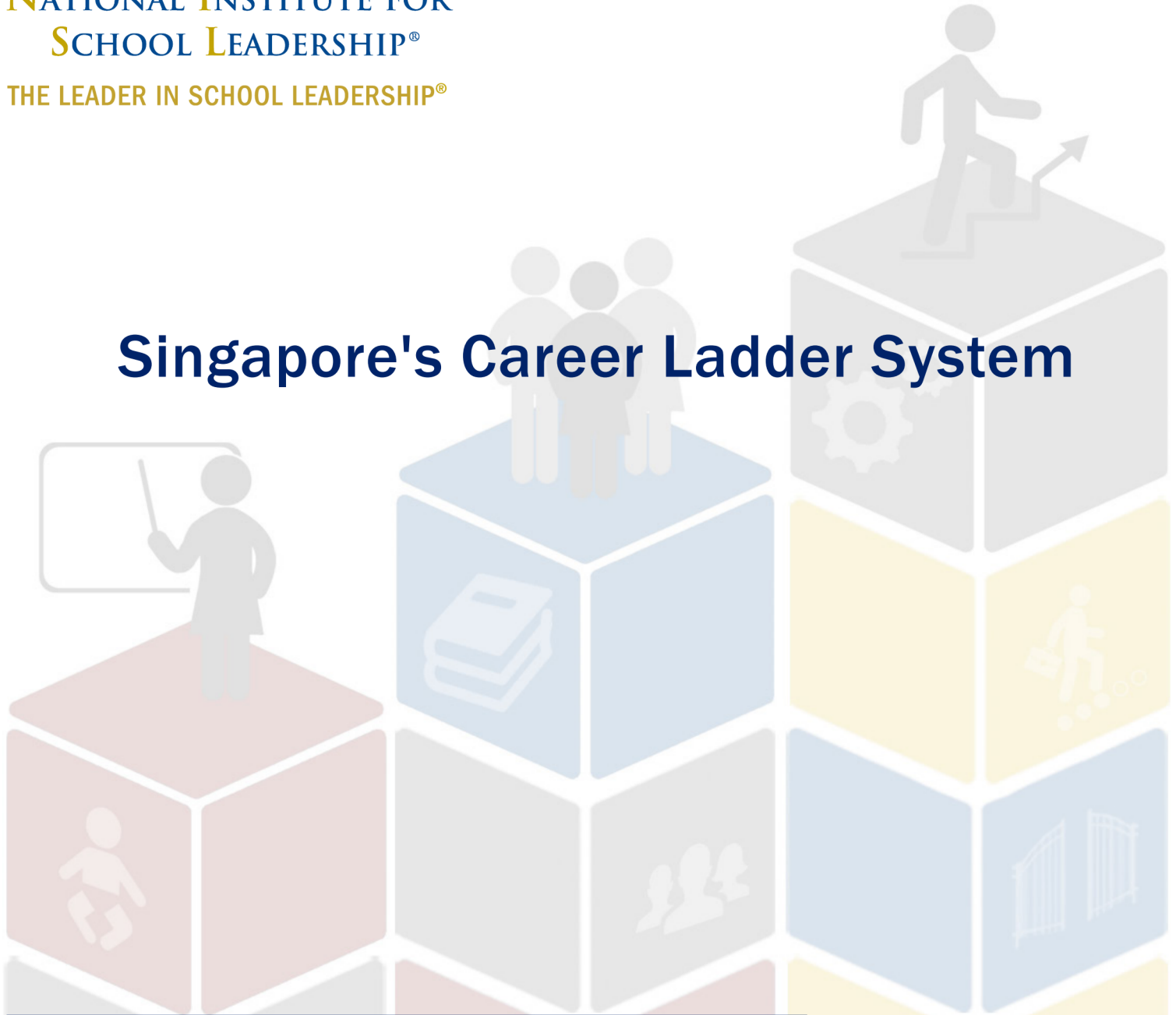


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THE LEADER IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP®

Singapore's Career Ladder System



Technical Note

Supporting Education System Redesign

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**Singapore's
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SINGAPORE'S CAREER LADDER SYSTEM

Structure of the Ladder

There are three tracks on the career ladder in Singapore: a Teaching Track, a Leadership Track, and a Specialist Track. (See Figure 1.) All teachers begin at the same rung on the ladder, and then choose one of these tracks once they and their supervisors mutually decide that they are ready to take on additional roles apart from teaching. The Teaching Track is designed for teachers who aspire to become expert teachers—remain within classrooms, mentor their colleagues, and continue to hone their expertise in pedagogy. The Leadership Track is for those who seek school leadership positions or leadership roles in the Ministry of Education. The Specialist Track is for those who develop deep knowledge and skills in specific disciplines, which can bring them to Ministry-level leadership positions focused on curriculum development and evaluation. This means that the system encompasses not just teaching and management roles in the school, but the entire range of professional educator positions in the Singapore government, up to and including Director-General of Education, the top civil servant in the Ministry of Education, comparable to a superintendent or staff chief in America.

