

Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality in South East Europe
Survey on elementary school children parents' attitudes towards and views on
parental participation in schools.

Croatia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The project is carried out as the part of the *Advancing Education Quality and Inclusion in South East Europe (SEE)* countries initiative.

It is funded by Education Support Program of Open Society Institute and implemented in cooperation with Center for Education Policy Studies (CEPS, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education).

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CEPS Center for Educational Policy Studies University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education

CRT Central Research Team

FG Focus groups

OSI Open Society Institute

PARENT – the person who takes care and is responsible for the child (mother, father), guardians when parents are absent, could be grandparents

PULS - an independent full service marketing and public opinion research agency

SEE – South East Europe

PURPOSE

Main purpose of the project itself is advancing educational quality by promoting partnership between school and parents.

Main aim of the survey: To provide a view of parental participation in schools from the perspectives of parents, parent representatives, Roma parents and principals.

To learn about parents' needs, expectations and experiences regarding their influence on school life

and the school efforts to engage them.

METHODOLOGY

This survey has been preceded by 6 focus group (FG) meetings and a pilot survey of the final survey instrument.

We had focus groups from the following places:

Zagreb (capitol) Samobor (small place near Zagreb)

Solin (small place on the coast, near Split)

Kutina (city, continental Croatia).

The variety of parents and their experience with school provided central research team (CRT) with material for the main **instruments** in the project:

- Questionnaire for parents (as a base for the standardized interview)
- Questionnaire for principals (as a base for the standardized interview)

Procedure for FG and questionnaires applied can be found on internet site <http://www.see-educoop.net/aeiq/>.

SAMPLE

Parents:

A - parents in mainstream schools (30 schools out of 944 primary schools in Croatia) (N = 908)

B – parent representatives (N = 144);

E - parents in schools in areas with larger number of marginalized groups (Roma) (N =60)

EB – parents representatives in schools in areas with larger number of marginalized groups (N = 10).

Principals:

A – principals in mainstream schools (N= 30)

E – principals in schools in areas with larger number of marginalized groups (N = 2)

Procedure

The survey was conducted by PULS agency in the autumn of 2009. They interviewed 1122 parents of primary school children (random stratified sample). Parents were interviewed in their homes.

Principals from the schools in the sample (30 from mainstream schools and 2 from schools with larger number of Roma children) were also interviewed. The interview took place in their school.

FINDINGS

1. Parents

Most of the parents tend to traditional approach of cooperation with school. They mostly expect initiative from school and then they react. For most of the parents school is the safe place for their child, even if the child has difficulties in school, or does not understand the language (some Roma children).

When they are not satisfied with school, it is not because the school does not accept their initiative, but because they want something more from school (written information).

Parents are mostly satisfied with the way of teachers' communication and they, parents, think that they themselves do not have the initiative for the cooperation. Their (parents') attitude is that parents should not involve in some "school matters".

We have tried to identify some of the characteristics of different kinds of parental involvement – for example, differences which come out because of the mother's level of education and because of the belonging to rural/urban area.

Statistical analysis of our data showed correlation of **mother's education** and following variables:

- Mother's higher education is connected with the higher parental ratings of their *child school's achievement*
- *Frequency of reports on child's progress* - lower education of mother is connected with perception of higher number of given information of that kind
- *Parental opinion on whether a school send home written information on how to help their child to learn* – higher education of mother is connected with a perception of higher school's obligation for sending such information
- *Frequency of school or class newsletter, or some other written information on drugs, violence etc.* – higher educational levels positively correlate with recollection of receiving written information from school, whether a regular class newsletter or more occasional information on bullying or drug awareness, as well as with the stronger belief that it is school's obligation to send this kind of information
- *Parental competency for reading any kind of written information from school*– higher education of mother is connected with a perception of a higher competency, as well as with the higher sense of parental duty to read such materials

