



FUND FOR AN OPEN SOCIETY - SERBIA

School Governance and Social Inclusion

Involvement of Parents

South East Europe Countries Experiences and Accounts of Principals' Views

Education Support Program Initiative
Advancing Education Inclusion and Quality in South East Europe



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Governance and
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Principals' Views**

2009

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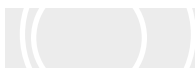
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Foreword

This publication is the second in a series presenting the results of a multiyear regional research and evidence-based advocacy initiative “Advancing Education Quality and Inclusion” in South East Europe (SEE).

The initiative was launched in 2007 following a series of international meetings with members of the Open Society Institute, education government and civil society representatives of the 10 SEE countries (Albania, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia). This initiative is funded by the Education Support Program of Open Society Institute and jointly implemented with the Center for Education Policy Studies (CEPS, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education), the National Soros Foundations and the Education Civil Society Organizations in the above SEE countries.

Despite the considerable improvements in national legislations on anti-discrimination and democratic school governance, disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes in SEE countries continue to exist. The Advancing Education Quality and Inclusion initiative was created to address these persistent disparities. The aforementioned representatives of the all 10 SEE countries have identified insufficient and inadequate involvement of the parents in school governance as a common issue affecting the equality of access to high-quality education. The gap between legislations and policies on parents’ involvement in school governance and their implementation raises concerns about the extent to which the equitable provision of education can be achieved in the schools in the newly developed education systems in the SEE region.

The equitable provision of education is intrinsically linked to the quality of school-level governance. Extensive worldwide research and evidence of practice has demonstrated that inclusive school level governance where the parents are given the opportunity to participate in shaping school policies has a positive impact on school climate and student learning. A true partnership between school and parents directly improves the chances for students to have access to a quality education, which all children in democracy are entitled to.

To determine the course of action to take with the goal of decreasing disparities and bridging the policy-practice gap, it was necessary to:

Better understand the opportunities created by school leadership for parents to participate in school life and to assess the extent to which equal opportunity for parental participation in school life is promoted;

and

Learn about parents’ needs, expectations and experiences regarding their influence on school life and the school efforts to engage them.

With these goals in mind, two comprehensive, robust scientific surveys were conducted.

The first took place in 2008 with a sample of 2,273 principals of primary schools (attended by students aged 6 to 15) in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania,

and Serbia. Those principals in the aforementioned countries participated in an hour long, face-to-face structured interviews. The survey was preceded by: 16 focus group meetings with school principals, a pilot survey of the final survey instrument, and one large-scale coordination meeting with researchers in each of the eight participating countries. The cross-national principals' survey report, published in the first publication of this series, provides a panoramic view of what schools are achieving or failing to do to promote an inclusive and democratic environment for students and parents in each of the listed countries.

The English translations of the summaries of the principals' survey reports for each of the participating countries appear on the following pages. All the countries produced comprehensive survey reports in their respective languages which are available at www.see-educoop.net/aeiq/outputs.htm. Some of the participating countries undertook local initiatives to promote school-parents partnership. These examples can also be found in this book.

The second survey, conducted in 2009 in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia, looked at the flip side of the school-parent relationship – the parents' views. This survey provides a panoramic view of parental participation in schools from the perspectives of parents, parent representatives in school government bodies and principals in each of those countries. Face-to-face household surveys of representative samples of parents (N=9600) in 320 public schools covering grades one to eight, including booster samples of Roma parents are combined with interviews with principals and parent representatives on related topics in the same schools. This survey was preceded by 60 focus group meetings (30 groups with average parents, 20 groups with disadvantaged parents, including Roma parents and 10 groups with parent representatives of school government bodies) and a pilot survey of the final survey instrument.

The cross-national parents' survey report and the summaries of each of the participating countries report will be published in number 3 and 4 respectively in the series.

The materials presented in all the books and other information related to the project are available at www.see-educoop.net/aeiq/outputs.htm.

Both surveys have yielded a tremendous amount of important data. To best utilize the collected data, the Education Support Program of Open Society Institute has organized an Individual Research Competition for the young researchers preferably from the countries that participated in the survey. The twenty five research grants have been awarded with the primary purpose of gathering additional information from the survey data which can be used to support education reform, policy development and strategic planning. The research papers produced so far are of the superb quality and shed additional light on how policy makers and educators can improve education for all students, particularly those from vulnerable groups, in each of the ten SEE countries. These papers will be published in separate volumes.

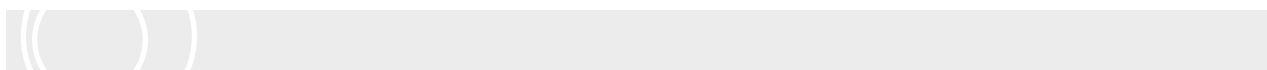
It is hoped that this publication, as well as subsequent ones, will be of interest and use to all education stakeholders in our joint efforts to build and sustain an inclusive school governance and establish a meaningful partnership between school and parents in SEE countries. This will be a huge step on the road toward providing access to a high quality education and expanding opportunities for all children.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

B&H, BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CA	Council of Administration
CEPS	Centre for Education Policy Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana
FOSIM	Foundation Open Society Institute Macedonia
ESP	Education Support Program
GfK	Growth from Knowledge (market research company who conducted the survey)
GO	Governmental Organisation
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MNE	Forum Mladi i Neformalna Edukacija
NF	National Foundation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPP	National Plan and Program
OSF	The Open Society Foundation
OSI	Open Society Institute
PC	Parents' Council
SB	School Board
SEE	South East Europe

Chapter I

Summary of the National Principals' Survey Reports

National Survey of School Principals in Albania

Bardhyl Musai

Acknowledgments

This survey could not have been carried out without the contribution of 300 School Principals and the support of Regional Education Directorates and the Ministry of Education and Science, who willingly expressed their opinions and attitudes. Grateful thanks are also due to the Project team of Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality in SEE, which has made a great contribution to the carrying out of the survey.

Methodology

Sampling

Survey data were collected using two-stage random sampling. In the first stage, the relevant strata were identified (i.e., urban vs. rural, distribution by region). In the second stage, random sampling was applied to ensure equal probability of selection of schools within each stratum. Stratification by region was done to reflect regional distribution in the population of schools. Urban/rural distribution in the sample is proportional to distribution of schools in the population. Three hundred schools were chosen randomly according to the proportional distribution in the territory. The schools were also distributed according to urban/rural distribution.

School sample data

In the sample the average number of students per school was 386. Most schools in the sample (52%) have only one full-time member of management staff (Graph 2.3). The average number of full time teachers per school is 8 (min value 2/max value 77). Each school in the sample has about 6 full-time teaching professionals teaching in accordance to qualifications. In about 43% of schools full-time teaching professionals teach in fields other than those they are qualified for. In 12% of the schools there are full-time unqualified teaching personnel. The majority of school Principals (66.3%) have been in that position for less than 3 years.

Instrument and data collection

The survey instrument is the result of the joint effort of the central research team, country research teams, the input of ESP staff and independent experts. Several project-related documents helped the drafting of the survey instrument, such as country context reports, the literature review and the themes from the focus group discussions with school Principals organized by the SEE countries participating in the project. GFK, a specialized survey company, was contracted to conduct the survey through its local branch in Albania. The survey took place in May-June 2008.

Findings

School actions to engage parents in school life

School-parent communication

- The majority of school Principals (72.6%) organize meetings with parents at least once a quarter, and 41.5% organize them at least once a month.
- Similar results are found regarding the frequency with which a written evaluation of pupils' performance is sent to parents: the majority of school Principals send them at least once a quarter.
- School Principals share information on school events and activities with parents. The information is sent to them at least once a quarter in 62% of the cases.
- However, other aspects such as information on the curriculum, a school newsletter, and information on school policies, seem to be shared less frequently. Also surveys and home visits are less frequently reported among school Principals.
- In general, school Principals express satisfaction with the meetings organized by teachers.
- The most common topic discussed at school meetings is discipline /behaviour (41.6% of cases) followed by academic achievement (38.2%).

Parental involvement

- Results show that teachers are not inclined to ask parents to participate in organizing activities more than once in a month. They tend to ask for parental involvement once per quarter or once per semester.
- According to School Principals, activities to which parents are required to contribute less frequently are: fundraising for the school, helping other parents with their children's education and providing teaching assistance to teachers.

Support for parents

- In about 20% of the cases, schools organize sessions to help parents assist their children with homework at least once per month. Another 39% organize such sessions at least once per semester, while 41.1% organize sessions once per year or not at all.
- Schools are less inclined to provide parents with materials to assist their children with homework (in 42.4% of cases this was not done) or provide them materials to monitor their children's homework (49.5% never did this).
- About 39% of schools have organized issue-based support groups with parents.

Parental involvement in school governance

- According school Principals, the Parents' Committee generally has little or no influence on pedagogical methods used by teachers. They have even less influence on the content of lessons (82.8%).
- They are however more frequently involved in planning of extracurricular activities, helping pupils in valuing education, planning of school infrastructure development and facilitating increased involvement of parents.

School Principals' attitudes on the engagement of parents in school life

Parental influence

- The first area where parents have influence to a great extent is decision taken at school level, followed by decisions taken at classroom level and social activity planning. However, this percentage is less than one fourth of all schools.
- However, 43.2% of school Principals think that parents have some influence on decisions taken at classroom level, 40.3% think that they have influence in decisions taken at school level, 34% think that they influence school policies and regulations and about 31% of school Principals think that parents have some influence in evaluating teachers' performance.

Benefits of parental engagement in school life

- School Principals generally think that overall improved school climate is one of them (74.3%).
- Another one they think as a benefit to a large extent is more positive attitudes and behaviour of parents towards school (69%).
- Also they generally agree that more overall support of parents for school as well as improved pupil performance will be some of the benefits (Table 3.7).

Support for parents

- Organized sessions to help parents assist their children with homework are considered by 77% of school Principals to be useful to a large extent.
- 64% of school Principals think that parent issue-based support groups are also useful to a large extent, followed by provision of parents with information on how to create a home learning environment, with materials to assist and monitor children in their homework.

Barriers and constraints in fostering school-parents partnership

- According to School Principals the barriers which limit the school's ability to support parents are: insufficient school resources to develop and run the services (49.5%), followed by the fact that parents are too busy to be involved in school-based support services to them (33%), and lack of parent interest in becoming engaged in such services (31%).
- Interestingly, lack of teacher skills to offer such support services is not perceived as a barrier by school Principals (less than 6% think that this is a barrier to a large extent).

The practice of participation

Instances of successful parental engagement

- Most School Principals recall one instance of successful school-parent partnership.
- Organizing events, celebrations and extracurricular activities is the most frequently mentioned instance of partnership (26.3%), followed by organizing of educational workshops in 19.8% of cases, assistance with school renovation and financial help.

Level of parental engagement

- According to the majority of school Principals (60.2%), the members of Parents' Councils are entitled, without restrictions, to participate at meetings where school level decisions are taken. About 40% of school Principals think that they are entitled to do so by invitation only.
- About 58% of School Principals think that Parents' Councils should participate in elaborating policies/strategies only when invited to do so.
- Generally, participation in modification or adoption of school policies and rules is done by invitation only.