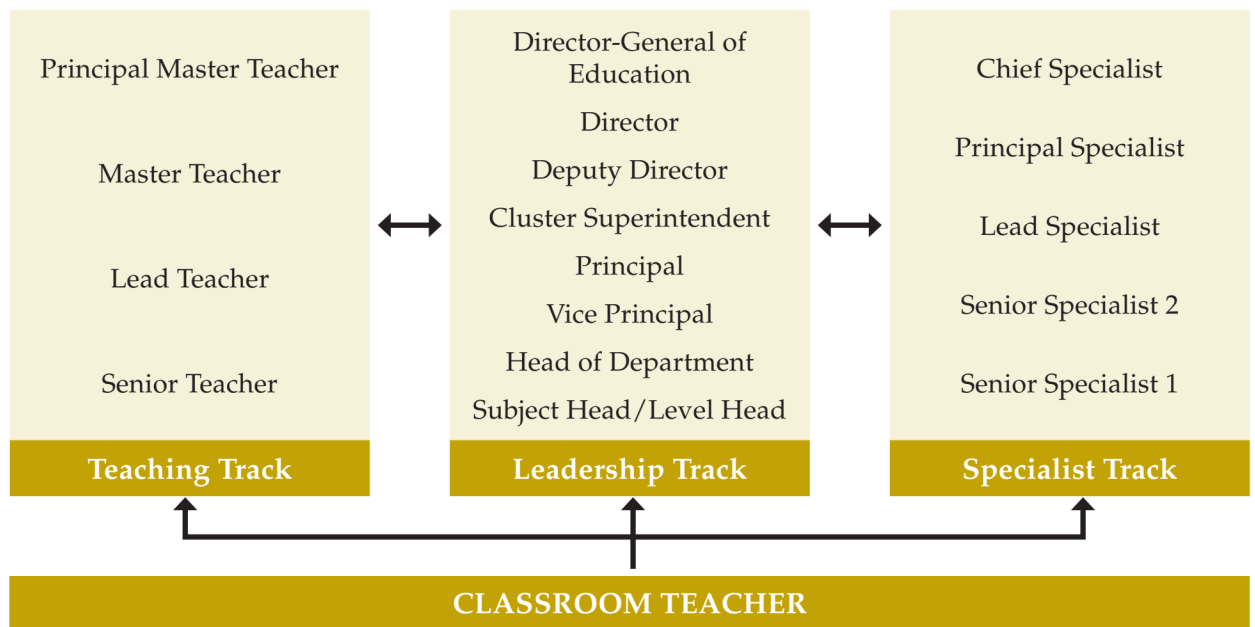


Figure 1: Different career tracks for teachers

Source: Singapore MOE

Each level is associated with a range of experiences that a candidate for the next rung on the ladder is expected (generally) to have. However, each rung of the ladder does not correspond exactly to a set job description or school-based function. Principals have broad latitude to determine the kinds of responsibilities and experiences that teachers

on each level of the ladder have, based on the needs of the school. Furthermore, while the career ladder is linked to Singapore’s education civil service salary grid, it is not itself a salary scale. This finding is described in more detail later in this document.

Evaluation and Advancement

Teachers are regularly assessed, and advancement from one level to the next requires a teacher or school leader to demonstrate competency at that level and potential for the next, since forward movement along each track requires deepening levels of expertise and experience. Furthermore, advancement is never assured; for a teacher to advance to a position at the next rung of the ladder, that position must be open and they must successfully apply for it.

Teacher performance, choice of career track, professional development needs, promotion, and bonus compensation are all informed by the Enhanced Performance Management System (EPMS). EPMS is a tool used by the government to support teachers, and helps teachers chart their development along the different leadership tracks.

That being said, the EPMS does not specify exactly how supervisors must assess their direct reports. Instead, it is a very broad set of competencies and outcomes. These outcomes are called Key Result Areas (KRAs), which are used to set targets and review progress and achievements: 1) holistic student development (quality learning of students, character development of students, and co-curricular activities); 2) professional development (development of self, and coaching and development of others); and 3) organisational outcomes (contributions to school, committee work and nation, and collaboration with parents). Figure 2 summarizes the competencies and Key Result Areas.