- *School's right to ask parents to help their child with homework* – lower education of mother is connected with the parental perception of a greater school's right to ask parents for it, as well with the higher sense of duty to help their children, whilst the competency for helping with homework is connected with the higher education of mother
- *School's right to ask parents for a help with the sport, social and cultural activities* – higher education of mother is connected with a higher parental assessment of school's obligation/right to do it
- *School's right to ask parents to help with lessons in school* - higher education of mother is connected with a higher parental assessment of school's obligation/right to do it
- *Parental competency for doing any kind of volunteer activities* – higher education of mother is connected with a higher sense of competency, as well as with the higher sense of perceived child's benefit from this kind of parental co-operation
- *Opinion on school's financial management* – higher education of mother is connected with the more frequent consultations (seeking opinions from parents); higher education is connected with higher respect of the given opinion and higher parental sense of school's obligation to ask for it
- *Seeking opinions in all the others aspect of school decision making* such as: organization of school events, health and safety issues, overall school management, educational things, violence and discipline – higher education of mother is connected with the higher parental sense of school's obligation to ask for their opinion
- *Parental competency in all kinds of participation in decision-making* – higher education of mother is connected with the higher sense of competency, higher sense of duty to co-operate in such way and greater perceived benefit for the child.

The results indicate that mothers who are more educated are more willing to get involved in their children' education and feel more competent to do that. The results also indicate that their attitudes toward school (their high expectations and willingness to co-operate) could be predictors for children's higher school achievements, as confirmed by many previous studies.

There are some urban/rural distinctions in the following areas of a parental participation:

- *Wealth index* – parents in urban area show a significantly higher wealth index, which means they are able to provide better living and learning conditions for their child

- *Frequency of school's invitations to an individual parents meetings* - parents in rural area are less frequently invited to an individual meetings and their sense of school's obligation to invite parents to an individual meetings is lower compared to parents in urban area
- *Schools obligation for sending written feedback on child's progress* – parents in rural areas, to a lower extent than parents in urban areas, believe it is something that school should send families.
- *Parental perception on frequency of a different kind of written materials and school's obligation for sending them* - parents in rural areas state more written information on how to help their child learn, more school or class newsletter and more written information on health, drugs, violence in the last year than parents in urban areas, and yet show a greater belief than parents in urban area that school should send them information on things like health, violence, drugs etc.
- *Parental competency for reading any kind of written materials from school* - parents in rural area feel less competent to read any kind of written information compares to parents in urban area, and they do not find this kind of participation so useful as parents in urban area do.
- *School's right to ask parents to help their children with homework* - parents in rural area more than parents in urban area feel that it is the school's legitimate right to ask parents to help their children with homework, their sense of duty to help their children is greater and they think that this kind of participation is more helpful for their children.
- *School's right to ask parents to help with maintaining or improving school infrastructure* - parents in rural area feel, more than parents in urban area, that helping with maintaining or improving school infrastructure is something that school should ask families for.
- *Frequency of school's invite to help with sport, social and cultural activities* - parents in rural area state higher number of school's invitation to help with sport, social and cultural activities .
- *School's right to ask parents to help with lessons in school* - parents in urban area estimate, more than parents in rural area, that helping with lessons is something that school should ask parents for and they believe it is useful for their children more than parents in rural area.
- *Parental perception of school's obligation to ask parents for opinion by the various aspects of school issues* - regarding the participation in different kinds of school's decision making (parent's opinion on school financial management, their opinion on extra curricular activities, organization of school events, opinion on health and safety issues, opinion on overall school management and opinion on educational things) parents in urban area show

greater belief , then parents in rural area, that school should ask for their opinion on these issues.

- *Parental competency in all kinds of participation in decision-making* – parents in urban area feel more competent for participation in any kind of school’s decision-making, and they are more likely to see the child’s benefit from these form of participation.

Some results indicate that parents in rural areas tend to have more traditional orientation than parents in urban areas. For instance, they seem to be more willing to help with improving the school infrastructure, but their belief that they should participate in decision making is lower, perhaps because of their lower sense of competency.

Parents in rural areas show greater need for written information from school on various issues, although they feel less competent than parents from urban areas to use this information.