Initiatives by Parents' Councils

- The most significant initiative by the Parents' Council mentioned by the School Principals was renovations and improvements of school/school yard (31.7%).
- The next most frequently mentioned was additional work with pupils with poor marks/behavior (22.3% of cases).

Recommendations

- Parents' participation needs to become more practical in the education system in Albania. Though results suggest that most Principals engage in actions to involve parents in school life, improvements can be recommended so that the frequency of parents' meetings called by the Principals is increased. Also, creative ways to engage parents that are community contextualized must be explored. For example, in excluded communities home visits can be one way of initiating communication with parents.
- Sharing information on school activities with parents needs to be more frequent and more intentional. Not only is this sharing unusual, it is also rare, and needs to be more frequent than once per quarter. Although Principals seem to be satisfied with meetings with parents, they must be aware and check that the same is true for parents. Also, it must be explored whether the topics discussed with parents are initiated by Principals or by parents themselves.
- Support for parents on how to assist children with homework is rare and must be increased. Issue-based groups for parents are a good idea that can turn into a good model to replicate. However, the effectiveness of these groups is still unknown.
- Principals must be intentional in inviting parents to activities where parents cannot only passively attend but can also contribute to organizing them. Asking parents directly about where and how they can contribute might also be effective. Parent initiatives must be encouraged to go further improvement or renovations of yards. Parents should be included in influencing decisions at school level. Moreover, Parent Councils must be seen as a structure that can indeed contribute to revising/writing policies/strategies of school and opportunities must be available for them to do this.
- Principals must organize capacity building of school teachers on parents' participation, despite the fact that they do not see this as a barrier. If it still is an issue, the teachers must be active players in improving the situation and it starts with their increased awareness.

National Survey of School Principals in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Steve Powell

Acknowledgements

The research team would like to thank the following:

- The 237 school Principals who kindly found time to take part in the survey.
- The 12 Ministries of Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina who all kindly agreed to allow the study to take place in their schools.
- Dženana Trbić at OSF-BH who helped us at every stage of the survey.
- Growth from Knowledge (GfK) B&H who conducted the survey on time and to the highest standards.
- The Education Support Program (ESP) of Open Society Institute (OSI), which was in charge of the regional project.

Purpose

This report presents the results for Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) of a survey on elementary school Principals' attitudes towards and views on parental participation in schools. For the purposes of this report, "parental participation" means the involvement of parents in decision-making, in extracurricular activities, and in the education of their own children.

This research is part of Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality in South East Europe, a project of the Education Support Program (ESP), which is financed by OSI (Open Society Institute). The project aims to address the problem of rising disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes in the South East European (SEE) countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia.

Similar surveys were carried out in the other seven countries and will be reported separately.

An impetus for this study was provided by some recent empirical evidence which highlighted improving parental involvement as a very promising strategy, not only to improve student educational outcomes overall but as a factor especially suited to helping socially excluded children and children with special needs to overcome educational disadvantage.

Methodology

The sample was designed to be representative for B&H with due regard to each of the areas of different ethnic majorities and to the urban/rural distinction.

The questionnaire used contains a broad range of questions on parental participation and its background as well as specific questions on exclusion. It also provides ample opportunity for open-ended answers.

Questionnaires were completed by 237 Principals.

At the end of the general questionnaire which was used for all the countries, an additional set of questions was added on topics specific to BiH.

A path diagram has been produced as an attempt to summarise the more detailed findings and in particular to answer the questions about “what influences what?”

Findings

Forms of participation in BiH schools do not extend to parental influence over education or the running of the school in anything but extracurricular matters. Parental involvement is very much focussed on organisation of events, renovating buildings, tidying the schoolyard etc. However, these forms of engagement are not to be disparaged, especially in the context of limited educational resources.

Principals are very aware that less well educated and otherwise socially excluded parents participate less in all forms of school life.

Quite a large number of Principals feel themselves drastically under-resourced and cut off from support from the Ministries. Their schools tend to have lower levels of parental participation.

Many schools have quite frequent, but limited, contact with parents. However this contact is very much one-way, from school to parent, with the most frequent activities being sending information about pupil performance and school activities. Parents are also invited to parents’ meetings, at which attendance is relatively good overall. However there are some groups of parents who attend much less frequently.

In general Principals are not convinced that parents should have much influence in their schools, and if so, primarily in areas such as social activity planning. They do not see parents as being competent to influence educational decisions. Parents’ Councils on the other hand are given more powers at least over general policy but again only a very small minority of Principals consider them competent to influence for example the content of lessons.

In BiH, parents participate more in bigger schools who consider themselves to be relatively well resourced and in which the Principal is convinced of the value of participation. These schools are better at encouraging and assisting parents to support their own children’s education, with a range of activities which can be called “home-school activities” or “parenting services”. Surprisingly, Principals who spend more of their time teaching seem to be more open to home-school activities, even though it is larger schools which tend to encourage these activities and Principals of larger schools tend to spend less of their time teaching.

These schools in turn communicate with parents more frequently and invite them to to the school more often. These activities seem to be a bridge between school and family. Unfortunately, the majority of Principals are not convinced of the value of such activities. Such schools also give more power to the Parents' Councils, which function as another such bridge.

A positive outcome for schools in which Parents' Councils have power and parents are invited more frequently to participate is that they actually experience a higher level of participation (as measured by the proportion of parents participating in meetings and other events, and as measured by the influence which Principals attribute to parents and their Council).

The second piece of good news is that Principals in these schools are also in general satisfied with parental participation and the influence of the Council and in turn are more convinced of the importance of parental voice, which in turn feeds back into their perception of the benefits of participation.

A very important variable is the negatively-expressed indicator "perceived barriers to school support for parents" which perhaps expresses a fatalistic or cynical view of the possibilities. There are two-way negative connections between this attitude and frequent and inclusive participation.

Recommendations

1. Investigate further why Principals who spend a larger proportion of their time teaching seem to be more open to home-school activities, a key prerequisite for participation.
2. Consider ways to encourage Principals even in large schools to spend some time teaching.

The most important link in the chain is probably the extent to which a Principal is convinced of the potential benefits of parental participation. So consider ways to demonstrate to Principals how parental participation can benefit them and their schools. This could be done by disseminating best-practice stories produced by other Principals.

It is probably too early to hope to introduce genuine participation of parents into wider school-level decision-making at this stage. Realistic initiatives which could work and gain the support of both parents and Principals are:

- Including parents in home-school activities around the education of their children;
- Including parents in activities which can visibly benefit the school;
- Encouraging Principals to widen the remit of the Parent's Council;
- Finding ways to extend participation to parents who are otherwise excluded, especially the poor;
- Finding ways to include parents who are very busy, i.e. provide opportunities which do not demand much time but could be useful in other ways.

National Survey of School Principals in Kosovo

Dukagjin Pupovci

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- Mrs. Gordana Miljević from Open Society Institute - Budapest for initiating and planning this project and closely following its implementation;
- Fellow researchers from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Romania and Moldova for continuous communication and exchange of ideas;
- The Prism Research Company from Prishtina for carrying out the survey in professional manner.

Purpose

The objective of this survey is to better understand the participatory opportunities created by school leadership in Kosovo schools. The survey of School Principals investigates the nature of regulation and extent of equitable implementation of parental participation (in decision-making, in extracurricular activities, and in the education of their children) in public elementary schools in relation to school-level factors and to the attitudes and beliefs of School Principals. In light of the general aim of the initiative, the purpose is to gather evidence in order to provide an enhanced and contextual understanding of the capacities, attitudes, and efforts of school leadership to improve/hinder the participation/engagement of parents in school life.

Methodology

The research methodology is the result of joint efforts of experts from the participating organizations from the region, as well as of external consultants who managed the overall process. The initial workshop, held in January 2008, was followed by intensive consultations resulting with a well prepared framework which guided this research.

The main aim of the survey in Kosovo is to better understand the causes of existing disparities in the quality of education and participatory opportunities. It is comprehensible that measures taken at the macro level of the education system can provide a general framework to overcome such disparities; however, it is not realistic to expect them to impact on the attitudes and stereotypes at the school level and thus result in evident improvements. The main question posed in this survey is:

- What are the values, attitudes and actions of School Principals towards furthering parental involvement in school life?

The survey was focused on the primary and lower secondary School Principals in Kosovo. The sample was limited to 539 schools that function as a part of the Kosovo Education System, and was divided into three geographic regions: Center, Southeast and West. The stratification was based on regions to accurately reflect the regional division of the school population.

Within each respective region representative municipalities were analyzed as well as school population of that region. Meanwhile, the school selection was made randomly following the division of schools into two categories (urban and rural schools). Thus the error margin is below 5%.

The instrument for completing such a survey was a questionnaire that was completed during the face-to-face interviews with selected School Principals. This questionnaire consists of six modules:

1. School background information
2. School-parent communication
3. Opportunities for parents to support school activities
4. School support for parents to help their children in education
5. Parental involvement in school governance

1. General attitudes

In order to allow us to draw clearer conclusions about stakeholder participation in decision-making in education we have summarized the questions of the questionnaire into four broader fields:

1. School actions to engage parents in school life,
2. School Principals' attitudes to the engagement of parents in school life,
3. Objective and subjective barriers in establishing school-parent partnership,
4. Best practices of successful parental participation.

Findings

To the best of our knowledge this was the most comprehensive survey of School Principals ever undertaken in Kosovo. This survey targeted 41% of the primary schools of Kosovo where 44.6% of the students are taught and 42.2% teachers are employed. Thus we believe it is safe to assume that the results of the research can be generalized for the entire population of Kosovo schools.

Individual communication with parents is a key to parental inclusion in school life. Based on the results of the survey this communication is mainly in one direction, from school to parent: a parent is more likely to listen than to express his/her opinion. The fact that 50% of the surveyed schools do not use such research tools to understand parents' opinions/attitudes indicates limited opportunities for parents to positively change the school environment through their own attitudes. Meanwhile our experience suggests that even where parental surveys are implemented, data processing and analysis is done superficially and does not always serve its purpose.

About 60% of the surveyed Principals expressed concerns about the quality of the parents meetings organized by school teachers, whereas 75% confirmed that their school did not have strategies for communication with parents. This leads us to identify an immediate need for setting some norms in communication with parents and for building the capacity of school personnel to establish effective communication in order to improve overall teaching and learning process. School Principals perceive lack of parents' interest and their insufficient time commitment to be the key barrier to such communication, with 54% of Principals of the opinion that their teachers have the relevant skills needed to work with parents. However, such confidence does not seem to correspond with Principals' dissatisfaction with the quality of teacher communication with parents.

It can be noticed that there is willingness on the part of the parents to take part in different school activities, but nonetheless 39.7% of the surveyed Principals declare that parents do not sufficiently engage in assisting the teaching process. This distinction again emphasizes the need improve the relationship between parents and schools, building parent capacity to contribute towards teaching process. Moreover, we observe low levels of parental financial contributions to schoolw (in 35.9% of the schools parents do not financially support school activities). This may be a consequence of the fact that schools are publicly funded, but may also be a consequence of unfavorable socio-economic conditions of different school communities. Indeed, mechanisms for managing financial resources gathered from parents do not guarantee transparency of expenditure and as such parents hesitate to provide such contributions.

