

Potential structural indicators for a systemic approach to parental involvement for early school leaving prevention

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Key starting points as framework for analysis

Not 1 size fits all solutions but there can be better models than others for key aspects

Parental engagement for ESL prevention involves a range of strategic approaches and models rather than a single intervention approach

Need to recognise it is a system level problem with different dimensions of a system requiring change and support for solutions – *beyond individual projects to an integrated system strategy at municipality level*

Need to focus on direct delivery and to minimise ‘committee sitting’

Need to minimise fragmentation across diverse services ‘passing on bits of the child’ and family (Edwards & Downes 2013)

Need more coherence of multidisciplinary team based approaches (Downes 2011), multifaceted problems require diversity of skill-sets and approaches

Representation of target group (youth, parents, ethnic minority groups) in decision making



Stakeholder representation and participation are key in devising solutions, strategies, identifying problems/unmet needs – this centrally requires engagement of the ‘target groups; with solutions, strategies, representation, participation so they are not simply ‘objects’ of policy

Feedback from parents built into all interventions with them to analyse what is and is not good practice

Child-centred parental involvement



Prevention and early intervention focus (Heckmann 2006) – early intervention means both in early years of children’s lives and at early stage of a problem developing

Beyond ad hoc, ‘little bits here and there’ interventions to sustained supports of varying intensity depending on need, to recognise that need will vary at different points in time – sustained interventions of sufficient intensity

Sufficient intensity of focus on specific age cohorts of children to bring system change

Use of services to maximise efficiency and avoid duplication

Recognise sharing of good practice involves analysis of gaps

Not 1 early school leaving problem – a behaviour with a vast range of underlying motivations and factors

Strategic Gaps

The VaSkooli project in the Turku and Salo regions of South-West Finland acknowledges the 'difficulties in reaching the youngsters and their families, who do not participate in any of the special services provided by the sub-projects' (Ahola & Kivela 2007, p.254).

Burkhart's (2004) review and consultation process for the EMCDDA also observed that for Germany, compared to school intervention programmes, the family as a place for preventive measures is neglected.

In 12 Irish schools, staff reported that they would like more supports in priority areas including psychological support, and in establishing links with students' homes and the local community (Smyth et al., 2004).



Clarity on which levels the service is targeting

Three widely recognized prevention approaches in public health. These are:

Universal, selected and indicated prevention (Burkhart 2004; Reinke et al., 2009).

- Universal prevention applies to school, classroom and community-wide systems for all students and their families.
- Selective prevention targets specialized group systems for students at risk of early school leaving and their families.
- Indicated prevention engages in specialized, individualized systems for students with high risk of early school leaving and their families.

Combining *universal* (all or at least all of those in areas designated as at risk of ESL), *selected* (some groups of families or young people) and *indicated* (intensive work with individual children and/or families) prevention approaches – ALL 3 levels need to be focused on in a city strategy

Beyond outcome indicators to structural indicators:

Outcome indicators; reduced rates of ESL, increased school attendance

Structural indicators are enduring features of a system that are nevertheless malleable

Structural indicators are key conditions/enablers for system success

This goes beyond traditional qualitative/quantitative distinction

Goal of indicators is firstly, for comparison of the cities' own with itself, and secondly, to compare with other cities



What are structural indicators for systems of prevention ?

Structural Indicators

In the words of the UN Special Rapporteur on the international right to the progressive realisation of health (2006):

‘ 54. *Structural indicators* address whether or not key structures and mechanisms...are in place. They are often (but not always) framed as a question generating a yes/no answer. For example, they may address: the ratification of international treaties... the adoption of national laws and policies...or the existence of basic institutional mechanisms...’

Generally structural indicators are framed as yes/no answers. This will facilitate questioning regarding gaps in services and supports in relation to access to ensure that a solution-focused approach occurs for the analysis rather than simply a narrowly descriptive account.

Structural indicators

Structural indicators (SI); yes and no-questions, something that can be changed (laws, spaces, roles and responsibilities, key guiding principles, potentially malleable dimensions to a school and/or community system)

SIs can operate flexibly at different levels of a system and at different levels of concreteness and abstraction (i.e., physical spaces and designated jobs, guiding principles for action/strategy) – **Structural indicators as physical structures, roles as structures in an organisation or as enduring key principles structurally underpinning the intervention**

Process indicators: quantity, degree

These indicators are separate from a rights-based framework

Examples of **structural indicators** could include:

Physical space in school for parents to meet, specific staff employed for outreach for parents, alternative strategies to suspension/expulsion, curriculum aspects, institutional admission criteria for entry etc. Another important dimension of structural indicators is legislation in an area, for example, offering a statutory right to post-primary education.

