

Advancing educational inclusion and quality in South-East Europe

Country context report for the Republic of Macedonia

The issue of parent's participation in schools in the Republic of Macedonia does not feature prominently in the public discourse. There are also very few projects that work on enhancing the participation of parents. However in a number of official documents parent's participation has a prominent place. Parent's participation is also regulated with the Law on Primary Education.

1.1. Legal Framework

The reforms in the primary education follow the ideas outlined in the National Programme for the development of Education in The Republic of Macedonia 2005-2015 (Ministry of Education and Science, 2005). The strategy outlines the main developmental path for the educational system in the Republic of Macedonia. The main idea that the document promotes is raising the educational level of Macedonian citizens by raising the awareness of the importance of education, eliminating obstacles which make education unavailable and cause high drop out rates and modernisation of the education system. As the Programme outlines high level of school drop outs, low intake of pupils in pre-school and higher education the strategy suggests lengthening the compulsory education as well as other changes throughout the educational sector which will improve the quality of education for all citizens. The Programme accentuates the need for establishing strong links between the schools, the stakeholders and the local community as well as the role of the parents in the education of their children.

Following the recommendations a Concept for Primary Education (Bureau for Development of Education, 2007) has been prepared. The Concept deals with the important aspects of the educational process and has a section dedicated to parental participation in the primary schools. The Concept outlines some of the experiences from other countries which can serve as basis for parental inclusion in the Republic of Macedonia.

Following the recommendations of the Programme and the Concept a new Law on Primary Education in the Republic of Macedonia was passed in 2008. According to this Law primary education is compulsory and lasts for 9 years. Children have to be registered for school in May of the calendar year in which they turn 6 and they start school in September of that year. The Law also regulates formal parental involvement in the school life.

According to Article 5 and Article 47 the parents or legal guardians are obliged to enrol their children in primary schools. Although each school has a catchment area (Article 19) according to Article 50 parents can choose whether to enrol the child in the school in their catchment area or in another school. According to Article 48 when the parents enrol their children in school, the school forms a school committee (the school psychologist or pedagogue and one teacher) which decides whether the child is ready to attend schools and the parents can appeal to the decision of that committee to another committee formed by the Mayor. If for any reason the school staff decides that the child should wait one more year before it starts school parents have to agree with that decision so it can be implemented according to Article 49. This means that the parents are obliged to enrol their children in school but they can choose the school which they think is appropriate for their child and make decisions accordingly. The parents of children with special needs are given a choice to enrol their children in mainstream primary school except when the needs of the child require specialist attention according to Article 51.

The Law also outlines the rights of parents during their child's schooling. There are few articles connected to the parent's inclusion in child's achievement and assessment. According to Article 67 the teachers are obliged to inform the parent of their child's achievements twice in each term. According to Article 72 the summative assessment and the final grades for each pupil are presented to each parent on a Parent's Class Meeting. The Meeting is organised by the class teachers within three days of the Teacher's Council in which the final grades for each student have been confirmed. The parents can also make decisions whether they want their child to progress through primary school faster according to Article 75. As can be seen these articles regulate the flow of information during assessment and children's progress through primary school.

According to the Law the parents are also involved in the management and decision making in the school. According to Article 124 three representatives of the parents are members of the School Board. The School Board has a three year mandate, but when a child finishes school the parent's membership automatically stops even if the three year mandate is not over. The parent's representatives are elected by anonymous and secret voting by the Council of Parents as stated in Article 125. The responsibilities of the School Board are regulated with Article 126. As such the School Board is responsible for: electing the school's statute; presenting a yearly plan of work as well as yearly report to the Municipality Board; electing the school development plan; electing plans for implementation of higher standards and other programmes; presenting a financial plan to the founder; presenting yearly financial report to the founder; preparing a public ad for the position of a School Principal; interviewing candidates for the Principal's position; suggesting one or two candidates for the position of Principal to the Mayor; giving suggestions to the Principal for the selection of teaching staff and the Professional Support team; suggesting cessation of the working contract of the teaching staff with unsatisfactory results; deciding upon appeals from the employees; deciding upon appeals from students, parents or legal guardians; dealing with any other issues according to the school's statute.