2. Principals

Comparison of principals' and parents' perception of parent participation in school activities

School principals and parents answered the same questions. For example, about giving opinion on decision-making, organization of school events, school trips etc:

Question for parents:

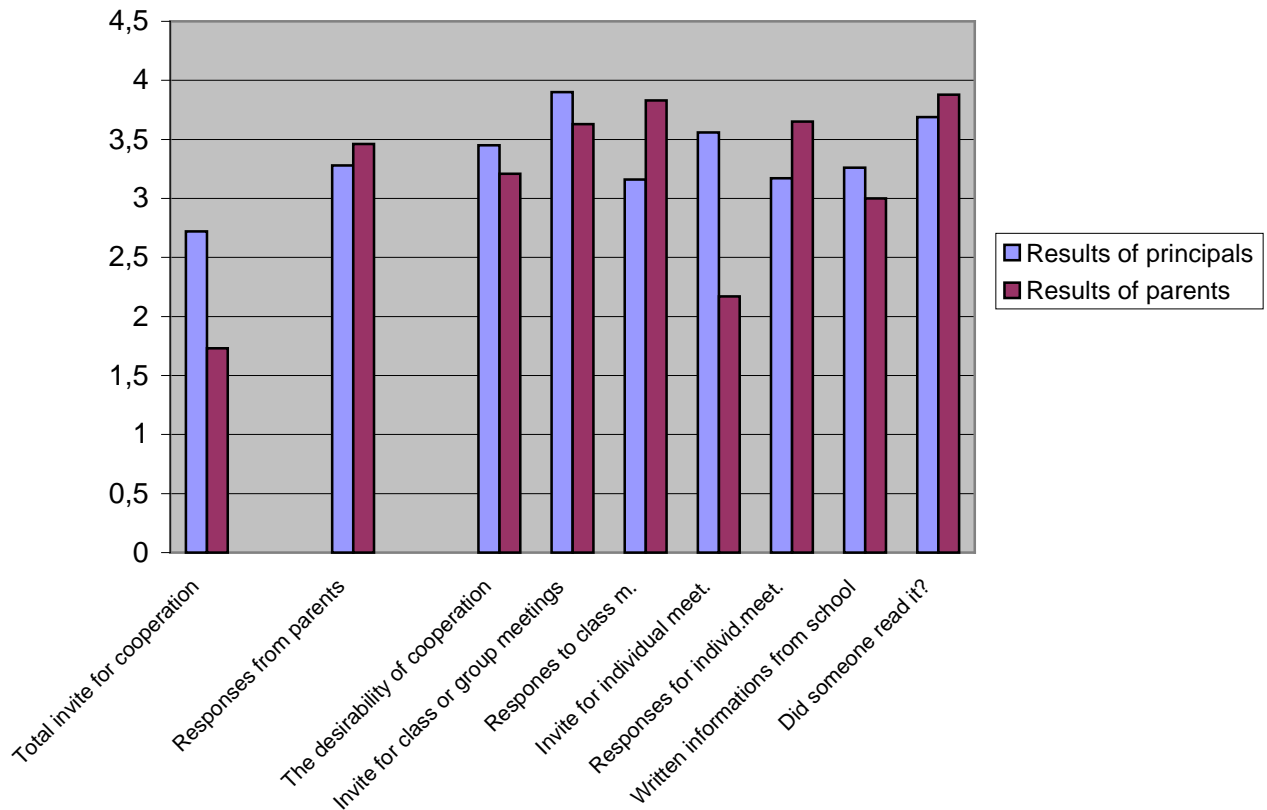
How often did the school ask your opinion on this last year (PERSONALLY OR AS A FAMILY)?

Question for principals:

How often was the average family asked their opinion on this during the school last year?