Principals also think that parental participation in school life is of great benefit. Thus, only 1.7% of Principals surveyed reported that parental participation has little or no impact on improving the overall school environment, while other surveyed Principals considered that parental participation has a some or a large impact on the school environment. This chimes with the experience of 85.6% of surveyed Principals, who were able to recall successful partnerships with parents (most of these were infrastructural projects).

In practice, schools do offer some support to help parents to supervise their children while doing homework and to help them in other extracurricular activities. Meanwhile, School Principals have a very positive attitude towards the idea of offering such support although they also report that (for varying reasons) they are not able to do so. For instance, 73.3% of Principals report that schools do not offer materials to parents in order to help them provide homework assistance to their children, although 71.1% consider that such a step would significantly improve learning outcomes. Only 3.1% think that it would not have a positive impact on students' learning outcomes. However, Principals that do wish to implement such activities report that they face many obstacles, the most common of which is lack of school-level resources and lack of parents' interest.

Surveyed Principals reported fairly high levels of influence of Parents' Councils in school governance: about 60% reported that Parents' Councils influence governance "to a large extent" while 35% reported that Parents' Councils had influence "to a limited extent". Principals reported that Parents' Councils actively engage in all the forms of decision making in schools including teaching and extra-curricular activities. However, when Principals were asked to offer practical examples of initiatives from the Parents' Councils they only reported initiatives for improvement of school infrastructure. This appears to make a strong case that there is a need to build the capacity of Parents' Councils.

Analysis of Principals' responses shows that parents have an average impact on their children's schools in more than 50% of schools while in about 25% of schools parental impact is great. Nevertheless, since the survey only collects Principals' perceptions we cannot come to a sustainable conclusion about real impact of the parents in schools.

Recommendations

From the above conclusions we can extract few recommendations.

For schools:

1. Schools should develop procedures for meetings with parents, specifying the dynamics, preparation and content of such meetings. Group/thematic meetings should become a regular practice, as should individual meetings with parents. Teachers should be trained to manage different types of meetings and to use these meetings to advance teaching and learning.
2. Schools should engage in raising parents' awareness of their role in the school and should train them to exercise such a role. Schools might organize awareness-raising campaigns and other related activities to build parents' participation capacity.
3. Parents need greater support from schools in order to help the students improve their learning outcomes. Students should be provided with different tools to guide them and in some cases informative sessions or training should be organized.
4. Special attention should be paid to building the capacity of the Parents' Councils and parent representatives in school governing bodies to increase parental participation in school life.

For governmental sector:

1. To operationalize measures stipulated in the Strategy for the Development of Pre-University Education in Kosovo 2007-2017 to support parents at the national and other appropriate levels. The Kosovo Education Parents' Council, a body outlined by the law, should be re-activated and necessary support for its operation should be provided.
2. To continue with financial decentralization to the school level by a) increasing responsibility of schools for managing their own finances and b) creating additional opportunities for parents to make financial contributions to schools.
3. To encourage schools to improve communication with parents by supporting activities of professional, governmental and non-governmental institutions to develop manuals and guidelines that help this process.

For non-governmental sector:

1. To work on raising awareness of parents about their role in schools. Awareness raising activities should be organized at the individual school level as well as other levels such as municipality, region and country.
2. To work on building the capacities of Parents' Associations at all levels in order to help increase the influence of parents in school life. These associations should be trained to work with parents and their representatives in schools, to building their capacity to better carry out their new roles and responsibilities.
3. To promote good practices of parental inclusion in school life by creating opportunities for parents and schools to benefit from them.

National Survey of School Principals in Macedonia

Petar Atanasov

Acknowledgements

This summary is based on research results, research report and focus groups reports in the OSI/ESP Project Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality in South East Europe. Macedonia was one of the eight countries that participated in this regional project. The author of the report would like to thank the 200 School Principals who kindly found time to take part in the survey, GfK MK who conducted the survey on time and to the highest standards, the Ministry of Education in Macedonia who kindly agreed to allow the study to take place in their schools, the Education Support Program (ESP) of Open Society Institute (OSI), which was in charge of the regional project, and, most of all, to Suzana Kiradziska, Head of the “Step-by-step”, who coordinated, supported and made possible the Macedonian participation in the program

Methodology

The research undertaken in Macedonia consisted of two phases: preliminary qualitative research (two focus groups) and quantitative research (survey). The results of the qualitative part were used to create the instruments of the quantitative research. The decisions on sampling universe, sampling design, and questionnaire design were made by the central (international) research team.

The two focus groups were attended by more than 20 Principals, mainly from Skopje elementary schools. The interview topics and guidelines were the ones previously set by the main research team. The topics approached are divided into four sections: current state of the education system, education system reform, community involvement in school life, and parents' participation.

The survey used a random stratified sample consisting of 200 Principals from schools with grades I-VIII. It is representative of the target population (518 schools with grades I-VIII) with an error margin of +/- 3% at 95% confidence level. Data gathering and data entry were provided by a professional company, GfK Macedonia. The research was conducted in 8 countries in South Eastern Europe in May-June 2008.

Context

This paper analyzes one important aspect of the education process: participation of parents in their children's education. This theme is not much covered by research projects in Macedonia, so this project is important. A good portion of the paper is dedicated to the argument that the parents are given a task that they cannot fulfill. **The main thesis was that there is only basic communication and formal cooperation between parents and the primary schools in Macedonia.** The goal of the research was to gain knowledge of the values, attitudes and activities of the primaries and their Principals towards expanding parents' participation in school life. For this purpose a stratified sample was designed for each country. In the case of Macedonia the research was done through 200 in-depth interviews with the School Principals.

We can say with certainty that this element of education is one of the most important links which is not sufficiently present in Macedonian educational system. **The main question that we tried to answer was whether the parents are “the missing link” in education and upbringing and what is the experience of their inclusion or absence in Macedonia.** First, many of the Principals think that most urgent problem in our schools is the children's inadequate upbringing. In this domain the most important task is cooperation with the parents. Second, schools find it most difficult to cooperate with those parents who are hardest to reach and bring to the schoolyard. These are generally parents of the most problematic children. With the transition and the new working hours of the parents (8/9 until 5/6) even parents who are willing to come and participate cannot make it. Third, the formal functioning of the school management (Parents' Council, School Board) is hard to overcome.

The task of the research was to profile the values, attitudes and activities of the School Principals in relation to parents' inclusion in Macedonian primaries. A two step sample was designed according to regions and the type of place of living. In Macedonia there are five regions. This sample was made in proportion to the total distribution of the schools. Since rural schools have fewer students, they make up 40% of the sample, compared to the 60% of urban schools.

Findings

Asked what they think about the advantages and benefits of the parents' inclusion in the processes of education, School Principals' answers are generally “very much” in the relation to improvement of school atmosphere (54% - 108 schools), improvement of the students' attainment (53.5% - 107 schools), more positive parents' attitudes towards the school (51.5% - 103 schools) and greater support of parents for the schools (49.5% - 99 schools). When asked how important it was for parents to have influence in certain areas, again most Principals answered “very important” for the evaluation of teachers (46.5% - 93 schools), decisions about class level (43.5% - 87 schools) and the development and improvement of school rules (42% - 85 schools).

When we asked about what the schools are actually doing, the picture was slightly different. When asked how often there was activity in their school Principals generally reported that the offered activities were implemented “at least once in three months” (43% - 86 schools), followed by “at least once in a semester” in 34% of schools (69 schools).

Concerning the different kinds of parent engagement, the most most frequent method is the organization of the Principal-parent meetings (composite average of 4.07), then organization of open days

(average 3.85) and sending home evaluations of student progress (average 3.51). The least frequent activity is the sending of the school newsletter to parents: 73.5% of respondents (147 Principals) reported that this activity was not practiced at all. All kinds of engagement in which something is sent home to the parents (except evaluation forms) have decreasing frequency: information on the curriculum, information on school events, information on school policy and rules, and school newsletters. Meetings with Principals are organized at least once a month in 32% (64 schools); open days in 40.5% of schools. In general, the chosen activities from the school side are small in number and are implemented on average once a month or once a semester.

The rarest method of engaging parents is the provision of materials to help parents to follow their children's homework (composite average of 1.91) and the provision of materials for parents to help their children do their homework (average 1.97). Slightly more often (from 2.38 to 2.85), Principals chosen to: organize sessions to teach parents how to help their children, provide information for parents on how to create a home learning environment, provide advice for parents and support groups on children's behavior. This seems to demonstrate that between the home and the school there is no flow of written materials, which might have a longer effect or a bigger impact.

Interesting data are presented in an analysis of the question "how often does your school ask parents to do something as a support for their children?". Principals said that they did ask something from the parents in 39% of cases "at least once in a semester" (78 schools), "not at all" in 35.5% of cases (71 schools). Concerning the method of engagement, parents were most commonly invited to organize the school/class festivities with composite mean of 2.72, and to organize social activities for the school/class with a mean of 2.33. A smaller number of parents were asked to sponsor the school/class activities (composite mean 2.19) or help in fundraising for the school (mean 2.18).

At least once every three months 95 schools asked the parents to organize festivities, at least once in a semester 93 schools asked the parents to represent them at an event and 92 schools asked for fundraising help. In this context, the percentage of schools that are doing something in this area at least once in a month is very small. In general, schools ask parents to participate in activities on average once a semester or less. The frequency is much lower than communication with parents to support their children.

Two questions in the research are related to 1) barriers and problems in communication with parents and the barriers and 2) problems which limit the capabilities of the schools as institutions offering support for the parents. In the context of the first question most Principals reported three types of barrier: lack of interest in communication from the parents' side, limited time of the parents, and lack of communication skills from the parents' side. However, Principals consider these barriers as "partially" problems in 73.5% of cases (147 School Principals). In terms of the composite mean the biggest barrier is the lack of interest in communication from parents (2.64), limited time of parents (2.42) and lack of parents' communication skills (2.21). In terms of the second question Principals reported three types of barriers: lack of parents' interest in participating in school programs, parents' lack of time to participate and the absence of sufficient school resources for developing and implementing different approaches. The Principals also consider these barriers "partially" as problems, although they appear in 51% of the cases (102 School Principals).

