

# **Advancing Inclusion and Quality in South East Europe**

## **National survey of school directors in Moldova**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### **Introduction**

The assertion according to which any educational system remains helpless if it systematically confronts with lack of interest or parents' opposition has become axiomatic. In the report on the relationships between school and family in the European Community countries, (Macbeth, Al., 1984) there are four reasons for which school and family are trying to establish some connections between them: (i) parents are responsible, from the juridical point of view, for the education of their children; (ii) the school education is only a part of the child's overall education; a big part of education takes place outside the school; (iii) researches emphasize the influence of the parental attitude towards the results of their children at school, especially towards motivation for learning, as well as the fact that some behaviors of parents could be favored by the dialogue with the school; (iv) social groups involved in the school (especially parents and teachers) have the right to influence the school administration.

The obstacles related to the school-family relation could be of behavioral manner (meetings among parents, teachers and school administration) or of material manner (the school-family relation requires additional material effort and time). Difficulties could result from different opinions and ideas related to: (i) the state and family responsibility for children' education; (ii) the freedom of choice regarding the educational institution by parents or educational oneness. (iii) The impact of the familiar climate on the child's achievements; pedagogical output and parental duty; (iv) parents' participation to the school management and to the decision-making process within the school.

#### **Political and legislative context of the situation from Moldova**

Due to the fact that the quality of the school-family relation is fundamental for a good functioning of the educational system and for good achievements among pupils, the improvement of these relations must become a constant concern of the educational institution. The provisions of the article No. 60 of the Educational Law stipulate that parents' rights in relation to the school are:

(1) Parents or tutors have the right to:

- a) choose for their children the educational institution and the training language;
- b) request the children rights and liberties in the school;
- c) be informed regarding the educational process, contents and results of their children evaluation.

What relates to the right to parents meetings - this is possible by constituting a Parents' Committee of the class that proves to be very efficient by stimulating parents' involvement. At their turn, the presidents of the parents' committees also meet at the institutional level, in the representative Parents' Council, that also has several responsibilities, stipulated in the regulations of the pre-university institutions, being the following:

- d) to train the children within the family, ensuring those necessary studies for the children, according to a concrete educational level;
- e) to be chosen as representatives of some administrative and consultative bodies of the educational institution.

(2) Parents or tutors have the responsibility to:

- a) ensure the child's enrollment in a compulsory educational system (state or private) or to ensure the child's education within the family;
- b) ensure the child's education within the family and to create adequate conditions for studying, development, extra-curricular activities and self-training.

(3) Parents or tutors that do not contribute to the child's training and education are punishable, according to the legislation in force.

#### **Investigated key-subjects**

- Parents' involvement in the school activities. By involvement we mean, on the one hand, the level of activism that parents manifest in order to apply their rights and to honor obligations in what relates to building partnerships with the school. On the other hand, the opportunities created by the school and the support offered to parents for building a functional partnership.

- The attitude of the school directors towards the parents' role and place, as well as their involvement in school life.

The specialty literature and the researches in this domain emphasize the determinant factors that ensure quality of the school-family partnership and the conditions for establishing this relation. Among these are the following:

psychological, pedagogical and managerial preparation of the didactic staff and of the school directors; the level of openness among didactic employees; understanding of parents' role and place in the educational process; the time allocated for information regarding pupils and activities organized with parents. All these issues are causes of the partnership successes and failures. We will present the obtained data taking into account this perspective too.

### **General information, research methodology and educational institutions that represented the research sample**

This project involved representatives from 8 countries from the Eastern Europe. In order for these data to be comparable between the participant states, it was decided to apply the bi-stage sampling (urban-rural and distribution on regions). The institutions were selected not taking into consideration some concrete rule, but the number of those selected is proportional to the share of the sub-group sample. Thus, 12 regions of the country were selected. The grouping of regions in zones was based on the number of the population in schools from these regions, as well as on the geographical zones, than the data regarding the school distribution in zones was collected and was weighted in percents as a percent of the total number of schools. In this way, we have obtained the total number of questionnaires, necessary to be applied on zones and on the placement climate. Then, the schools necessary to be interviewed were selected. It is necessary to mention the fact that the research had as a target the gymnasium-type schools and due to this fact, the rural environment prevails in comparison to the urban one. This situation is characteristic, in some cases, to gymnasiums, but not to all the educational institutions as a whole. The questionnaire was used as an instrument of collecting data, and the direct interview method was used.

The presented data are obtained as a result of carrying out a quantitative research on a sample of 296 directors of pre-university general culture 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: 82,8% small schools, including rural ones, in which there are up to 225 pupils, which means there are only one set of classes (ex.: one 9<sup>th</sup> form, one 8<sup>th</sup> form etc.); 16,2% of schools are of medium size, having between 226 and 450 pupils (in this type of schools, there can be 2 parallel classes at each level).