For a city to assert the presence of any given structural indicator, evidence may be needed. The detail of such evidence may depend on the kind of specific structural indicator and may require different levels of detail for different structural indicators. The level of detail may also depend on the form of the reporting process.



Process Indicators

In the words of the UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (2006), '*Process indicators* measure programme, activities and interventions. They measure, as it were, State effort', whereas 'outcome indicators will often be used in conjunction with benchmarks or targets to measure change over time'.

This offers a focus on change over time dimensions and is a focus on degree/intensity of effort/participation.

Process indicators address two limitations of outcome indicators. That is, process indicators provide a better picture of the quality of services and better information for programme improvement (Stecher 2005).

Process Indicators

The value of process indicators for research is that they are a measure of the services the education system is actually providing and information about system performance is critical for effective educational evaluation and reform. Those charged with setting education policy as well as those responsible for overseeing educational programmes cannot be effective without on-going, valid information about the health of the system they govern (Stecher 2005).

These indicators have a collective, as well as individual, dimension. Collective lifelong learning processes and outcomes embrace collective contexts varying from local community associations, and trade unions to professional and sectorial associations, as well as enterprises.

Outcome Indicators

Outcome indicators measure the broader results achieved through the provision of goods and services. Outcome indicators will often be used in conjunction with benchmarks or targets to measure change over time (Downes et al., 2008).

Area rates of early school leaving is an outcome indicator

There are a number of limitations to outcome indicators. Outcome-based indicators provide little or no guidance for improvement (Stecher 2005). They do not explain why phenomena occur nor how they could be changed, nor obstacles to their change.

The causal factors underpinning a commitment to outcomes require a scrutiny beyond a simplistic one to one relation between a given intervention and a particular outcome.



***Core structural indicators** - shared by all cities in the network

***Specific/thematic structural indicators** - local needs, peer/critical friends, strengths/weaknesses with a minimum of 2 cities though ideally a cluster

*** Holistic structural indicators** – all relevant ones that cities recognise are important and will address in the future if successful case for additional funding is made. These allow for recognition of gaps in current services for parental engagement and ESL prevention

National Policy directions and relation to municipalities

OECD ten steps to equity in education (Field, Kuczera & Pont 2007). These are:

- Step 6: Strengthen the links between school and home to help disadvantaged parents help their children to learn
- Step 9: Direct resources to students and regions with the greatest needs.



Building on strengths

There is a need for a family outreach and family support approach to be one focusing on building on strengths of the family rather than concentrating on their deficits (McKeown et al 2001). Models of comprehensive partnerships are characterized by family and community empowerment through decision making and addressing culturally relevant priorities for change (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 2000; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007). An emphasis on mutual respect and accountability contributes to sustained supports for families, schools, and communities to promote children's well-being across systems (Power, DuPaul, Shapiro & Kazak, 2003; Sugai & Horner, 2002).

Some Key Themes for Consideration as a) Common, b) Local Cluster or c) Holistic Structural Indicator Levels (by no means the only ones):



Early intervention for language development – Parents’ reading classes for children, storytelling, musical beginnings (CDI and Familiscope, Dublin)

familiscope

Early intervention for attachment bonding processes – Family supports for bonding, feeding, relational parenting styles, sensory stimulation of children

Some Key Themes for Consideration as a) Common, b) Local Cluster or c) Holistic Structural Indicator Levels (by no means the only ones):

Bridge-Building A: Outreach supports to parents' homes for their children's school attendance as empowerment supports rather than social control (Familiscope gains in Downes 2011)

Bridge-Building B: Education outreach supports for parents in community lifelong learning centres (Downes 2011a), other community sites (Parent cafes, shops, churches, mosques, pubs)

Bridge-Building C: Parent peer support approaches – for young children's language development, for mutual advice for their adolescents

Bridge-Building D: Recognise social dimension to parents' motivation to be involved – to meet new people etc. – a feature increasingly recognised in adults' motivation to attend lifelong learning classes (Sp3 of LLL2010 project, European Commission)

Building on strengths of communities – festivals approach



Physical spaces and times school is available for parents – parents rooms, parents not forced to wait outside school gate in the mornings



Some Key Themes for Consideration as a) Common, b) Local Cluster or c) Holistic Structural Indicator Levels (by no means the only ones):

Preventing pupil hunger in school (frequently underestimated) through parent support: cooking classes, availability of food, school kitchens

Preventing pupil/students loss of sleep affecting concentration, behaviour, motivation, academic performance etc. through parent support to address adequate structured sleep – 9 hours a night recommended by international research

Preventing bullying in school leading to ESL – parental involvement to provide supports/feedback for both bullies and victims, as part of a wider bullying prevention strategy



Family intervention dimension needed for bullying prevention success – a risk factor for ESL

Swearer et al (2010) conclude from their international review that: 'The research that has been conducted on bullying prevention and intervention suggests that anti-bullying initiatives should include individual, peer, family, school, and community efforts' (p.43). Swearer et al (2010) further conclude 'the research suggests that the majority of school-based bullying prevention programs have had little impact on reducing bullying behavior. Bullying will be reduced and/or stopped when prevention and intervention programs target the complexity of individual, peer, school, family, and community contexts in which bullying unfolds' (p.43).