For the following graph presentation, we have used the answers for the questions about: overall (total) invitation from school for the cooperation with parents, parent's response to the invitation; parents' opinion on the desirability of cooperation, invitation to class or group parents' meetings, response to class or group parents' meetings, invitations to individual meetings, parents' response to the individual meetings, written information on child's progress from school, did someone in the family read it. Both parents and principals answered the questions using the scale 1 to 4 : 1 (no), 2 (probably not), 3 (yes, probably) 4 (yes). Or (depends on the question): 1(never), 2 (once), 3 (most times) 4 (every time).

Graph 1. Comparison of parental and principal means of composite variables of school invitations for cooperation and response of parents



Principals and parents differ in perception of school initiative for parent participation – principals estimate school initiative bigger, especially concerning invitation to individual meetings. On the other hand, parents' estimation about their own participation is bigger than principals'. They estimate their response for the cooperation higher than principals do.

Both groups agree that the most common cooperation is through class or group meetings.

When directly asked who is more responsible for the obstacles for better cooperation between parents and school both groups pointed it is the *parent factor* (Items: *Parents are not interested to participate in school activities. Parents do not have time to inform themselves about school activities.*)

3. Roma parents

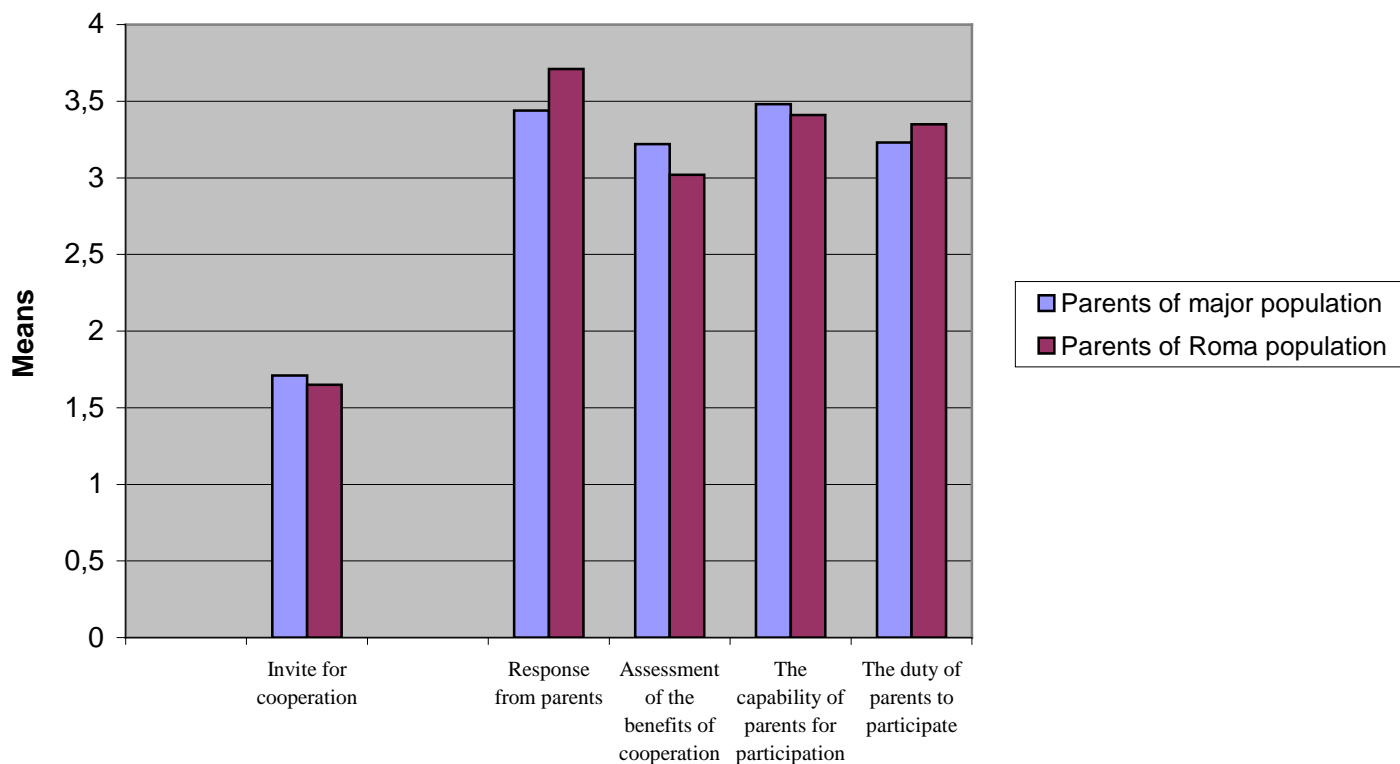
Of all Roma parents, 25% think that their children have more difficulties in school than other children, 69,6% think it is the same and 5,4 % thinks that their children have less difficulties than others.