The share of small institutions (of up to 225 pupils) in the pre-university education from Moldova does not exceed 66%. Small schools have some peculiarities related to the families' specifics, level of didactic staff' preparation, ratio between titular full teachers and substitute teachers etc. – all these having an impact on the school-family relations.

#### **School Directors**

73% of managers from the interviewed institutions are women and 27% - men. 32,1% of directors have an experience between 13 and 25 years in educational management, 30,7% of them have an experience between 3 and 5 years, 28,4% - between 5 and 13 years and 8,8% - an experience of more than 25 years. The average managerial experience among directors constitutes 12 years.

What relates to the length of service, in general, 65,9% of interviewed managers work in the educational system more than 25 years, 31,8% - between 13 and 25 years and only 2,4% activate for less than 13 years in this domain, the average length of service in the educational domain constitutes 29 years.

#### **Teachers**

The professionalism and the level of teachers' involvement in the educational process are determinant factors of quality regarding the school-family relation. From this perspective, the sample has the following characteristics: in 119 schools (40,2% of all) the number of titular full teachers is less than 10, what means that more than 40% of all the didactic courses are facilitated by teachers having a number of hours than exceeds the norm, meaning that these 40 % of courses are facilitated by substitute teachers. Due to this fact, the time necessary for getting to know better children, to discuss with parents, to organize different activities etc. is limited.

#### **Parents**

The families that have their children studying in the interviewed schools have the following characteristics: 62,5% of directors mentioned the fact that over 25% of pupils come from families having 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 directors mentioned that over 25% of pupils come from families with only one parent and 8,7% of managers affirmed that over 25% of pupils come from families in which both parents are working abroad .

The most optimistic conclusion of the general picture created according to the information provided above is that more than 50% of schools are confronting with difficulties in establishing relations with over 25% of families.

### **School actions for increasing the level of participation among parents**

#### **Communication between school and parents**

The education of children is a common purpose of the school and of the family that could be efficiently accomplished only by ensuring a strong partnership and by dividing competences, responsibilities and functions among the parties involved, by commonly investing time resources, by sharing information, by making a common effort and by solving the problematic situations etc. Communication between school and family is one of the most important instruments of establishing and maintaining partnership relations between schools and families.

Schools apply different forms of communication with parents, the most “popular” (practiced in many educational institutions) being meetings with parents, most of them being home visits by teachers and by auxiliary didactic staff (64,9% - once in a month, 26,5% - once in a semester). At least once in a semester, in approximately 95% of the researched educational institutions, meetings between parents and the school administration are organized, with class masters and teachers. The representatives of the rural educational institutions are less satisfied with these meetings than those from the urban areas.

During the meetings organized in most of the institutions, about 50%-75% of the total number of parents is present. 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 stable incomes, and parents do not manage to schedule their time, we can consider this index as being a very good one.

This figure shows parents’ openness for dialogue with the school.

The categories of parents with whom is the most difficult to communicate are those parents that are predisposed to violence, alcohol and drug addicts (59,0%), parents that are working abroad or who live in other regions (48,6%); parents that ignore the education of their children (38,8%) and also the socio-vulnerable families (36,4%)

In order to assure communication with all the parents in 81,4% of schools was elaborated a strategy that is focused mostly on organizing meetings with parents, on maintaining teacher-parent relation, on involving parents in public activities etc. Only in 39% of answers there was mentioned that strategies are based on some training activities for parents.

The data presented above proves the school endeavor to inform parents about the school problems and of pupils’ achievements. Thus, we may conclude that there exists some effort made in schools for dialoguing with parents and not just for informing them. However, the flow of information is, in most of the cases, unidirectional, with little effort and openness that comes 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 employees. Class masters, teachers and the school administration are those who decide whether to apply or not the most efficient instruments in this matter.

The main activities that stimulated parents’ involvement, from the managers’ points of view, are considered to be, according to the synthetic indicator, the following: (i) extra-curricular activities and different trips, (ii) activities related to improving conditions in schools, endowment with equipment etc. and also (iii) meetings with parents. The development of relations between pupils and teachers, between parents and teachers, the educational plan, the debates or seminars, including creation of councils of parents, are not considered by the directors as being the most important school activities that could facilitate parents’ involvement in the school life.

In order to encourage an active participation of parents, there were made some concrete actions: in 65,7% of cases – discussions and negotiations, in 26,7% - direct discussions are facilitated between parents and the school administration, in 25,7% - parents are being involved in different projects, in 21,4% - parents are encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities, in 21% - to constitute councils of parents, in 20% - concrete financial help is requested etc.

