

Call for Proposals

for the Bi-Annual Conference of the Subdivision for Policy and Educational Law (KBBB), endorsed by the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI)

Reframing Leadership for School Improvement Roles, Relationships, and Responsibilities in a Demanding World

Location:

TU Dortmund University
Dortmund, Germany

Conference Dates:

September 10 and 11, 2026

Proposal Submission Deadline extended!

The deadline for submissions is now **February 28, 2026 (23:59 CET)**.

We welcome submissions that engage directly with the conference theme, as well as contributions addressing school improvement more generally.

Conference Theme

School improvement and related school improvement research have been part of the educational landscape for decades. A rich body of research has shaped how we understand what school improvement is and what role leadership plays in it. In recent years, however, there has been a growing call to rethink and reframe school improvement and leadership in light of new educational, societal, and global challenges.

Whereas earlier approaches concentrated on student performance indicators, there is now a growing emphasis on well-being, motivation, and socio-emotional development. These broader goals require new strategies and a more comprehensive understanding of what it means for a school to improve. Moreover, school improvement has increasingly come to be understood as a relational practice. It is shaped by the quality of relationships within schools and between schools and their communities. Trust, collaboration, and the ability to navigate tensions and resistance to change play a decisive role in determining whether improvement processes succeed or falter. As a result, the roles and responsibilities of those involved in school improvement are being redefined, and informal leadership, shared responsibility, participatory structures, and collective learning are gaining in significance, especially in organizational settings that emphasize collaboration over hierarchy. Against this background, context has proven to be a crucial factor in shaping what school improvement looks like in practice. International research has shown that ideas and strategies developed in one educational context do not necessarily transfer to another. Differences in governance structures, school autonomy, accountability systems, resources, and cultural norms all influence the conditions under which school improvement efforts can unfold.

Moreover, the broader societal environment has changed, placing new demands on schools and school leaders. Children and young people are growing up in the midst of multiple, overlapping crises, ranging from climate change, war, and social polarization to technological disruption and threats to democratic values.

These experiences shape how they understand the world, what aspirations they develop, and what they consider meaningful both inside and outside of school. Schools cannot remain unaffected by these shifts; they must respond in ways that acknowledge and engage with young people's changing perspectives, needs, and priorities. These developments are reshaping expectations regarding the purpose of schooling and the responsibilities of those who lead and support school improvement.

Taken together, these developments underline why the reframing of school improvement is necessary. In this conference, we want to address these issues, examine their implications for research and practice, and explore how roles, relationships, and responsibilities are changing in schools around the world.

Rethinking Roles in Complex Systems

The conference will explore how leadership is evolving in increasingly complex education systems. Beyond formal authority, leaders act as instructional and system leaders, balance local and global demands, and work within flat hierarchies. We will examine role fluidity, hybrid responsibilities, and new forms of shared leadership in multi-level education systems.

School Improvement as Relational Practice

A key focus of the conference is understanding school improvement as a relational process. Shared goals, trust, and collaboration shape meaningful change, especially in polarized contexts. We aim to examine collaboration in the midst of diversity, shared sensemaking, and how relational resilience enables schools to sustain improvement during periods of disruption and uncertainty.

Responsibilities in an Era of Heightened Expectation

The conference will also address growing moral and ethical responsibilities in school leadership. Equity, inclusion, and justice must be advanced in settings under intense public scrutiny. Attention will be given to navigating complex policy environments while ensuring the well-being of students, staff, and leaders as a core improvement dimension.

School Improvement Across System Variations

Comparing school improvement across educational systems is another key theme. Governance models, system structures, and cultural norms influence leadership approaches. By examining school improvement across different contexts, we want to discuss how leadership ideas travel and adapt, and what can be learned from transnational collaboration.

Adaptive and Futures-Oriented School Improvement

Looking ahead, the conference will focus on future disruptions such as AI, climate change, wars, neo-conservatism, and migration. Anticipatory strategies and organizing for resilience can help schools act proactively. We aim to discuss how innovation can be led responsibly while safeguarding educational values in uncertain and rapidly changing environments.

