

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

National survey of school directors in Montenegro

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 143 schools out of 145 that were part of the research, had parents' representatives in Schools' Boards. Taking into consideration this fundamental aspect of parents' participation, this basic information is fairly favourable.
- The principals themselves are **very satisfied with the key aspects of parents' participation in the School Boards' work**. In this respect, the principals undoubtedly state greater satisfaction with parents' attendance of the meetings of Schools' Boards, rather than with their contributions to the work of Schools' Boards.
- In the most schools (almost 70%), **the communication between school- parents is active during the whole length of one semester**. Comparatively, the most used means of this communication is realised through: *schools sending written evaluations of pupils' success to parents*, as well as through *meetings that principals organise with parents*.
- The research's results indicate that **the principals are mostly satisfied with the communication between teaching staff and parents**. More than half of the 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 the communication between teachers and parents is slightly lower, but, nevertheless, very favourable. In this respect, even more than 58% of principals show satisfaction 'to some extent' with almost 36% of them stating satisfaction 'to the large extent'.

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- **Half of the principals estimate that over half (but less than 2/3) of parents regularly attend the meetings with form teachers**, with more than 20% that, in more than 2/3 of cases, attend these meetings. **Taking into consideration meetings with teachers, again, almost half of the principals estimate that between half and 2/3 of parents regularly attend these meetings**, with almost 1/3 of principals that assess 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 meetings with principals**, with almost 25% of principals assessing parents' attendance to less than 50%.
- The most common topics discussed at the meetings with parents can be sorted as follows according to the hierarchy and importance:
  1. grades and overall success of pupils
  2. discipline and behaviour of pupils
  3. schools' curriculum
  4. school's equipment and working conditions
  5. excursions and extra - curricular activities
- Out of 145 inquired schools, 137 of them (94.5%) **do not have the policy/strategy on how to communicate with parents.**
- When estimating factors that negatively influence on communication with parents, **the principals state that the greatest barrier in communication is parents themselves.** According to the principals' opinions, and among all of the barriers that were mentioned in the research, the key ones are: **lack of parents' interest, parents' limited time and lack of parents' communication skills.** Accordingly, the message that the principals send is that in order to improve communication between parents and school, the work with parents themselves must be done.

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- When identifying the categories of **parents that are most difficult to communicate with**, the principals highlight the following groups (in hierarchical order):
  1. those that with lower levels of education
  2. those lacking interest and responsibility
  3. those whose children have got behavioral problems
  4. those whose children have got problems with studying
- Related to the activities that are aimed at improvement of parents' participation in school's life, the most often is request to parents to participate in *organizing social activities at school/classroom level*, as well as *participate in organizing school/classroom ceremonies*. Therefore, **the incentive from schools related to parents is mostly aimed at their engagement in extra-curricular activities**.
- Considering *school activities that most successfully engage parents*, the principals identify three following key activities in hierarchal order:
  1. events, celebrations and extra-curricular activities
  2. maintenance of school and school's yard
  3. organization of excursion and pupils' free time
- 121 schools (83.4%), out of 145, recall the instances when successful school parent communication has been achieved. The most principals (51 of them) state that **successful cooperation is achieved when parents help in school's renovation** and this is the highest frequency in this respect. There are two more examples of successful cooperation that are emphasised related to: organization of events, celebrations and extra-curricular activities in general (22 principals), as well as offering financial (in-kind) contribution to school (21 principals). Additionally, it is worth mentioning that 11 principals emphasise organization of educational workshops as examples of successful cooperation.

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- Analytically, all the findings are showing that parents are engaged in extra-curricular activities in different areas. The key question in this respect is **whether parents are engaged in extra-curricular activities because it is their preference or the principals and teachers support these means of their engagement?** According to the research conducted through group interviews with principals<sup>1</sup>, we can think that, in fact, the problem is not related to parents, but rather to the principals and teaching staff, i.e. that the school as an institution is approving and supporting only these means of engagement, whilst being inhibitory and acting without support and encouragement towards the means of parents' participation that are directed both, at the teaching and decision making process.
- When exploring which types of activities would contribute to improvement of pupils' learning in school, according to the principals' opinions, **all the activities that are listed in the questionnaire, would 'to some extent' be useful for the improvement.** Comparatively, there are two activities that are stressed amongst all the others and that could, again according to the principals' opinions, have more significant effect than the others. These two are: *providing parents with information on creating a home learning environment* and *organizing sessions to help parents assist their children with homework.*
- After identifying the principals' attitudes related to whether and to which extent the offered activities would help parents in the process of their children's education, the next question was to establish **the extent to which the schools were actually practicing and realising those activities in order to influence on increased parents' participation related to their childrens' learning process.** The results of the research are indicating that there are certain similarities as well as differences in the perception of significance of those activities and of schools' practice related to the process of realisation of those activities. The key activities of this sort are listed as follows according to frequency of answers: help in