Although not all the aspects and possibilities to involve parents are used by the school, 82.8% of directors describe concrete situations in which successful partnerships between parents and educational institutions were created. The most frequently, parents were involved in capital repairs activities within the school – 42.1%, from which in 8.2% of schools this was done during the implementation of some projects by the Social Investment Fund from Moldova.

### **Support offered by school to parents**

The necessity and importance of the support that the school can offer to parents with the purpose of facilitating active parents’ participation in education of children is indisputable. In our research, the school managers have evaluated the utility of 6 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. Thus, we conclude that more attention and support is offered to mono-parental families and to divorced parents. Also, families in which violence exists, or those that ignore education of their children, or families that are members of the parents' councils have some priorities in this matter.

## **The attitude of directors towards parents' involvement in the school life**

### **Parental influence**

The way that directors see parents' influence on the educational process and on the school, in general, determine parents' role and place in the educational institution and vice versa. The direction, intensity and quality of the parental influence on the school determine and are determined by the school directors' perception regarding the school-family relation and by the importance that they give to parents in children education.

The advantages for the school as a result of involving parents in the school life are highly appreciated by directors. 87.1% of those interviewed consider that parents' activism contribute "to a large extent" and "to some extent" to improving their behavior and attitude towards the school. 86.1% of them believe that parents involvement determine an improvement in the school climate. 86 % of managers think that this determines an increase in the support offered by parents to the school. 82.1% of them mentioned that the pupils' performances and achievements are increasing due to this fact. We consider that such a perception of things stimulates parents' involvement, creates new opportunities and multiple supports for parent's initiatives, and respectively ensures some good further results.

In order to create a favorable environment for learning and for improving pupils' performances, school managers consider the following activities as being very useful:

- Informing parents about the way to create and ensure an adequate home climate – 88,3%;
- Parents' counseling - 87,1%;
- Organizing some training sessions for helping parents to assist their children with homework – 79,5%;
- Creating some support-groups for parents of children with problems (violent etc.) – 74,7%.

We can thus conclude that school managers consider it necessary for the school to offer the essential support to parents and they accept different forms and activities for this purpose.

### **Barriers in providing support for parents**

Barriers that limit to a great extent the ability of the institution to offer parents the necessary support on time, in managers' point of view, relate to the following: 68% of directors believe that that parents are too busy to get involved in parental counseling services, 63 % of them mentioned the lack of parents' interest towards these services and 60% - lack of resources in the educational institution for developing and maintaining these services (affect „to some extent” and „to a large extent” the situation). We concluded that 2 of three main barriers are external ones (outside the institution). Thus, in directors' opinion, the main barriers are not related to the lack of time among teachers for developing such kind of services, the lack of the necessary skills for providing parental counseling, the lack of a methodology for developing parental counseling services and also not the conflict between teachers and parents – all these issues being considered as having a "small" and "very small" impact.

### **Barriers in the communication process between school and parents**

The school directors consider that the biggest obstacles and problems in efficient communication between school and parents come from parents and not from teachers. Lack of time for getting informed about all the school issues is considered by 65.2% of managers as being the biggest barrier in establishing an efficient communication between school and family. 35.4% of directors think that teachers' workload is an important barrier. The lack of parents' interest in communicating with the school follows - 63.3%, and only 11.1% of respondents believe that the lack of teachers' interest to communicate with the school is also a big barrier.

Generalizing the results of this analysis, we can conclude the fact that directors are tempted to present the school as an institution that wants and does its best to efficiently communicate with parents. Most of the obstacles and barriers, in their opinion, come from outside the school and they do not want and do not make the necessary efforts to make the school-family communication more efficient.

### **Parents' involvement in the school administration**

Most of the school managers agree on the great importance of the impact that comes from parents' involvement in the process of school governance, especially what relates to improving the educational quality. We conclude that only in 28 schools (of 296), directors minimize parents' role in education of their children and violate their rights, stipulated in the regulations of the pre-university institutions, not even having any parents involved in the Administration Council of the school. In urban areas there are more institutions not having any representatives from parents in the school Administration Council, in comparison to the rural ones.

The committees of parents in the researched schools have the right, **without restrictions**, to participate to the meetings in which important decisions are made - 70.1%, to reject some rules – 59.6%, to be actively involved in elaborating some new strategies/policies – 54.8%. It is **excluded** and **under no way** parents can have the right to initiate any project for modifying some existent policies in 13,1% of institutions, to reject the adoption of some rules if they do not agree – 13.1%, to initiate adoption of some new policies – 19.3% of schools.