Submission Timeline

Proposal Submission System Opens: **January 10, 2026**

Submission Deadline: **February 28, 2026**

Proposals must be submitted through the conference website:

<https://iads.ep.tu-dortmund.de/institut/veranstaltungen/details/reframing-leadership-for-school-improvement-roles-relationships-and-responsibilities-in-a-demanding-world-58564/>

Contact

Local organizing committee: kbbb-conference.fk12@tu-dortmund.de



Presentation Formats and Submission Requirements

All proposals will be reviewed in a double-blind review process and should therefore be submitted in an anonymized form. Proposals can be submitted in English or German for the following formats.

Symposium

A symposium offers an opportunity to present three to four papers that address a common, clearly defined topic. The symposium may focus on research, practice, or a combination of both. The theme of the symposium must show a clear connection to the conference theme. The total duration of a symposium is 90 minutes, and it must include a minimum of three and a maximum of four presentations and a discussant. All proposals must include appropriate references and consist of the following components:

- Introductory abstract (maximum 250 words, excluding title and references): A clear description of the common topic, its relevance to the conference theme, the underlying theoretical model or theory of action, and an explanation of how the individual papers are connected within the symposium theme.
- Abstracts for each paper (maximum 400 words each, excluding title and references):
Each paper abstract should include:
 - Title
 - Objective(s) of the paper
 - Research question, policy focus or focus of inquiry
 - Theoretical model or theory of action
 - Methods, techniques, or practical approach
 - Data source or evidence
 - Results or findings
 - Discussion of importance or relevance for school improvement
 - Connection to the conference theme

Paper Session

A paper session offers an opportunity to present three to four papers that address a common, clearly defined topic. The session may focus on research, practice, or a combination of both. In contrast to a symposium, a paper session does not need a clear connection to the conference theme, but its relevance for school improvement must be clearly addressed. The total duration of a paper session is 90 minutes, and it must include a minimum of three and a maximum of four presentations and a discussant. All proposals must include appropriate references and consist of the following components:

- Introductory abstract (maximum 250 words, excluding title and references): A clear description of the topic, its relevance for school improvement, the underlying theoretical model or theory of action, and an explanation of how the individual papers are connected.
- Abstracts for each paper (maximum 400 words each, excluding title and references):
Each paper abstract should include:
 - Title
 - Objective(s) of the paper
 - Research question, policy focus or focus of inquiry
 - Theoretical model or theory of action
 - Methods, techniques, or practical approach
 - Data source or evidence
 - Results or findings
 - Discussion of importance or relevance for school improvement

Individual Paper

Participants may also submit proposals for an individual presentation, either research or practice. Individual papers will be sorted into Paper Sessions with three to four presentations by the conference organizers. Individual paper submissions do not need a clear connection to the conference theme, but their relevance for school improvement must be clearly addressed. Individual paper proposals must consist of an abstract (maximum 400 words, excluding title and references) with appropriate references that consists of the following components:

- Title
- Objective(s) of the paper
- Research question, policy focus or focus of inquiry
- Theoretical model or theory of action
- Methods, techniques, or practical approach
- Data source or evidence
- Results or findings
- Discussion of importance or relevance for school improvement

Poster

A poster offers an opportunity to present ongoing or completed research, practical projects, or innovative ideas in a visually engaging format. Posters are intended to foster discussion and exchange among participants, allowing presenters to share insights, receive feedback, and build connections around emerging or applied work. Poster submissions do not need a clear connection to the conference theme, but their relevance for school improvement must be clearly addressed. Poster proposals must consist of an abstract (maximum 400 words, excluding title and references) with appropriate references that consists of the following components:

- Title
- Objective(s) of the paper
- Research question, policy focus or focus of inquiry
- Theoretical model or theory of action
- Methods, techniques, or practical approach
- Data source or evidence
- Results or findings
- Discussion of importance or relevance for school improvement

Innovate Session

In keeping with the tradition of ICSEI, participants are invited to submit proposals for a workshop in an Innovate Session. These sessions provide an opportunity to present and engage participants in a concrete approach, method, or tool that contributes to school improvement and leadership policy and/or practice. Innovate sessions should demonstrate a clear connection to the conference theme. An Innovate Session should be interactive and participatory, offering attendees a hands-on experience that stimulates reflection and application. Each workshop will have a duration of 25 minutes and will be scheduled in sessions of three by the conference organizers. Workshop proposals should not exceed 400 words and must address the following points:

- Relevance of the approach for school improvement or leadership practice, and/or policy
- Intended outline for the workshop, including interactive elements
- Perspective(s), theoretical framework, or context underlying the approach
- Methods, techniques, modes, or approaches used
- Connection to the conference theme