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

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creating a home learning environment, organising parent issue-based support groups, organizing sessions to help parents assist their children with homework.

- When analysing the **barriers that limit the ability of school as an institution to offer parenting services**, the results of the research indicate that there are three key factors representing such barriers, these being: *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 the principals' opinions, the responsibility for the low parents' participation related to the important aspects is on parents themselves**.
- The principals have got very different attitudes related to parents' involvement in various aspects of decision making processes. More accurately, the principals are very willing to involve parents in certain aspects of decision making process whilst being very unwilling to involve them when some other aspects are in question. Concretely, **the parents are welcome to participate when some decisions of general character are made, as well as decisions related to extra-curricular activities, but the principals are reserved towards parents' participation related to: some expert aspects of teaching and the school, human resources policy and distribution of financial means**.
- While exploring answers to the question **if parents 'have got the right' to participate in certain activities related to the decision making process on a school's level**, the results are clearly showing that, **in most of the 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 a school's level.

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- When measuring the ‘influence’ of Parents Council as the most important body related to parents’ decision making, **generally, 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 estimation on how important it was for parents to participate in different aspects of school’s practice and their actual participation in these aspects. The results related to their participation are showing the principals’ belief that parents are mostly influential in fields of *decisions taken at classroom level*. Then, the extent of their influence is lessen in areas of *decisions taken at school level and evaluation of teachers’ performance*. Factually, the parents’ influence in the practice is even lesser when considering *social activity planning* and even lesser regarding *development or up-dating of school policies and regulations*. Interestingly, **the parents’ influence in practical school life is more visible in the areas in which the schools’ principals consider it important and vise versa.** Still, it is important to consider that altogether, according to the principals’ attitudes, we can say that **the extent of parents’ influence in practical school life, as one of the the aspect of participation, is entirely unsatisfactory.**
- Identifying the most significant initiatives by the Parents’ Council in the current school year, 78 schools, out of 145, identified the initiatives related to schools’ renovation and repair work in school and school’s yard. All the other initiatives are significantly less present. Nevertheless, it can be noticed that the **majority of initiatives suggested by the Parents’ Council are focused on the aspects that are related neither to the teaching process, nor to the rules and regulations relevant for school’s functioning.**

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- Finally, when exploring **the aspects in which, according to the principals' opinions, parents can be 'mostly useful' for the school's work, the results are undoubtedly indicating that the parents can be useful 'to a great extent' in all of the aspects** that were envisaged by the research. Comparatively, though with minor differences, the parents can be mostly useful both for improved pupil educational performance and overall improved school climate.
- Through identifying **specific categories of parents that, from various aspects, tend to get less involved on different levels**, the principals identified the following groups (in hierarchical order):
  1. very busy
  2. uneducated
  3. lacking interest (think that education is less important)
- Analysing either lesser or greater **degree of principals' satisfaction with different aspects related to their overall school governing**, the results of the research are showing that **their 'satisfaction' is greater than their 'dissatisfaction'**. The principals are the most satisfied with the cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science and afterwards with the support they receive from the Ministry. This finding could be based on the fact that 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 got political connotation.
- Finally, **more than every second principal is satisfied with the educational reform and the impact that the reform has had on their school**. Accordingly, this individual indicator is showing that the principals have positively accepted the primary education reform. Still, it should be noted that every tenth principal is not at all satisfied with the educational reform and this can be an indicator that for 1/10 of the principals the new concept is entirely unacceptable. **Structurally, the principals generally express major satisfaction with the institutional,**

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**programmatic and reform cooperation with the authorities and moderate satisfaction with material resources allocated to the schools.**

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