It is obvious that directors accept parents' participation to the decision-making process but less what relates to initiation or adoption of some changes. Managers diminish parents' role in the decision-making process related to development strategies and policies of the institution. This phenomenon could be caused by managers' belief that parents do not have the necessary competences and skills to make correct decisions or by the belief that only managers have those necessary abilities to elaborate internal policies and regulations.

Parents are seen by directors as some "really important" and „very important" actors in improving the educational quality by making some decisions at the class level – 87,5%, by making some decisions at the school level – 82,5%, by planning school activities – 69,6%. Most of the directors diminish the importance of parents' involvement in the process of hiring and firing of teachers, in selecting manuals and necessary materials for the courses. Developing and modernizing policies and school regulations are considered by almost half of directors as being the responsibility of only the pedagogic staff, without parents' involvement and the other half of managers believes that parents should be involved in this aspect too.

77,4% of managers have mentioned some important initiatives made by the Committees of Parents during this year. In 43,9% of cases, the initiatives were related to the institution's endowment. Parents are concerned, as a rule, of creating the necessary conditions and of assuring the well-functioning of the educational process – the material basis of the class and of the school. Maybe parents do not know other ways to participate, as separate partners, in the educational process and in other school activities, or maybe they are not allowed to be directly involved, beside at the existent level or directors do not see or understand other initiatives that are coming from parents.

Only a half of managers consider parents' involvement in the process of school governance as very important, and not only formally, in the decision-making process. Thus, we can conclude that directors appreciate the school-family partnership as being important in ensuring educational quality, but the partitioning of roles and responsibilities among partners, in directors' view, cannot be equal in all the domains.

## **SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR MOLDOVA**

### **Estimating the impact of the scholar reforms and the collaboration of the school managers with the local public administration**

The efficient and qualitative application of the scholar reforms in every educational institution will ensure a successful activity of the educational system as a whole and the realization of all the initiatives at the level of educational policy. Among the determinant factors of success in the „top – down" Reforms are the following: (i) relations that are being established between the institution that drafts/plans the changes and the institution that implements them; (ii) also the existence of some conditions, necessary and sufficient resources for implementation. The data of this research show that 56,1% of school directors are satisfied by the reform process, 45,6% - are satisfied "to some extent" and "to a large extent" by the cooperation with the Ministry of Education and by the support that comes from it. Only 30 institution managers (of 296) are satisfied "to a large extent" by the classrooms, buildings and equipment. This is due to the fact that the educational institutions from the Republic of Moldova are insufficiently endowed with the necessary equipment, necessary and vital for the well-functioning of a normal teaching-learning process. According to some estimations made at the beginning of the academic year 2007-2008, half of the school furniture and equipment did not correspond to the hygienic and sanitary norms.

The educational institutions from Moldova are passing through a really difficult period what relates to the financial matter. Most of the schools from the Republic dispose of much fewer resources that they require for development, salaries and maintenance (heating, services, food and training). For example, in 2005, only 59% of the budget school necessities were covered by some transfers from the state budget. The existent deficit is usually covered by contributions that come from parents, local authorities, businesses, occasional efforts and foreign donors.

The results of the survey related to the school budget for the academic year 2007-2008 gives us a clear picture of the above mentioned facts. Thus, 8,2% of directors consider that the budget was good and enough to pay all the current invoices and it even permitted to make some important investments. For 49,7% of managers, the budget was sufficient, the invoices were paid, and some small investments were made. At the same time, for a considerable number of schools, the budget was insufficient, they hardly managed to pay their invoices (35,6%). Approximately 6,5% of directors mentioned the fact that they did not pay even the current services. These issues speak about a visible budget deficit and about an insufficient administration of resources.

The relations between schools with the Townhouses and with the Local Public Administration were appreciated as being very promising: 28% of directors have succeeded to establish „very good" relations, and 59,5% of them - "rather good" relations. This situation could be explained by the fact that the circumstances and the

necessary resources for a healthy development of the educational process are ensured, as a rule, in most of the schools from the Local Public Administration budget. Only for 12 % of institutions this collaboration is not successful at all, and this could be explained by the existent socio-economic context.

Based to the research we can emphasize the most stringent problems that exist regarding parents' participation in the school life. The solvency of these problems has to be made with common efforts of all the educational actors, including with the support of the school managers:

- The existence of multiple barriers for an efficient functioning of educational school-family partnership, including those caused by some cultural and socio-economic circumstances, characteristic to this long period of transition;
- Lack of clearness in partitioning roles and responsibilities between partners: school-family-pupil;
- Insufficient transparency in the decision-making process and in information about the partners' activities, as well as the lack of trust between them;
- Insufficient preparation of the institution's administration, of teachers and parents, in order to build some sound partnerships for achieving common goals;
- Lack of some cultural traditions related to the school-family collaboration and to ways of maintaining and stimulating it etc.

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