Alternatives to suspension/expulsion

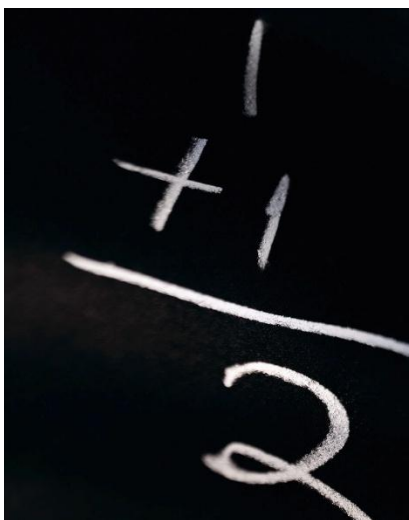
Evidence from Lithuania and Ireland in particular highlights the serious scale of the problem of suspension and expulsion from secondary schools. Taljunaite et al.,(2010) provide the following example:

According to [secondary school] management and the teacher interviewed approximately 10 percent of students are expelled from school in each year. The reasons are usually:

- behaviour problems
- bullying
- harassment
- aggressiveness

The teacher mentioned that there were no expelled students for not attending classes - i.e. non-academic reasons prevail.

The statistics, according to the management can be collected, but this will not solve the problem. This figure seems to be in addition to their estimates of those who 'drop out' from school which also reaches approximately 10% in Lithuania (Downes 2011). The Irish post-primary figure of 5% for suspension, applied to the total population of 332,407 students equates to well over 16,000 students suspended from post-primary schools in 2005/6 (ERC/NEWB 2010).



Some Key Themes for Consideration as a) Common, b) Local Cluster or c) Holistic Structural Indicator Levels (by no means the only ones):

Schools developing an alternatives to suspension/expulsion strategy in conjunction with
a) parents and b) multidisciplinary teams

Mental health supports for some families – this impacts upon ESL (EU Commission and Council documents on ESL prevention 2011 directly recognise the role of social and emotional distress in ESL

Need integrated health and education strategy and system of supports for families for ESL prevention – not just an education issue !

Multidisciplinary teams

Beyond ‘pastoral supports’ which are too limited to intervene for complex emotional situations that require therapeutic supports: Distinguish mental health promotion, stress prevention and therapeutic supports – teachers have a role with the first two but not the third one

Need for specific focus on intergenerational drug and alcohol abuse in families, which leave their children especially vulnerable to risks including ESL – chronic need requires intensive indicated prevention focus

Some Key Themes for Consideration as a) Common, b) Local Cluster or c) Holistic Structural Indicator Levels (by no means the only ones):

Cultural competence of teachers/schools to connect with vulnerable people (parents, children from ethnic minorities) – Staff professional development and pre-service education on diversity training and to reform authoritarian teaching approaches

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Cultural competence and staff from stakeholder groups

Lieberman et al (2011) note that, 'The shortage of infant mental health providers from minority groups has a particularly negative impact on immigrant and minority children and families, who need interventions that are provided in their native language by practitioners who understand their cultural values and childrearing practices' (p.407).

Clarity around confidentiality protocols

Mellin et al's (2011) findings: 'several community providers also noted addressing the historical mistrust of schools and mental health systems that is a part of the experiences of many parents in this urban community.

In particular, they discussed taking time to show families file cabinets and the keys. They explain to families that the files belong to the collaborating agency, not the school, and that the files will not follow their child to another school' (p.87).

The EU Commission Staff Working Paper on early school leaving (2010) echoes this theme of the need for development of teachers' relational and diversity approaches:

School-wide strategies focus on improving the overall school climate and making schools places where young people feel comfortable, respected and responsible...While these schools usually rely on a handful of dedicated and committed teachers who choose to stay despite the difficulties, it is essential that teacher education prepares future teachers to deal with diversity in the classroom, with pupils from disadvantaged social backgrounds and with difficult teaching situations. It is also essential to improve school climate and working conditions - especially in disadvantaged areas (p. 23).