Competencies				Key Result Areas
Individual Attributes	Professional Mastery	Organisational Excellence	Effective Collaboration	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Professional Values and Ethics ✓ Self-Management and Development ✓ Analytical Thinking and Intellectual Flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Student-Centric, Values-Driven Practice ✓ Curriculum and Content ✓ Pedagogy and Instruction ✓ Assessment and Evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Visioning and Planning ✓ Action Management and Implementation ✓ Culture Building and People Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Interpersonal Skills and Relationships ✓ Teamwork and Team Building ✓ Internal and External Partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Student Outcomes ✓ Professional Outcomes ✓ Organisational Outcomes

Figure 2. Competencies and Key Result Areas

Source: Singapore MOE

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Because these competencies are so broad and the Singaporean system relies heavily on professional judgment, individual principals are responsible for deciding on more concrete evaluation metrics and processes, such as behavioral indicators, specific service to the school, and self-reflection tools and protocols. But because training in Singapore is uniformly rigorous and expectations are clearly communicated, there is remarkable consistency across the system in how principals understand the competencies and how they evaluate teachers.

Based on the schools we visited, a typical picture of an evaluation system emerged. Teachers meet with their direct supervisor (typically the Vice Principal for Education) to discuss what their goals for the year should be, what new experiences and challenges they would like to try, and to co-design an evaluation plan. Based on that discussion, the supervisor will observe the teacher throughout the year, collect data on their performance, and monitor their participation in helping to mentor others, serve on committees, and otherwise support the school. (As with everything else about the evaluation system, these are representative activities that leadership may take to evaluate, but they are not required by the Ministry of Education to do any one thing in particular.)

Teachers will typically have a midyear check-in with their supervisors to report on progress and to determine whether any support is needed. At the end of the year, all members of the school leadership team—from Heads of Department to the Principal—will meet to rate all of the teachers in the building. Among the topics they will discuss are whether teachers met their annual goals, what areas of support they need moving forward, and whether they are suited for new and progressively more challenging roles in the future. On that point, leaders will often give promising young teachers the opportunity to unofficially assume certain duties from a higher level of the ladder under supervision for a set trial period (often six months to a year) in order to give them exposure to new skills and test whether they are ready to move up. This is the most common way by which fitness for the next level of the ladder is assessed. This process is known colloquially in Singapore as *upmannning*.

The principal's own supervisor, the Cluster Superintendent, also participates in all end-of-year evaluation meetings. The Cluster Superintendent is a mentor who is responsible for helping a group of 10–15 school principals develop professionally, collaborate, and improve their own schools and their colleagues' schools as well. The Cluster Superintendent theoretically has the authority to challenge evaluation ratings by serving as an independent norm reference to the process; in practice, however, it appears as though Cluster Superintendents overwhelmingly respect their principals' decisions and almost never exercise this authority.

One additional way that flexibility is built in to the career ladder system is that teachers can move between tracks temporarily, to gain new experiences, or permanently, in order to change the trajectory of their careers. This movement requires the authorization of their direct supervisor.

Levels and Tracks on the Career Ladder

Classroom Teachers

Classroom teachers occupy the lowest rung of the ladder; they remain within the classroom and teach full-time. (Although it should be noted that even “full-time teachers” teach much less than their counterparts in other countries; they spend about half of their working time meeting in teams with peers, communicating with parents, and participating in professional learning to improve their own practice.)

Classroom teachers may be younger teachers who are not yet ready to take on additional roles or opportunities, or they may be experienced teachers who, for whatever reason, have decided that they do not wish to take on mentorship, curriculum development, or leadership roles. Roughly 60 percent of teachers within Singapore’s schools are at this rung of the ladder.

Within the classroom teacher rung, there are five salary levels: General Education Officer 1–5. GEO1 teachers start at SIN\$37,200 (US\$28,239) annually, and are eligible for performance-based bonuses, as are all teachers. Moving up to higher salary levels within the Classroom Teacher rung is contingent on satisfactory evaluations and typically results in pay increases of about 10 percent.

Once classroom teachers decide that they are ready to take on additional responsibilities, they will have a conversation with their supervising officer about choosing one of the three career ladder tracks. Once their supervisor decides they are ready (usually after five years on the job at the earliest, but it can be sooner for those with demonstrated potential), they will move onto the next level of the ladder.

Teaching Track

The Teaching Track is designed to cultivate experts in pedagogy who remain in the classroom and mentor younger teachers and teachers who are looking for additional help. The highest levels within the Teaching Track serve to groom a core group of experts who then further develop the profession’s capacity. Roughly 15 percent of the teachers in schools are on the Teaching Track.