As a general conclusion there are no overwhelming obstacles to greater and better quality communication and inclusion of parents in the education of their children. Barriers that are reported are reported as 'partial' and should not present any serious obstacle to communication between parents and the school. **According to the Principals, the "largest portion" of responsibility for poor communication falls on the parents and their lack of interest in engagement.** There certainly is a small bias on the side of the Principals since they do not report even one specific problem with the

school or with the teachers. This probably depends on the context within which the school exists and operates, and certainly the school atmosphere. **The school atmosphere is definitely one of the strongest factors and is created or set by the school Principal him/herself.**

At the end of this discussion of Principals' perceptions, we would like to emphasize three more important questions in the area of school management: how much do the parents influence the practical school life?; how much influence do Parents' Councils have and how do they work?; and how much does the School Board influence several segments of the education process? **The results collected suggest that on average, parents have access to the school decisions, even for the members of School Boards "with restrictions", which together with the "partial" influence of the parents in general, leaves the impression that the schools are not open enough towards the parents, an important factor in the children's education.**

Conclusions and recommendations

One of the main conclusions of the research is that there are no specific obstacles for the greater parents' inclusion in school activities. According to the Principals are more to blame for non-cooperation. Of course this is a partisan view since the Principals did not find any particular problem for non-cooperation on the teachers' side. On average, research data suggests that parents' access to school decisions, even for the members of the School Boards, is "limited", which together with the "partial" influence of the parents in general and the "partial" influence of the Councils of parents specific, leaves the impression that the **schools are not sufficiently open to the other factors in the education of the children** – in this case their parents.

On the contrary, positive conditions are present for greater parent participation but these are not well exploited. The normative framework is good and tends to support parents' inclusion. Yet practice in Macedonia shows that cooperation or partnership is not established on proper level: **cooperation is not part of the schools' strategy or, where implemented, is more basic and formal and does not contribute to enriching the educational process and higher student attainment.**

The Principals as leaders have to re-evaluate their pedagogical methods and encourage teachers towards more open cooperation with parents. Through the Parents' Councils they can plan activities by which the partnership with the parents will gain more strength and the results will be self-reinforcing. Larger barriers and obstacles to implement this concept are as yet unknown. What is needed is better organization and greater motivation on the teachers' as well as the parents' side. More training is necessary in order to raise the consciousness of parents and upgrading their skills. **But the teacher training is also a crucial factor for success.** Their task is much more complicated because they have to be the planners, the organizers and the implementers. The school must create a positive atmosphere through the Principals and the teachers and impose new methods of instruction and upbringing. There is nothing to lose, stakeholders can only benefit. A few Principals have already implemented this kind of relationship within the school, but they are rare cases and not very institutionalized.

The best Principals must exploit all possibilities: the parents and their capabilities, the teachers and the available resources, the local community, the business community, civil society, NGOs, etc. Cooperation can extend from organizing festivities, through enriching the instruction process with new and practical training, up to the creation of efficient and democratically governed schools. **The goal is better outcomes for the child and the development of his or her educational potential, and this is one of the proper ways to do it.**

National Survey of School Principals in Moldova

Viorica Goras-Postica

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to all of those who have made a significant contribution to supporting our work within this project: to the CEPS team, especially to Igor Repac, whose reliability and prompt communication were invaluable; to Gordana Miljevici from OSI Budapest, whose professional support and efficient coordination have transformed this challenge into an opportunity for valuable professional development; and last but not least, to the Moldovan Ministry of Education and to all School Principals involved in the survey, who showed great interest and sincerely shared their points of view.

Research Purpose

This work aims 1) to investigate the extent to which parents seek to assert their rights and to honor obligations in terms of building partnerships with the school, 2) to identify the opportunities created by the school and the support offered to parents to help build a functional partnership and 3) to discover the attitude of the School Principals towards the role and place of parents as well as their involvement in school life.

Methodology

This project involved representatives from 8 countries from South Eastern Europe. We used bi-stage sampling (urban-rural and distribution by region) to ensure data was comparable between the participant states.

The institutions were selected to ensure that the number of those selected was proportional to the share of the sub-group sample, thus covering 12 regions of the country. We grouped regions into zones based on the population in schools in these regions, as well as geographical factors. Data on the school distribution in zones was then collected and weighted as a percentage of the total number of schools in order to obtain the total number of questionnaires necessary. We then selected the schools to be interviewed, targeting in particular secondary schools (grades 1 to 8 minimum). Due to this fact, schools in

rural environments form a larger proportion of the sample group than do those in urban settings. This situation is characteristic of secondary schools, but not to all the educational institutions as a whole.

Data was collected via questionnaire and the direct interview method was used.

The data presented here were obtained through quantitative research on a sample of 296 School Principals of pre-university general educational institutions. The sample selected for the research consists of 89.5% of rural institutions and 10.5% urban schools. According to the number of pupils, the educational institutions are divided along the following lines:

- 82.8% small schools in which there are up to 225 pupils (meaning there is only one set of classes, one 9th form, one 8th form etc.);
- 16.2% medium schools, having between 226 and 450 pupils (in this type of schools, there can be 2 parallel classes at each level).

Overall, the share of small institutions (of up to 225 pupils) in pre-university education in Moldova does not exceed 66%. Small schools have some unique features related to the families' specifics, level of qualification of teaching staff, ratio of fully-qualified teachers to substitute teachers, and so on. All these have an impact on school-family relations.

School Principals: 73% of interviewed Principals were women and 27% men. 32.1% of School Principals had 13-25 years' educational management experience, 30.7% of them 3-5 years' experience, 28.4% 5-13 years' experience and 8.8% more than 25 years' experience. The average managerial experience among School Principals was 12 years. In terms of length of service, in general, 65.9% of interviewed Principals had been working in the educational system for more than 25 years, 31.8% - for 13-25 years and 2.4% for less than 13 years. The average length of service in the educational domain was 29 years.

Teachers: Levels of professionalism and involvement in the educational process are determinant factors of quality regarding the school-family relationship. The sample has the following characteristics: 119 schools (40.2%) have less than 10 fully-qualified teachers, meaning that more than 40% of all courses are facilitated by substitute teachers.

Parents: The families that have their children studying in the interviewed schools are described as having the following characteristics: 62.5% of School Principals reported that over 25% of pupils come from families with stable salaries; 37.5% of Principals stated that over 25% of pupils come from families in which one of the parents is working abroad; 9.4% of School Principals mentioned that over 25% of pupils come from families with only one parent and 8.7% of Principals affirmed that over 25% of pupils come from families in which both parents are working abroad. The general picture created is one in which more than 50% of schools are facing difficulties in establishing relations with over 25% of families.

Findings And Recommendations

Political and legislative context of the situation in Moldova

The quality of the school-family relationship is fundamental to good functioning of the educational system and for good pupil achievement and the improvement of these relations must become a constant concern of the educational institution. Article No. 60 of the Educational Law stipulates that: "Parents or guardians have the right to: choose the educational institution and the teaching language for their children; request their children's rights and liberties in the school; be informed about the educational process, contents and results of their children's evaluation." Meeting the requirement of the right to parents meetings is possible by constituting a Parents' Committee: this proves to be very efficient in stimulating parents' involvement. In turn, the presidents of the Parents' Committees also meet at the institutional level, in the representative Parents' Council. This also has several responsibilities: to teach the children within the family and ensure that students study as necessary for their educational level, and to be chosen as representatives of some administrative and consultative bodies of the school. Parents or guardians have the responsibility to ensure the child's enrollment in a compulsory educational system (state or private) or to ensure the child's education within the family; to create adequate conditions for studying, development, extra-curricular activities and self-training. Parents or tutors that do not contribute to the child's training and education can be punished according to the legislation in force.

School actions for increasing the level of participation and communication among parents

The education of children is a common purpose of the school and of the family and can be efficiently accomplished only by ensuring a strong partnership and by dividing responsibilities and functions among the parties involved, by commonly investing time and resources, by sharing information, by making a common effort and by solving problematic situations together. Communication between school and family is one of the most important instruments of establishing and maintaining an effective partnership between schools and families. Schools apply different forms of communication with parents, the most popular being meetings with parents, (mostly visits by teachers and by auxiliary didactic staff 64.9% once a month, 26.5% once a semester). At least once a semester, in approximately 95% of the researched educational institutions, meetings are organized between parents and class teachers.

The Principals of rural educational institutions are less satisfied with these meetings than those from urban areas. 50-75% of the total number of parents attend these meetings. Taking into consideration the fact that approximately 25% of children come from families in which one or both parents are working abroad, or from a family that does not have a stable income, and parents do not manage to schedule their time, we can consider this a very good rate of attendance. The categories of parents with whom is the most difficult to communicate are those parents that are predisposed to violence, alcohol and drug addicts (59%), parents that are working abroad or who live in other regions (48.6%); parents that ignore the education of their children (38.8%) and families who are otherwise socially or economically vulnerable (36.4%). In order to assure communication with all parents 81.4% of schools have a strategy that is focused mostly on organizing meetings with parents, on maintaining teacher-parent relationships, on involving parents in public activities etc. Only in 39% of Principals mentioned that strategies

are based on some training activities for parents. The data presented above shows the school endeavor to inform parents about school problems and pupils' achievements. Thus we may conclude that schools make some effort to create a dialogue with parents and not simply informing them. However, the flow of information is, in most of the cases, unidirectional, with little effort and openness from parents.

Parents' participation

Creation of a large range of opportunities for involving parents in school activities is an indicator of openness and of professionalism among school employees. The main activities that stimulated parents' involvement, from the Principals' point of view, are considered to be: (i) extra-curricular activities and different trips, (ii) activities related to improving conditions in schools, endowment with equipment etc., and (iii) meetings with parents. Principals did not mention the development of relations between pupils and teachers, between parents and teachers, educational plans, debates or seminars, or the creation of councils of parents, as important activities that could facilitate parents' involvement in the school life.

In order to encourage active participation of parents some concrete action was taken: discussions and negotiations in 65.7% of cases, direct discussions between parents and school administration in 26.7% of cases. In 25.7% of cases parents are involved in different projects, in 21.4% of cases parents are encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities, in 21% of cases they are encouraged to constitute councils of parents, and in 20% of cases concrete financial help is requested. Although not all opportunities to involve parents are used by the school, 82.8% of School Principals describe concrete situations in which successful partnerships between parents and educational institutions were created.

Support offered by school to parents

The necessity and importance of school to parents to facilitate parents' participation in education of their children is indisputable. In our research, the School Principals evaluated the utility of six types of activity. The support given to parents is individualized depending on the problem that exists in the family and the necessary and relevant form of support and help, as well as the necessary instrument, is applied, depending on the case. Also, priority is given to families in which violence exists, or those that ignore education of their children, or families that are members of the Parents' Councils.

The attitude of School Principals towards parents' involvement in the school life

School Principals' perceptions of parents' influence on the educational process and on the school determine parents' role and place in the educational institution and vice versa. In order to create a favorable environment for learning and for improving pupils' performances, Principals consider the following activities as very useful: informing parents on how to create a good home learning environment (88.3%), parents' counseling (87.1%), organizing some training sessions to help parents assist their children with homework (79.5%), creating support groups for parents of children with behavioral problems (74.7%). We can thus conclude that School Principals consider it necessary for the school to offer essential support to parents and employ different activities for this purpose.

Barriers to providing support for parents

Principals reported that the following barriers limit to a great extent the ability of their school to offer parents the necessary support: 68% of School Principals believe that that parents are too busy to get involved in parental counseling services, 63% mentioned lack of parents' interest in these services and 60% mentioned lack of resources for developing and maintaining these services (affecting their ability to provide services to some or a large extent).