Those who think their children have more difficulties mention the following reasons: child does not speak Croatian well, child has problems with achieving educational goals, child is anxious or hyperactive.

Those who think their children have less difficulties than others mention: adapted school-program, school helps Roma children more than others, child speaks Croatian very well.

We compared answers of Roma parents and parents of major population for the following categories: - quantity of the invitation for the cooperation from school, parents' response, benefit from the cooperation for the child, parents' ability for participation, parents' duty for participation.

Graph 2. Means of composite results for the parents of the majority population and the population of Roma parents



There is the difference between Roma parents and major population. Roma parents' perception is that they are rarely invited for cooperation than other parents, but, when invited, their response is

bigger. They also have higher estimation of parents' duty to participate. According to the data from focus group, some Roma parents would like to participate in the Council of Parents (but they do not because they have not been invited). Council of Parents consists of one representative from the class, so, the majority chooses their representative.

Parents of the mainstream population estimate the benefit from the cooperation for the child and parents' ability for the cooperation higher.

Roma parents are more satisfied than other (mainstream) parents with the information they receive from school and their reception in school (they come to school more often, when invited, than other parents). 93,3% of Roma parents agree that school does a lot to help Roma children. They mentioned the following ways of help: they get free or reduced price text-books, free meal in school, additional classes, especially for those who do not speak Croatian language well, financial aid for school-trips, teacher's support in education -teachers encourage Roma children to persist in schooling, protection in case of violence from other children. Some schools have Roma assistant to help Roma children to adapt and learn.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since parents generally accept initiative from school, than school should expend it: offer more various activities for parents, ask parents for greater participation in decision making, etc.

But, this could not happen if principals and teachers do not believe that this could be useful for children.

Ministry of Education, Science and Sport should organize **seminars for principals** in order to present the data from this survey. That should sensitize principals to change their ways of cooperation with parents and turn their co-operation into the more productive, more partnership oriented, following the main findings of the research (parents show their interest to be involved in various aspect of school's functioning because of the perceived benefit for their child school achievement).

Parents should receive more information about possibilities of participation. The schools should inform parents of the possible ways of volunteering, their rights and the possibilities of influencing in the process of school's decision-making. Some documents concerning parents' rights and possibilities in the cooperation with school should be changed - especially the one that refers to teaching assistance to teachers because current law does not permit parents to assist teachers in the class with teaching.

There is also a need to make **education for teachers**, to make them aware of importance of the partnership co-operation and parental involvement in the schooling of their children. It is important

to make teacher realize that parents are very keen to co-operate, by all the earlier mentioned aspects, and that they would like to receive more school's invitations for various kinds of co-operation. Teachers are supposed to accept parents' participation as benefit, not as a burden in their work.

In one of the focus groups there was an interesting proposal: each school should have a *room for parents* - possibility to join other parents, drink coffee with them, have a box for proposal, board with the information about the activities parents can join as well as with the information on other school activities.

Parents' Council members should regularly inform other parents about the main decisions.

Parents' Council should not be too numerous; it could be divided in two groups (lower and upper grades) so that each parent has opportunity to discuss.

Roma parents should be enabled to participate in Parents' Council, by the law if necessary. For instance, for the schools with minority population it could be regulated by the law that minority parents have to have their representative in the Parents' Council.

LITERATURE: <http://www.see-educoop.net/aeiq/>.

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