- ✓ **Senior Teachers** serve as mentors for all first- and second-year teachers (all of whom participate in induction programs), supervise teachers-in-training in practicums, and occasionally lead workshops and professional development for their colleagues. (The balance between these tasks varies from school to school.) Roughly 20 percent of Senior Teachers’ teaching responsibility is offloaded to enable them to take on these responsibilities.
- ✓ **Lead Teachers** build capacity of Senior Teachers and Teachers in content, pedagogy, and assessment, and develop their schools into strong Professional Learning Communities; they also share their subject expertise with teachers in other schools within their cluster to strengthen the teaching profession. Roughly 33 percent of Lead Teachers’ teaching responsibility is offloaded to enable them to take these responsibilities.

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- ✓ **Master Teachers** are “teachers of teachers” who mentor other teachers so they reach professional excellence and are highly effective; they drive new pedagogies to improve instructional practice school-wide, champion their subject discipline, and lead curriculum innovation. About 80 percent of their work is attached to the Ministry, as they are primary staff of the professional development hub the Academy of Singapore Teachers, where they lead professional development and drive innovations in pedagogy throughout the nation. But their responsibilities also include teaching master classes through attachments to schools in order to keep them connected to the classroom. There are only roughly 70 Master Teachers out of 33,000 educators in the Singapore system.
- ✓ **Principal Master Teachers** are the chief pedagogical experts for their subjects—at the national level—and lead the drive toward teaching excellence across the education system. Similar to Master Teachers, Principal Master Teachers are responsible for teaching master classes, leading their colleagues’ professional development, driving curricular innovation and leading pedagogical research and innovation, and they are also attached to a school to teach one class weekly. There are only roughly 20 Principal Master Teachers in the system, and they form the leadership of the Academy of Singapore Teachers.

Once classroom teachers are promoted to the Teaching Track, they will see pay raises of approximately 20 percent. They are placed on a new salary scale, called the Senior Education Officer scale, which has three levels, each of which sees pay raises of about 15–20 percent. Principal Master Teachers max out at the top of the Senior Education Officer scale and are paid the same as school principals.

Leadership Track

The Leadership Track provides another pathway forward for teachers with leadership potential, who are identified early and groomed for leadership positions. Roughly 25 percent of educators within Singapore’s schools are on this track.

- ✓ **Subject Heads and Level Heads** observe and coach new teachers and participate in their formal evaluations at end-of-year. Subject Heads are the experts in their particular subject and organize all the other teachers of that subject (for example, biology), and Level Heads serve as the coordinator for a given year (for example, serving as the Sixth-Grade Lead). Roughly 20 percent of their teaching responsibilities are offloaded for these tasks.
- ✓ **Heads of Department** serve four broad role functions: 1) departmental management, including coaching and developing teachers in subject areas and implementing comprehensive instructional programs; 2) administration, such as helping principals and vice principals on administrative matters; 3) teaching, so they can advise and give practical assistance to others; and 4) whole-school, so they collaborate as part of the school’s management team. These roles may vary somewhat depending on the school. Roughly 33 percent of their teaching responsibilities are offloaded for these tasks.

- ✓ There are two *Vice Principals* in every school—a Vice Principal for Education and a Vice Principal for Administration. Vice Principals for Education oversee all curriculum-related areas of the school, make decisions related to teaching and learning, and lead the EPMS evaluations for all teaching staff. Vice Principals for Administration oversee all non-curriculum areas and lead a team of Executive and Administrative staff. They also assist principals in strategic planning and resource management.
- ✓ *Principals* lead and inspire teachers to provide students with a holistic education and help students discover their strengths, in addition to working with parents and the community. Principals are systematically appointed and rotated so schools are infused with fresh perspectives and experienced principals can share best practices in different schools; this process also helps principals to progress in their career development.
- ✓ After many years of successfully leading diverse schools, principals may be promoted to leadership roles in the Ministry such as *Cluster Superintendents*, who, as described above, mentor and support a group of principals under their charge and observe all school-based evaluation processes to ensure that they are fair and unbiased; *Deputy Directors*, who lead roughly 40 departments and sub-departments within the Ministry; and the *Director-General of Education*, which is the highest career civil service position in education and leads the entire system. These officials are paid on a separate “Super Scale” to determine their salary.

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Specialist Track

Teachers who wish to become researchers contributing to the creation of new subject matter knowledge within the teaching profession may elect to join the Specialist Track. Unlike other tracks, members of this track do not teach within schools, but instead serve in the Ministry of Education and at the National Institute of Education (the nation’s sole teacher preparation provider). Specialists are developed to be experts in their fields, and are expected to produce scholarship in their fields much as professors would. The various levels of the Specialist Track are less differentiated in function than other tracks of the career ladder, and members of the track advance on the basis of the quality of their research and contributions to the field. They take on more supervisory authority for increasingly more complex studies as they advance.

Unlike the other tracks, specialists are expected to have, or be in the process of pursuing, a doctorate. There are only roughly 200 specialists within the Singapore system out of 33,000 employees total (less than 1 percent).