Barriers to home-school communication

The School Principals answers indicate that they consider that the biggest obstacles to efficient communication between school and parents come from parents and not from teachers. 65.2% of Principals consider parents' lack of time for becoming informed about school issues as the biggest barrier, 35.4% think that teachers' workload is an important barrier. 63.3% cite lack of parents' interest in communicating with the school, and only 11.1% of respondents reported that the lack of teachers' interest was a big barrier to home-school communication.

Parents' involvement in school governance

Most of the School Principals agree on the great importance of parents' involvement in the process of school governance, especially in terms of improving the quality of education. Only in 28 schools (of 296), do School Principals minimize parents' role in the education of their children, thus denying them the rights stipulated in the regulations for pre-university institutions. Schools in urban areas show a higher frequency of institutions with no parent representatives in the school Administration Council. 87.5% of Principals report that they consider parents to be somewhat or very important actors in improving educational quality by making some decisions at classroom level, 82.5%, believe parents can make important contributions to decision-making at school level, while 69.6% think parents make a valuable contribution by planning school activities. Most School Principals do not consider parents' involvement to be important in the process of recruiting and sacking teachers, in selecting manuals and materials for the courses.

Almost half of School Principals consider that developing and modernizing school policies and regulations are the responsibility only of teaching staff, while the rest believe that parents should be involved in this aspect too. Just half of Principals consider parents' active involvement in school governance and decision-making as very important. We can conclude that School Principals appreciate the school-family partnership as important for ensuring educational quality, but that they believe that parents cannot have equal power in all domains.

Estimating the impact of the school reforms and the collaboration of the School Principals with the local public administration

The efficient and qualitative application of the school reforms in every educational institution will ensure the success of the educational system as a whole and the realization of all the education policy initiatives. Among the determinant factors of success in top-down reforms are the following: 1) relations established between the institution that drafts/plans the changes and the institution that implements them, 2) the existence of necessary and sufficient resources and conditions for implementation. Our research shows that 56.1% of School Principals are satisfied by the reform process, 45.6% are satisfied "to some extent" or "to a large extent" with the cooperation with the Ministry of Education and by the support that comes from it.

Only 30 School Principals (of 296) are satisfied “to a large extent” with the classrooms, buildings and equipment made available to them. This is due to the fact that the educational institutions from the Republic of Moldova do not have the equipment necessary for the good function of a normal teaching and learning process. According to some estimates made at the beginning of the academic year 2007-2008, half of the school furniture and equipment did not meet standards laid out in the hygiene and sanitary norms. Moldovan educational institutions are passing through a really difficult period financially: most schools have much fewer resources than they require for development, salaries and maintenance (heating, services, food and training). The deficit is usually covered by contributions from parents, local authorities, businesses, occasional efforts and foreign donors.

The results of the survey relate to the school budget for the academic year 2007-2008 and give us a clear picture of the above facts: only 8.2% of School Principals consider that their school budget was good (enough to pay all the current invoices and even permit some important investments). These responses reveal a visible budget deficit and insufficient administration of resources.

The most pressing problems

Based on the research we can emphasize the most pressing problems that exist regarding parents' participation in school life:

- The existence of multiple barriers to the efficient functioning of the school-family partnership, including those caused by some cultural and socio-economic circumstances characteristic of this long period of transition;
- The lack of clearness in roles and responsibilities of school, family and pupil; insufficient transparency in the decision-making process and in information about activities, as well as a general lack of trust;
- Insufficient preparation of school administrations, teachers and parents, to build sound partnerships for achieving common goals; lack of cultural traditions of school-family collaboration and ways of maintaining and stimulating it.

Solving these problems has to be made with common efforts of all the educational actors, including the support of School Principals.

National Survey of School Principals in Montenegro

Miloš Bečić

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Background and purpose

This is a summary of the national report on parents' participation carried out in Montenegro with 143 elementary schools' Principals. This research was conducted within the framework of the regional research project *Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality in South East Europe*, launched by the Education Support Programme.

The project aims to address the problem of rising disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes in South East European (SEE) countries. To address these issues a series of international meetings, with the participation of the Open Society Institute (OSI) and related representatives of 10 SEE countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia) were held. OSI-related representatives of 10 SEE countries identified the following common priorities to be addressed by OSI in the region:

- a) Inequity in education, more precisely the gap between existing policies and their implementation, and the neglect of various forms of discrimination (e.g., in relation to minorities, special needs etc.);
- b) Insufficient participation by stakeholders, particularly students and parents in education systems.

Methodology

In this survey, the sample comprised 145 elementary School Principals from 161 elementary schools in Montenegro. The sample was stratified by region (covering northern, central and southern regions) and by where the schools were situated (covering both – urban and rural elementary schools). The survey was conducted during May and June 2008. The Principals were contacted in person and interviewed. GfK Agency was engaged to conduct the survey in Montenegro. The Principals' contact details were provided by a representative of the Bureau for Educational Services in Montenegro. The Bureau was a partner for the duration of the project.

The survey was conducted via a questionnaire, which was compiled by the survey team on the basis of the focus group interviews with the Principals as well as relevant literature on parental participation in school life in Montenegro.

Findings

- 143 schools out of 145 that were part of the research had parent representatives in Schools' Boards. Taking into consideration this fundamental aspect of parents' participation, this basic information is fairly favorable.
- The Principals themselves are **very satisfied with the key aspects of parents' participation in School Boards**. In this respect, the Principals undoubtedly state greater satisfaction with parents' attendance of the meetings of School Boards rather than with their contributions to the work of School Boards.
- In most schools (almost 70%), **the communication between school and parents is active during the whole length of a semester**. Comparatively, the most used means of communication are: schools sending written evaluations of pupils' success to parents, and meetings that Principals organize with parents.
- The research results indicate that **Principals are mostly satisfied with the communication between teaching staff and parents**. More than half of Principals are to some extent satisfied with the communication between form teachers and parents, with more than 47% being satisfied with the communication on this level 'to a large extent'. Satisfaction with communication between teachers and parents is slightly lower, but, nevertheless, very favourable. In this respect, more than 58% of Principals show satisfaction 'to some extent' with almost 36% of them stating satisfaction 'to the large extent'.
- **Half of Principals estimate that over half of parents regularly attend meetings with form teachers, while 20% Principals estimate that over two-thirds of parents attend such meetings. In terms of meetings with subject teachers, almost half of the Principals estimate that between half and two thirds of parents regularly attend these meetings.** However, almost a third of Principals report that less than half of the parents attend those meetings. Finally, **over 40% of Principals estimate that more than half of the parents regularly attend Principal-parent meetings**, with almost 25% of Principals assessing parents' attendance at less than 50%.

- The most common topics discussed at meetings with parents are listed in order of importance:
 1. Grades and overall success of pupils
 2. Discipline and behaviour of pupils
 3. School curriculum
 4. School equipment and working conditions
 5. Excursions and extra - curricular activities
- Of 145 schools, 137 (94.5%) **have no policy/strategy on how to communicate with parents.**
- When estimating factors that negatively influence on communication with parents, **Principals state that the greatest barrier to communication with parents is the parents themselves.** According to the Principals, the key barriers are: **lack of parents' interest, parents' limited time and lack of parents' communication skills.** Accordingly, the message that Principals send is that in order to improve communication between parents and school, work needs to be done with parents themselves.
- When identifying the categories of **parents that are most difficult to communicate with**, Principals highlight the following groups (in hierarchical order):
 1. Those with lower levels of education
 2. Those lacking interest and a sense of responsibility
 3. Those whose children have behavioral problems
 4. Those whose children have problems with studying
- The most often reported activities that are aimed at improvement of parent participation in school's life are to request parents to participate in organizing social activities at school/classroom level and participate in organizing school/classroom ceremonies. Therefore, **the incentive from schools for parents to engage is mostly aimed at their engagement in extra-curricular activities.**
- Considering **school activities that most successfully engage parents**, Principals identify three following key activities in order of importance:
 1. Events, celebrations and extra-curricular activities
 2. Maintenance of the school and schoolyard
 3. Organization of excursion and pupils' free time
- 121 schools (83.4%), out of 145, recall instances when successful school-parent communication has been achieved. Most Principals (51 of them) state that **successful cooperation is achieved when parents help in school renovation**, the highest frequency in this respect. Two more examples of successful cooperation are emphasized: organization of events, celebrations and extra-curricular activities in general (22 Principals), as well as offering financial (in-kind) contribution to schools (21 Principals). Additionally, it is worth mentioning that 11 Principals emphasize organization of educational workshops as examples of successful cooperation.
- Analytically, all the findings show that parents are engaged in extra-curricular activities in different areas. The key question in this respect is **whether parents are only engaged in extra-curricular activities because it is their preference, or because Principals and teachers support this**

type of engagement? According to the research conducted through focus group interviews with Principals¹, we might think that, in fact, the school as an institution is approving and supporting only these means of engagement, whilst inhibiting or not supporting parents' participation in the teaching and decision making process.

- When exploring which types of activities would contribute to the improvement of pupils' learning in school, according to the Principals' **all the activities that are listed in the questionnaire would 'to some extent' be useful for this**. There are two activities that are stressed and that could, according to the Principals' opinions, have a more significant effect than the others. These activities are: providing parents with information on creating a home learning environment and organizing sessions to help parents assist their children with homework.
- The next task was to establish **the extent to which the schools were actually practicing and realising those activities in order to increase parents' participation in their childrens' learning process**. The results indicate that there variation in the perception of significance of those activities and of schools' practice of those activities. The key activities reported are listed according to frequency of response: help in creating a home learning environment, organizing parent issue-based support groups, organizing sessions to help parents assist their children with homework.
- When analyzing the **barriers that limit the ability of school to offer parenting services**, results indicate that there are three key factors: parents too busy to be involved in school-based parenting services, lack of parents' interest in engaging in school-based parenting services and insufficient school resources to develop and run the services. Therefore, **according to Principals, the parents are responsible for their limited participation**.
- Principals have very different attitudes to parent involvement in various aspects of decision-making processes. More accurately, Principals report being very willing to involve parents in certain aspects of decision-making processes but are very unwilling to involve them in other aspects. **Parents are welcome to participate when decisions of general character are made, as well as decisions related to extra-curricular activities, but the Principals are reluctant to involve parents in aspects of teaching and the school, human resources policy and distribution of finances**.
- Answers to the question **"have parents got the right to participate in certain activities related to the decision making process on a school's level?"**, show that, **in most cases, parents can participate by invitation only**. Accordingly, there are rather small numbers of cases when parents are free to participate without restrictions in decision-making process at school's level.
- When measuring the influence of Parents' Councils, **the influence that was measured in each area could be dominantly identified as existing 'to some extent'**. Structurally, **parents are mostly influential in the field of motivation, less in the area of extra-curricular activities and the least in the area of educational process itself**.
- The research envisaged the existence of potential differences between estimates of the importance of parents' participation and their actual participation. Results show that Principals believe that parents are mostly influential in fields of decisions taken at classroom level. The extent of their influence is less in decisions taken at school level and evaluation of teachers' performance. Factually, the parents' influence in practice is even less when considering social activity planning and even less in terms of development or updating of school policies and regulations. Interestingly, **parents' influence in practical school life is more visible in the areas in which the school**

1 The report: 'Promotion of inclusion and quality in education in South-East Europe'; focus group interview, 18th of February 2008; Forum MNE and CEPS

Principals consider it important and less so where Principals do not consider it to be so. According to the Principals' attitudes, we can say that the extent of parents' influence in practical school life, as one of the the aspects of participation, is entirely unsatisfactory.