Acknowledged subsequently in the Council Recommendation (2011), the Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation in relation to early school leaving further highlighted this issue of teacher professional development:

Supporting and empowering teachers in their work with pupils at risk is a pre-requisite to successful measures at school level. Targeted teacher training helps them to deal with diversity in the classroom, to support pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and to solve difficult teaching situations (p. 12).



Territories



Local rivalries across municipalities an obstacle to sharing of good practice

Local rivalries across agencies especially in a recession – to claim resources and credit for gains

Tensions between schools and community, including community professionals

National Government Ministries involved from the start to maximise their ownership of projects findings/recommendations

Clearly defined leader of team and lead agency – clear responsibility – ideally one plan for child which services feed into

Obstacles to effective internal functioning of teams

If possible, no more than two agencies to limit fragmentation and provide shared goals focus – restructure agencies for great focus

How to assess quality of cities' strategic approaches and interventions for parental involvement for ESL prevention ?

- ✓ Self assessment template
- ✓ Self assessment of strengths
- ✓ Self assessment of gaps
- ✓ Independent assessment template
- ✓ Critical friend feedback from other cities



City level assessment

School level assessment of parental involvement indicators and ESL prevention strategies

For within school and within city examination of progress

For comparison across schools and cities

To inform assessments and reviews at national strategy level for ESL prevention as part of EU2020 headline target of 10% ESL

Assess quality through:

- ✓ Parents feedback
- ✓ Outcome gains over time in ESL reduction, increased school attendance, student motivation – attributable to intervention ?
- ✓ Key principles guiding policy and practice
- ✓ Policy and practice supported and informed by research
- ✓ Avoiding poor practice, e.g., tokenism, manipulation
- ✓ Identify pitfalls and barriers to system change and how to overcome them: problem-solution focus



What incentives are there for schools to open their doors and to change for increased parental involvement ?



A. Key Questions for your Municipality – What are the priority agreed structural indicators as part of a strategic systemic approach to overcome gaps ?

-Examples of **structural indicators** across different system levels

Guiding principles as SIs :

- Active involvement of target groups in design
- Active involvement of target groups in delivery
- Building on strengths of target groups – not framing them simply in terms of deficits
- Cultural competence of staff (including in schools)
- Empowerment not dependency of parents
- Prevention and early intervention focus

Roles in organizational structures as SIs

- Services provided are consistent with objectives
- Intervention of sufficient intensity to bring change
- System change focus and not simply individual change focus
- Clear focus on level of prevention – universal, selected and/or indicated
- Distinct age cohort focus

Examples of **structural indicators** across different system levels

Roles in organizational structures as SIs

- Clear outreach strategy to reach marginalised groups
- Strategy to develop community leaders from marginalised groups
- Employment of members of marginalised groups in the team
- Clear leadership responsibility with and between agencies for achieving Specific goal – not diffusion of responsibility

- Clear feedback paths from parents
- Clear feedback paths from students
- Continuum of supports across ages
- Bridging health and education
- Targeting malleable risk and protective Factors
- Multiple domains
- Confidentiality/Privacy Protocols
- Alternatives to Suspension

Physical spaces as SIs

- Specific space in school building for parents to meet
- Clear representations of cultural identity of specific groups in shared physical spaces such as schools (and communities, such as through festivals)
- Common spaces for overcoming hierarchies (e.g., common eating spaces)

B. Key Questions for your Municipality – A strategic systemic approach to overcome gaps

1. Which level(s) of prevention is your project working at? E.G. Stockholm ABC is general parent programme (3-12), therefore it is universal level and not selected or indicated

Which levels of prevention is your project NOT working at ?

2. Is there collaboration with key target group members (i.e., involvement in design, strategy, decision-making, leadership roles, employment of them) or merely information to be consumed by them ?

E.G, collaboration- Hague Helderling Partnership
Are the Roma mediators in Sofia from the Roma community themselves ?

3. Which level of system change is your project working at ?

- Individual only (e.g. Reverse scholarships PIN)

- School system

- Family system

- Community system (e.g., Gijon Romanian festivals)

- Links between some of these ? (Antwerp transition primary-postprimary - is there a system change focus here ? Tallinn eKool - is there much feedback from students and parents to change the schools ?)

- Which of these system levels are NOT being targeted in your municipality and need to be ?

4. Is the focus in your municipality **holistic** for parental engagement and including:

- Mental health issues (plus drug, alcohol support focus)
- Education issues for parents
- Language education issues for parents
- Support for parents in educating children
- Parent peers supports

5. Is there clear responsibility at local levels for which agency takes the lead on key issues or is there diffusion of responsibility?

- Are there integrated teams or fragmented multiple agencies ?

Commission staff working paper {SEC (2010).} Reducing early school leaving
Accompanying document to the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving
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