As stated in the Article 145 the Council of Parents is formed to fulfil the interests of the pupils. The Council consists of one parent representative from each class. The representative is chosen by the parents of each class on a Parent's Class Meeting. The Principal then decides on the date of the first meeting of the Council. The Council of Parents should: provide an opinion about the developmental plan and the yearly working plan of the school; discuss the school's yearly report; suggest plans for raising the standards of the educational process; confirms the Principal's suggestions for implementation of higher standards; discusses parent's appeals connected to the educational process; choose the three members of the School Board; deal with any other issues according to the school's statute.

Some other Articles such as Article 86 of the Law suggest that the teaching staff and the Professional Support team should regularly collaborate with the parents. However those Articles do not define the precise form, type

or frequency of the collaboration. This leaves space for each school to decide the strategy for parent's inclusion in the schooling process.

1.2. Parent's involvement in the schools

There have been very few projects or activities which promoted parent's involvement in the schools in the Republic of Macedonia. Some of the activities have been explained in details in the work of Atanasov (2008). One of the newest activities is financed by the foundation "Step by Step" and is realised as part of the "Primary Education Project" as part of the efforts to turn the classrooms in Macedonia into effective learning environments. The planning of the activities within each school has just begun.

Besides the planned projects and activities the parents in Macedonia mostly get involved in their child's schooling when they want to voice their negative opinions or dissatisfaction. One of the most recent involvement of the parents in the schooling process has been in two high schools in Struga, an ethnically mixed city in the South-Western part of the Republic of Macedonia, in February 2008 (Sutinoski and Trajkoska, 2009). Following few fights and verbal incidents between Macedonian and Albanian pupils the Macedonian parents and pupils demanded ethnically segregated shifts and the Albanian parents were opposed. The case received media coverage, Macedonian students boycotted the classes, the Minister of Education got involved and at the end the decision was made to start working in ethnically segregated shifts. This was followed by similar boycotts from the Albanian pupils, but so far the situation is unchanged. The tensions in the town are still visible as a result. A similar parent's involvement was visible in Krushopek, a village near Skopje in March 2009 (Ismaili, 2009). A high voltage electrical transmission is located just above the school roof and the conflict over its location has been going on since 1995 when the school was built. The issues escalated after one child got hurt. The parents stopped sending their children to school to voice their protest against the location of transmission line which has received media coverage but the issue hasn't been resolved.

1.3. Conclusion

As can be seen the Law for Primary Education gives parent's rights to be informed about their child's educational experience and be involved in decision making through the Council of Parents and the School Board. However to date there haven't been many reports that dealt with the quality and quantity of parent's involvement in the educational process.

Some examples of parental involvement such as the one in Struga suggest that sometimes parent's participation takes extreme forms and does not always result in positive outcomes for all. On the other hand sometimes parents need to take such extreme measures to voice their opinion such as in Krushopek. However both cases show that parents and schools need help in finding the right mode for cooperation which will result in enhancement of the educational process.

Literature:

Atanasov, P. (2008) *Parental inclusion in education in Macedonia: The missing link*. Retrieved 20 March 2009 from http://www.see-educoop.net/aeiq/reports/macedonia_report.pdf (in Macedonian).

Bureau for the Development of Education (2007) *Concept for nine years primary education*. Retrieved 20 March 2009 from http://www.bro.gov.mk/devetgodisno/Koncepcija_po_javna_rasprava_so_izmeni_i_doplnuvanja.pdf (in Macedonian).

Ismaili, M (2009, 3 March) Boycott of classes due to dangerous transmission line. Alsat-M. Retrieved from <http://www.alsat-m.tv>.

Ministry of Education and Science (2005) *National Programme for the development of Education in The Republic of Macedonia 2005-2015 with accompanying programme documents*. Retrieved 20 March 2009 from <http://www.npro.edu.mk/dokumenti/strategija-en.pdf>.

Law on Primary Education, Official Gazette of Republic of Macedonia, no. 103/2008.

Sutinoski, N. and Trajkoska, M. (2009, 10 February) Struga becomes a school example for ethnic segregation. *Dnevnik*. Retrieved from <http://www.dnevnik.com.mk>.