- Identifying the most significant initiatives by Parents' Councils in the current school year, 78 schools out of 145 identified initiatives related to school renovation and repair work. All the other initiatives are significantly less present. Nevertheless, it can be noted that the **majority of initiatives suggested by Parents' Councils are related neither to the teaching process, nor to the rules and regulations relevant for school's functioning.**
- Finally, when exploring **the aspects in which, according to the Principals' opinions, parents can be 'mostly useful' for the school's work, the results indicate that the parents can be useful 'to a great extent' in all of the aspects of participation** that were envisaged by the research. Research also indicates that parents can be 'mostly useful' both for improved pupil educational performance and overall improved school climate.
- Principals identified the following **specific categories of parents that, for various reasons, tend to get less involved** (in hierarchical order): very busy, uneducated and lacking interest (think that education is unimportant).
- Analysing the **degree of Principals' satisfaction with different aspects of overall school governance**, the results of the research are showing that **their 'satisfaction' is greater than their 'dissatisfaction'**. The Principals are most satisfied with the cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science and then with the support they receive from the Ministry. This could be because this cooperation is really good, but could equally be the result of the fact that the Ministry is responsible for their appointment and the appointment in itself has a political connotation.
- Finally, **more than one in two Principals are satisfied with the educational reform and the impact that the reform has had on their school.** Accordingly, this shows that Principals have positively accepted the primary education reform. Still, it should be noted that one in ten Principals are not at all satisfied with the educational reform. **Principals generally express major satisfaction with the institutional, programmatic and reform cooperation with the authorities and moderate satisfaction with material resources allocated to their schools.**

National Survey of School Principals in Romania

Ovidiu Voicu

Acknowledgments:

The research team would like to thank IMAS Marketing & Sondaje who conducted the survey to the highest standards, the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, all School Principals who participated in the survey and the focus groups, Center Education 2000+ staff who helped us to every stage of the research.

Context

Stimulating parents' involvement in school life is one of the common objectives of the educational policies designed and implemented in Romania in the last twelve years. However, the results were not as expected: participation levels have dropped year on year and there are no signs that this tendency will change in the near future.

There are multiple explanations for the parents' lack of interest. Cultural background is an important factor: Romanians' level of participation in any kind of voluntary activity are among the lowest in the European Union, with only 5% of the population involved. In addition, the school and the community had separate paths in the past, both before the Second World War and during the communist regime. People were taught not to interfere with the education system, rather than to take an active role in it. The idea of partnership is quite new and it will take some time for mentalities to change. Last but not least, schools themselves were not prepared for a closer partnership with the local community. However, the decentralization process advances slowly in education and it is becoming imperative to enable a closer relation between school and community by stimulating parents to take a more important role in school life.

In this context, the project *Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality in South East Europe* proposes international comparative research measuring Principals' opinions on parents' involvement in school activities and how the current situation may be improved. The project is financially supported by the *Open Society Institute* and it is implemented by a consortium of NGOs from eight South East European countries. The Romanian partner is *Center Education 2000+*. This report presents the findings of the research.

Methodology

The research undertaken in Romania consisted of two phases: preliminary qualitative research (two focus-groups) and quantitative research (survey). The results of the qualitative part were used to calibrate the instruments of the quantitative research. The decisions on sampling universe, sampling design, and questionnaire design were made by the central (international) research team.

The two focus groups were attended by Principals or Deputy Principals of Bucharest secondary schools. The discussions took place on the 24th and 25th of January 2008 at the main office of *Centre Education 2000+* in Bucharest and were attended by 17 people – 8 at the first group and 9 at the second. The interview topics and guidelines were those previously set by the main research team. The topics approached were divided into four sections: current state of the education system, education system reform, community involvement in school life, parents' participation.

The survey used a random monostadial stratified sample consisting of 670 Principals from schools with grades I-VIII. It is representative of the target population (6.135 schools with grades I-VIII) with an error margin of +/- 3% at 95% confidence level. Face to face interviews were carried out by professional operators between the 5th and 25th May. Data gathering and data entry were provided by a professional company, *IMAS – Marketing and Surveys Institute*.

Findings

The majority of School Principals (85%) say they have a strategy to communicate with all parents. However, when asked about the components of the strategy, under 10% of these are able to provide concrete and solid examples. The majority (two thirds of those who report having a strategy) mention activities that involve communicating with parents: meetings, written notes, home visits etc. About 18% did not indicate any component of the strategy and did not complete that question.

The main characteristics of school-parent communication are those suggested by the answers to the questions above. Parents play a passive role and communication is mostly limited to subjects such as pupils' results and discipline issues. The most frequent methods of communication are reactive, place parents in a passive role, and do not address all parents: meetings (mainly when the parents are called) and written notes; home visits come third, and other tools such as opinion polls or newsletters are used to a lesser degree.

Participation at Principal-parent meetings is quite high, the Principals say. On average, more than 50% of parents attend but it is not clear if this refers to the total number of parents in school or the number of parents who are invited to such meetings. Only 40% of schools use at least two communication instruments on a monthly basis, but in these cases the number of parents attending the meetings is significantly higher. The content of the discussions revolves around the pupils' problems and academic results. 71% of Principals mention as the most frequent subject either pupils' results (40%) or disciplinary problems (31%). The most important topic of discussion is discipline, order and violence, mentioned in the top three topics by 92% of the Principals.

When asked about obstacles to relevant communication, Principals consider the parents' mainly responsible. Principals say parents lack the interest, skills, and time to get involved in school life. They are reluctant to consider other reasons that imply school or teacher responsibility. Similar answers were given to questions about what categories of parents are harder to interact with. Parents with low levels of education and/or marginal status are mentioned in the first place by 42% of the respondents, 37% of Principals mention parents living abroad on temporary basis, 32% mention parents and guardians of children who come from disorganized or large families, 20% mention ethnic minorities (in the first place Roma). As expected, the answers correlate with the social situation in the community: migrants are more frequently mentioned in communities with high migrant populations, Roma parents where there are Roma communities, and so on.

Romanian schools offer limited opportunities for parents to support school activities. Parents' involvement in school life is in most cases limited to social and cultural events and rarely in educational activities. Two thirds of the respondents reported that in their schools parents are not asked to offer advice to teachers but in 97% of schools the parents are asked to organize a school ceremony and in 95% they are invited to participate in organizing a social event at least once each semester.

Principals' answers suggest they think that students' results will improve if the school conducts parental counseling activities. The survey has tested Principal's reactions to several suggestions about counseling services (organized sessions to help parents assist their children with homework, provided materials helping parents to assist children with homework, materials helping to monitor their children's homework, information on creating a home learning environment, counseling services, and/or parent issue-based support groups). For each activity at least two out of three Principals have agreed that it would contribute to improving pupils' performance. But only half of schools practice at least two of the activities at least once a semester; one third of the schools have never organized support groups and have never tried to teach parents how to monitor their children's homework.

Parents' involvement in decision making at school level shows a similar pattern. In 94% of schools parents are represented in the Council of Administration (CA), but it is worth noting that by law the parents' representatives should be a part of the CA in every school. 87% of Principals are satisfied with parents' participation at CA meetings. In most schools members of the Parents' Committee have good opportunities to give their input when important decisions are made and to initiate new policies and regulations. Three out of four Principals think that parents' involvement in decision-making in general is important but when asked about specific domains we find again the same distinction: the parents should be involved in organizing social activities and not in deciding on content of education.

Similar answers were given to the questions about how influential the parents are. Principals think that members of the Parents' Committee have great influence in helping pupils to value education and planning extracurricular activities, but little if any influence when discussing pedagogical methods used by teachers or content of lessons (only 4% of the Principals think parents can influence content of lessons). These results are coherent when compared with the answers Principals gave when asked about the influence of parents in general.

Recommendations

The general picture shows a growing divide between school and community. Principals blame lack of interest from parents' side but at the same time they do little to involve parents in school life. In the majority of cases Principals say they are in favor of parents' involvement in decision-making but it appears they would like to keep the parents away from important decisions on the content of education, human resources management and budget. Principals welcome parent participation only in social and cultural activities and imposing school regulations. Most Principals claim that they have a school strategy but are not able to give concrete answers about its components. The communication tools used tend to place parents in a passive role.

These are the general trends shown by the statistical analyses. The particular design of the sampling universe has to be taken into consideration: 73% of schools with grades I-VIII are in rural areas and they are rather small schools. Data suggests that situation is different in urban areas and in bigger schools. Also, it is important to mention that some schools do better than others in terms of communication and parents' involvement.

Several policy recommendations can be made on the basis of the findings of the research. They are now only general ideas but they are worth following:

- Continuing research to understand the perspective of the other stakeholders: parents, pupils, local authorities, NGOs, other community actors;
- Increasing school capacity to interact with the community and to adapt to the needs of the community;
- Designing and implementing communication strategies for the national education system and each school;
- Creating a collection of good practices and disseminating this to all schools;
- Including parental counseling in curricula and allocating resources for this.

National Survey of School Principals in Serbia

Jelena Vranješević

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Introduction

This report refers to the results of a survey of views of primary school Principals in Serbia with regard to the possibilities and practice of participation of parents in schools. The survey is part of the project *Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality in South East Europe*¹, unfolding in seven countries: Romania, Moldavia, Albania, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia. In each of these countries, the same survey was conducted.

Problem and survey objectives

Despite a legal obligation and the established importance of parental participation in schools, in practice this often comes down to either 'decorative function' of parents, or their participation in decision-making only on secondary issues. During focus-group discussions with School Principals of sixteen Belgrade primary schools held over the course of March 2008, they said that the parental participation (with the exception of the School Board and Parents' Council) came down to activities like

¹ The Education Support Program (ESP) of the Open Society Institute (OSI) was in charge of the regional project.

school refurbishment, organisation of some extracurricular activities or financial support for schools. School Principals are of the opinion that there is no true participation of parents in schools and they see the cause of this problem as the disinterest of parents themselves. Principals suggest that parents want participation in school life, but without any responsibilities. The cause of poor participation can also be found in the way the schools are organised as well as unwillingness of colleagues and teachers to involve parents in different aspects of school life.

The basic goal of this survey is to gain insight into School Principals' views of parental participation in school life as well as actions taken at school to encourage this participation. The survey endeavours to answer the following questions:

1. How the parents involved in different aspects of school life and how does the school implement parental participation?
2. What are the views of school management and Principals with respect to parental participation in school life?
3. Which factors render the implementation of parental participation in school more difficult?
4. What is the participatory practice in schools: what is the influence of parents on decision-making process in schools?

Methodology

1. **Sample:** In this survey, the sample comprised School Principals from 200 primary schools in Serbia (a total of 200 School Principals). The sample was stratified by region (Belgrade – 14.5%, Eastern Serbia – 29.5%, Western Serbia – 26% and Vojvodina – 30%) and by the type of settlement where the school is situated (urban – 49.5% and rural – 50.5%). While most School Principals have long-standing experience in the field of education (between 10 and 30 years of service), only 3% of School Principals have been in this office for a period longer than ten years. The majority of School Principals (63%) have been in this position for less than five years. As regards the time spent teaching in addition to performing their duties as School Principals, most School Principals are not teaching (85.5%), while a tiny percentage teach less than 25% of their time (5.5%) and 2% spend more than a half of their working hours teaching. As regards the size of schools in the sample and the number of pupils, 23% were very small schools (up to 200 pupils) 47% were small schools (between 200 and 600 pupils), 12.5% were medium-sized schools (between 600 and 800 pupils), 14% were big schools (between 800 and 1200 pupils), and 2% very big schools (over 1200 pupils).
2. **Procedure:** The survey was conducted over the course of May and June 2008. School Principals of sampled schools were contacted in person and interviewed. GfK Agency was tasked with conducting the survey.
3. **Instruments:** In the survey, a questionnaire was used which the survey team compiled on the basis of focus group interviews with School Principals in the given region as well as relevant literature on parental participation in school life. The questionnaire did not contain additional questions concerning the specific features of the context in Serbia.

Findings

1) Communication between school and parents: different levels of participation

Very few schools have defined strategies for communication with parents that contain the basic principle of active participation of parents: regular informing of parents, inclusion of all parents in problem solving processes, cooperation and mutual respect. However, while schools list participation as the basic principle on which communication with parents is based, in reality parents do not have many opportunities for participation. Opportunities for informing and consulting parents are rare (only a small number of School Principals say this happens more often than once a semester). The picture is similar when it comes to parents' inclusion in the process of education of their children. School Principals' responses seem to suggest they believe the best thing is to involve parents in activities which are not directly related to formal school curriculum, teaching and learning processes, or essential aspects of school organisation, ie. extracurricular activities, rearranging school space and fundraising. This may point to 'ornamental' or (at best) auxiliary role of parents in school life. On a more positive note School Principals also mention parents' inclusion in projects and different educational events (educational workshops), which points to a practice of informing and educating parents about issues which are relevant to them and which may stimulate their inclusion in school life.

2) School Principals' views on parental participation in school life

School Principals' assessment of the influence that parents have on different aspects of school life is divided: almost a half believe that parents do have an influence on school life, while slightly smaller but still significant number of School Principals believe that parents have very little influence. The majority of School Principals agree that parental participation is not necessary in areas like teaching process and the organisation of the school and school life. While almost all School Principals agree that parental participation contributes to a more positive atmosphere at school, changing parents' attitude to the school, promoting better support and partnership and improving pupil performance, in practice most School Principals reduce parental participation to the organisation of extracurricular activities. Verbal support for parental participation is also reflected School Principals' views on the importance of parents' inclusion in the process of education of their children. Although Principals report that they believe that schools have an important role in ensuring such support, in practice parents have very few opportunities to obtain this support and become more involved in their children's education.

3) Factors which interfere with parental participation

School Principals' report that the biggest obstacle in communication with parents are the parents themselves, i.e. their lack of interest in communication with schools and lack of communication skills. Parents with whom communication is the most difficult are considered to be: less educated parents; uninterested/irresponsible parents and biased parents, as well as parents of lower socio-economic status, working and over-ambitious parents. Parents were also described as uninterested or too busy to permit effective provision of school support. A smaller number of School Principals mentioned school as an obstacle, i.e. lack of school resources required for organisation and implementation of support programme; teachers' lack of skills or time to work on support programmes. When asked if their school had defined procedures intended to encourage and bring about participation, in most cases School Principals cited actions aimed at parents: individual contact (frequent calls, interviews, advisory work), school psychologist or pedagogue working with parents, official invitation (by post or telephone) to an interview. To a lesser extent, Principals reported action to change the school system and make it more open to parents' inclusion (inclusion of parents in different seminars, educational events and projects).

4) Participatory practice

In our schools, parental participation in the decision-making process takes place through Parents' Council (PC) and School Board (SB). While the PC, according to School Principals, has significant and extensive powers, the question is if these are actually translated into practice: the examples cited above suggest that the parents' participation is limited and their influence is small and restricted to secondary areas of school life. This is partly corroborated by School Principals' opinion of the PC's influence on various aspects of school life: in general PCs do not exert any significant influence on the curriculum, the method of work and school infrastructure, nor does it influence other parents to participate more. The most successful actions carried out by PCs, according to School Principals, are school refurbishment and actions related to safety and organisation of extracurricular activities. This finding confirms the role which the parents have been given within the school structure: auxiliary activities and extracurricular activities, but certainly not those concerning the fundamental organisation of schools.

Recommendations

School Principals believe that parental participation is an important part of school life, contributing to a positive atmosphere at school, motivation of other parents to participate, and pupils' performance. However, participation in our schools mostly boils down to auxiliary activities not directly related to the core education process or school organisation. Actual participation is most successful and yields best results in the field of numerous extracurricular activities (outings, excursions, school celebrations, etc.), school refurbishment and various humanitarian activities. School Principals see parents, their lack of interest, willingness and competence for participation as the biggest obstacles to parent participation. This effectively creates a self-fulfilling of non-participation, given that School Principals' perception of parents also has an impact on parents' expectations, which in turn define and determine parents' behaviour.

All this is taking place within a school system which fails to effectively encourage or stimulate participation, or limits and restricts it to passive participation and 'ornamental' activities. Thus parents are often not capable of recognising either the purpose of participation or the effects that it may have, which in turn increases their passive attitude towards their participation at school, and this is in turn interpreted as a lack of interest. Participation has not become an integral part of school practice and procedures, rendering its implementation at school more difficult. Given the importance which the parental participation has in terms of education quality and all aspects of cooperation between schools and local communities, it is essential that participation be promoted and encouraged by way of carefully designed long-term projects as part of which parents can get involved in diverse activities depending on their preferences, time available and capabilities/skills. The school must have a crucial role in designing such programmes, particularly the teachers who are most often in touch with parents.

The critical role of teachers means that it is important to educate teachers about the ways in which collaboration with parents may facilitate their work and stimulate children's development. It is important to encourage teachers to think about the ways in which they can involve parents and stimulate them to participate in the education process. However, in order to bring about such change, the processes of restructuring and culture change must unfold simultaneously: in conjunction with the change of teachers' attitude and values, the school system must change (in terms of values, norms and procedures) to support these changes and make them sustainable. Education of teachers is not enough in itself if the school remains closed to new approaches and ideas. Parent participation should become a part of school practice, not an isolated example that exists thanks to the goodwill of individual stakeholders.

Chapter II

Report on School/Community Based Actions

Snježana Mrše

Report on school/community based actions

Background and approach

The Advancing Education Inclusion and Quality initiative was developed in response to the three priorities identified by OSI education partners in 10 SEE/Western Balkan countries, i.e.

- a) Inequity in education, more precisely the gap between the existing policies and their implementation
- b) The neglect of the other (in relation to minorities, disabilities, etc) forms of discrimination;
- c) Insufficient and/or inadequate participation of education stakeholders, particularly students and parents in education systems and poor quality of education.

The project aims (1) to better understand the causes of disparities in education quality and equity, by carrying out national surveys of school principals; and (2) to support sustainable initiatives to improve quality and inclusion at local, national and regional levels.

After completing the first phase of the project (quantitative survey of School Principals), the idea has been to promote concrete actions in communities/school that would address the issues of disparities in education quality and equity through the increased participation of education stakeholders.

Seven SEE countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia) took part in the second phase of the project. Each country team developed a three-month action plan to implement a concrete step in a particular school/community for a school/community based initiative to enhance education quality and inclusion through the parents' participation.

In order to assist country teams to complete this phase of the project, the action research consultant (Snjezana Mrse) was engaged and general guidelines for school/community action design was developed specifying:

- Purpose of the school/community action – to initiate and support stakeholder participation (school students and parents in particular) in advancing educational inclusion and quality at school and/or community level;
- Objective of the school/community action – to help schools initiate, design and implement participatory action (initiative) at school and/or community level;
- Approach and steps to be taken by country teams:
 1. Choose a generative theme to be further explored through stakeholder participation and pose a problem/s that reflect main stakeholder's concerns related to the chosen theme – based on the findings of the *National Surveys Reports*;

2. Select school(s) and local partner(s) that should be involved (schools should be aware of the problem yet have not addressed it through stakeholder participation and stakeholders should have interest in resolving this problem) and establish 'parent-student-teacher' working group/s or local network;
3. Design and realize a group session/s to explore the problem (at personal, institutional and cultural level), develop a learning tool which would focus group discussion and serve as a reference point for analysis of different aspects of the theme/problem and discuss possible actions to address the problem;
4. Facilitate planning and development of the school/community action;
5. Support implementation of the action plan – provide monitoring and technical assistance to implementing teams (if and when needed) and write monitoring and action reports.

Review of seven school/community actions realized by country teams

Country:	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Responsible person: Ivona Čelebičić e-mail: ivona@promente.org
Action title:	“Parents can be a part of school”	
Description of the action:	<p>The main goal was for the school to focus, through its own activity plan, on establishing and improving partnerships with parents. The research for the action was implemented in two primary schools (urban and suburban) in Sarajevo Canton, involving 5th –8th grade students, their parents and teachers.</p> <p>Focus groups with teachers and parents were held in each school, one before and one after the activities proposed by the schools, in order to compare opinions and reasons for inclusion of parents in school life before and after the action. .</p> <p>The action was based on the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informing parents about the topics related to parents’ opportunities to be involved in their children’s school work; • Educational program offered to parents and teachers (and students) in joint workshops; • Small program of joint work (improving the schoolyard, joint meetings of parents with subject teachers, workshop on parents as school partners in prevention of drug abuse); • Joint outing (activities) – teachers, parents and school management pending time with each other to create closer relations that should open long term possibilities for school-parent cooperation. 	
The main results:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 62 subject teachers and parents of the 8th grade students participated in joint parent–teacher conference (where parents could exchange experiences with other parents, but also get to know subject teachers). 2. Two joint activity sessions of teachers, students and parents (“Games Without Borders”, football tournament and barbecue party and field trip to Mostar and visit to Blagaj–Buna). 3. The results of one school action were included in the Portal of primary and secondary education – officially supported by the Ministry of Education and Science of Sarajevo Canton (www.skola.ba). 	
Techniques and/or procedures developed:	<p>Focus groups with parents, teachers and school management.</p> <p>The two school activities - joint parent-teacher conference and joint outings - gave best contribution to removing barriers between teachers and parents.</p>	

Country:	Kosovo	Responsible person: Dukagjin Pupovci e-mail: dpupovci@kec-ks.org
Action title:	Advancing communication with parents in Kosovo schools	
Description of the action:	<p>The purpose of this action was to advance communication with parents in Kosovo schools by introducing a methodology for organizing structured individual meetings with parents.</p> <p>The five schools participated in the action. Each school was asked to nominate 2-3 participants for the working group that was asked to develop methodology and procedures for communication with parents. At least one of the participants from each school was a parent accompanied by School Principal and one teacher. Following the development of methodology in participatory way, teachers and parents from the targeted schools were trained on its use. After the methodology was applied in the targeted schools, a survey was organized to reach conclusions on perceived usefulness of methodology.</p>	
The main results:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 143 class teachers and principals adopted the new methodology and procedures – 85% of them expressed their belief that the methodology was useful for teachers and parents. 2. Public presentation of the methodology and results achieved within the framework of this action will help its dissemination, and represents an opportunity for reaching out to other schools in Kosovo. 	
Techniques and/or procedures developed:	<p>Methodology for individual meetings with parents.</p> <p>A comprehensive survey report is produced and will be presented to wider audience.</p>	

Country:	Macedonia	Responsible person: Suzana Kirandziska e-mail: skiran@soros.org.mk
Action title:	Improving school-parent collaboration	
Description of the action:	<p>The idea of this action was to stimulate collaboration between parents and school staff in order to result in frequent activities where parents will be involved in school life.</p> <p>The action was realized in primary school Mancu Matak (village of Krivogastani) with the main objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to find ways for better collaboration with parents • to create a parent room • to organize and carry out workshops for parents • to prepare a brochure with useful tips for the parents regarding their involvement in school work • to create a website for the school. 	
The main results:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The school created a website (www.mancumatak.edu.mk) and printed a poster for the project. 2. Brochure outlining parents' involvement prepared, printed and handed to the parents. 3. 60 parents participated in the three different workshops. 4. Parent room renovated and established. 5. School-parent cooperation is now part of the annual school plan. 	
Techniques and/or procedures developed:	<p>Preparation of action plan using SWOT analysis and focus group discussions.</p> <p>Writing a project proposal for "Small grants for School-Community actions" (FOSIM provided fund for small grants)</p> <p>The website created as a result of this project is an excellent way of sharing experiences and knowledge as well as for successful communication and cooperation between parents, the community and the school.</p>	

Country:	Moldova	Responsible person: Rima Bezede e-mail: rbezede@prodidactica.md
Action title:	Optimizing the school-parent partnership: “Let’s help our children by communicating and acting together”	
Description of the action:	<p>The aim of the action was to promote the survey results and make parents, school principals and MEY and RDEYS representatives more sensitive in identifying and overcoming existent barriers in the efficient functioning of the educational school-family partnership.</p> <p>The main steps realised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Round table held, where the survey results were promoted • Planning workshop for 25 parents and teachers held, designed to help the local partners establish partnership and plan the action. • Community action “Let’s help our children by communicating and acting together” realised (Tepilova, Soroca) with the aim to ensure financial sustainability of the Parents Club initiated in the gymnasium school (general secondary school). • Finalizing activity in Soroca involving 40 School Principals from the region to sensitize them and for sharing best practices of educational actors from the Tepilova Gymnasium School. 	
The main results:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A list of barriers to the efficient functioning of the school-parent partnership and solutions for optimizing the school-parent partnership elaborated. 2. More than 50 parents involved and a Parents Club initiated. 3. A fundraising event realized for ensuring sustainability of Parents Club 4. 40 School Principals from the district of Soroca became more sensitive to this problem. 5. The publication “School-Family Partnership Local Initiatives”, the synthesis of materials used within this project (200 copies). 	
Techniques and/or procedures developed:	<p>Parents Club “<i>Invitation to Education</i>” was the monthly activity chosen by parents, pupils and teachers from the Tepilova Gymnasium School.</p> <p>A fundraising event was held to ensure sustainability of Parents Club.</p> <p>A range of recommendations for all the educational actors were produced to contribute to improving the school-parent relationship.</p>	

Country:	Montenegro	Responsible person: Krivokapic Tamara e-mail: tamara.krivokapic@forum-mne.com
Action title:	Open days for parents in three primary schools	
Description of the action:	<p>The aim of the action was to offer and realize an ‘Open Day for Parents’ in three primary schools in Montenegro as a model for enhancing parental participation by advancing communication between parents and form teachers.</p> <p>The main steps realised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In every school, representatives of Parents Council, pedagogical service and form teachers of the 7th grade are entitled to attend the training organized by Forum MNE and delivered by the pool of trainers of National Parents Association. • The training aim was to inform all aforementioned representatives of the role of parents and roles of themselves when promoting or working with parental participation. • During the training all participants planned the Open Day for Parents to be organized in their school with technical support of Forum MNE. • At the end an evaluation of the process and the Open Days was carried out. 	
The main results:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A total of 36 teachers and other school representatives participated in three Open Days training workshops. 2. 350 parents, teachers, pupils and other school representatives participated at the Open Days. 3. Three TV stations and three newspapers, on national level, covered these events. 4. The end of the project saw the publication of the brochure of good practice that was promoted through this project. 	
Techniques and/or procedures developed:	Forum MNE presented a completely different model that promoted parents’ participation and published a brochure of good practice, so that the project can be implemented by other schools as well.	

Country:	Romania	Responsible person: Daniela Nita e-mail: dnita@cedu.ro
Action title:	News from Home	
Description of the action:	<p>The main objective of the action was to help parents that work abroad to be an active part of their children's (school) life by creating an efficient communication method and a strategy to involve parents, presenting it to the Arges County School Inspectorate for piloting and to the Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation.</p> <p>The action involved 22 parents, 28 children, 23 teachers (including school psychologists and Principals), 2 representatives from the Child Protection Department from Pitesti City Hall, and 1 representative from School Inspectorate.</p> <p>The action was based on the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of a parent database; • Focus group discussion with their children and questionnaire survey for parents and their tutors; • Support from a Specialized Counseling Team • Creation of a discussion forum for parents, and between school and parents • Sending letters and e-mails with narrative reports of the child's school activities from a determinate period of time, with recommendations and conclusions from teachers, or other persons from the school; • Keeping an archive of all the correspondence; • Organizing a day trip for the children involved • Organizing a closing seminar with parents or guardians, teachers, other actors involved and media representatives. 	
The main results:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A new, original view of parent participation and communication with the school was presented. School management now has a new method to communicate with parents, an inexpensive method that has been tested in practice. 2. Children involved in the action improved their grades and opened their perspectives becoming aware that their problem is not entirely their own - their feeling of security increased. 3. Parents had increased their trust in the school's actions and they are more confident in addressing requests to the school. They saw the practical role of the school psychologist. 4. Parents received wanted information about their children and children always agreed to what had been written. 	
Techniques and/or procedures developed:	<p>New method to communicate with parents working abroad.</p> <p>Working with the local media we disseminated the results of the action, receiving positive feedback from community members and other parents, other teachers and members from the Inspectorate of Arges county.</p>	

Country:	Serbia	Responsible person: Jelena Vranjesevic e-mail: jekac@eunet.rs
Action title:	Building partnership in the classroom: Promoting teacher-parent partnerships and parents' participation in the classroom	
Description of the action:	<p>The main idea of the action research was to explore possibilities for parent–teacher cooperation that would foster parents' participation in various aspects of school life. Parents and teachers from the primary school “Sreten Mladenovic Mika” in Nis were brought together to discuss different types of cooperation, to make action plans for fostering parent participation and to implement that plan in their school.</p> <p>12 teachers from the school (including teachers from 1st to 4th grade and four subject teachers) and 10 parents participated in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action planning phase (focus groups with parents and teachers in order to explore obstacles/possibilities for cooperation and participation, core group meetings in order to analyze the problem and make detailed action plan); • Implementation of the chosen project activities; • Evaluation of what was done and planning the finishing steps. 	
The main results:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “School sports days” realised (3 days of different sports and fun activities for parents, teachers and students). 2. Training in communication skills for teachers and parents from the core group led by the school psychologist. 3. Education in communication skills for other parents in the school led by parents from the core group. 4. Round table about parent–school cooperation and parents' involvement. 5. Publishing school newspaper with information about the project and plans for further cooperation between parents and school. 	
Techniques and/or procedures developed:	<p>Design of focus groups discussions.</p> <p>Planning (how to inform parents and teachers, how to evaluate their interest in the activities, how to make the action more sustainable).</p>	

Conclusions and Recommendations

The seven school/community based actions, realized within the project, addressed and further explored:

a) Two generative themes:

- lack of communication between parents and teachers
- lack of parent participation in school life

b) Several related problems that reflect the main stakeholders' concerns:

- schools have no strategy for communication with parents
- existence of different barriers related to the efficient functioning of the school-family partnership (caused by the socio-economic and cultural circumstances of the transition period)
- lack of innovative models that enhance parents' participation.

In order to address these issues properly, local partners and stakeholders were identified, invited and involved (through the establishment of mixed working groups) in the process of externally facilitated

- Joint analysis of different aspects of the problem;
- Discussion of possible ways of addressing it effectively;
- Participatory planning of one joint school/community action.

The country team experts have assisted the implementation of the school-community actions which were financially supported through the project budget in the all participating countries while the additional financial support in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro has been provided by the respective Soros National Foundation.

The school-community actions have had a big impact at the school level, the local community level and on the educational bodies involved (such as Ministry departments and the Schools Inspectorate). However, the major impact was on key actors:

a) Teachers, who

- Understood the importance of parent participation and cooperation with parents for the best interest of children
- Explored and tried various methods of cooperation with parents
- Expanded their professional competencies in working with adults/parents.

b) Parents, who

- Understood the importance of cooperation and their important role in this process in order to improve outcomes for their children
- Learned how to cooperate and share responsibilities with teachers
- Took a more active approach in cooperation and explored different methods of participation
- Were actively involved in different aspects of classroom and school life.

c) Students, who

- Improved their academic performance and behaviour
- Were able to see that others share similar problems
- Increased their feelings of security, becoming aware that somebody was paying attention to them and their problems.

The lessons learned from implementation of the seven school-community actions in this project could be best summarized by quoting the recommendations provided by Daniela Nita (country team coordinator, CEDU, Romania):

1. It is absolutely necessary to set a program of written information to parents. This activity is unusual and it is now proven that it has great positive impact on parents' participation.
2. It is possible to design a procedure that sets rules for correspondence with parents, whether they are at home or abroad. The quality assurance commission of each school could do this.
3. Parents should never be made to feel guilty (because they are not with the children). This triggers defense mechanisms and results in increased absence of parents from school life.
4. Parents frequently suffer stress in various areas of their lives, so all potential problems with their children should be carefully addressed and parents should be seen as key partners in solving them.
5. One basic step is acceptance of every parent: the construction of a successful parent-school relationship depends on this. So it is essential that someone who is trained in effective relationship building corresponds and communicates with parents.

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The mission of the Education Support Program is to promote justice in education, aiming to strengthen advocacy, innovation and activism in three interconnected areas:

Combating social exclusion: equal access to quality education for low income families; desegregation of children from minority groups; inclusion and adequate care for children with special needs.

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