

# Implementation Questions for PREVENT Policy Recommendations Report, Towards a Differentiated, Holistic and Systemic Approach to Parental Involvement in Europe for Early School Leaving Prevention

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# **C3. DEMOCRACY – INCLUSIVE SYSTEMS AS EMOTIONAL-RELATIONAL COMMUNICATIVE SYSTEMS**

## **C 3.1 COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS, INCLUDING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL POLICY MAKING**

\*A relational school climate requires a flexibility to move from a hierarchical institutional culture to a more democratic network of care relations. Gatt et al., (2011) working on the INCLUDED project, refer 'globally' to 'a culture of education that leaves little room for families' where 'it is difficult to decentralise the power that is very often monopolised by education professionals'

\*the need to engage in a process of dialogue with relevant actors in the system regarding unofficial realities and needs.

\*A starting point here is documentation of voices of students to hear their experiences, especially those students at risk of early school leaving. After this dialogue process (through pupil and student questionnaires and focus groups), it would provide a context for parents to comment on their interactions with the school and on how to progress the needs of students raised in the first wave of dialogue.

\*Similarly, it would be important to get on the record the unofficial thoughts and perspectives of teachers and principals across different areas of a municipality to see what their real concerns are here. Only after the relevant issues and responses have been brought to the fore can they be addressed in part through further dialogue between groups.

\*Each local municipality can play a key role here in facilitating these phases of the dialogue process, as well as with a view to developing appropriate system level policy and practice responses to addressing the common ground and strengths, as well as problems, emerging from this process

- Anticipated problems might include: student bullying, negative interactions with individual teacher, behavioural difficulties of student, learning problems of student, questioning of quality of teaching instruction. Communicative processes need to be put in place to address these conflicts – these are system issues and not simply individual parent concerns.

- \*Beyond discussion of parental involvement for school policy in the abstract 71

- \*Focus on concrete issues of school policy that matter to students and parents

- \* Issues that require school system change (including to hierarchy of communication)

- \*Issues of conflict, specific problems with school actors, policies

## C 3.2 COMMUNICATION BETWEEN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

\*A constructive, caring pattern of communicative relations between students and teachers is central to early school leaving prevention. A prerequisite for this is a basically democratic communicative environment in school.

\*the issue of students voices being heard in the school system is intrinsically related to the issue of parents voices in the school system. Avenues for their voices need to be created so that both groups are fully heard in the school. This may require system change in some schools.

## C 3.3 BULLYING

The relevance of the role parents can play for bullying prevention and intervention is firstly at the level of their contribution to the development of school policy in this area. They also have a key role to play as part of a systematic communication process between school and home both for student victims of bullying in school and for perpetrators. An individual plan or behaviour contract for engaging with students who are bullying needs to involve parents as part of this process.

The wider issue of developing improved communicative relations across the school climate is part of a democratic agenda for the school system and is one that requires systematic communication processes targeting parents of students at risk of early school leaving, as well as parents more generally.

\* there is a double silence that needs to be addressed, not only the need for students' and parents' voices in general but specifically for the voices of students from lower socio-economic groups or from ethnic minorities, in contexts where these groups are more at risk of nonattendance at school and of early school leaving.

*The challenge for municipalities and schools here is to create systemic structures and processes for dialogue that includes the hidden voices of the socio-economically marginalised students and parents in particular.*

## KEY QUESTION 1:

How can PREVENT municipalities implement these key recommendations about documenting students' voices and parents' reactions to the students' voices for democratic school systems ?

Such a phased dialogue, targeting schools especially in areas of high poverty, nonattendance and early school leaving, may commence with a limited number of volunteer schools initially, before widening this process.

This would include student surveys of their needs and school experiences, including open-ended questions and also focus groups of students and parents. It is recommended that municipalities develop a '*Quality Mark for Democratic School Systems for Parent and Student Voices*' for participating schools, as an incentive to participate in this process.

Through Specific Key Workers in Schools for Parental Involvement



## *A holistic focus:*

\* recognises the need to include family support within a parental involvement in education framework, bridging health and education domains, as part of a multidisciplinary focus on complex needs

\*recognises emotional and physical needs and not simply academic, cognitive ones of both children/young people and their parents in contexts of socio-economic exclusion

### ***A differentiated strategy:***

recognises parental roles and influences relevant to early school leaving  
at:

universal (all),

selected (some – moderate risk)

indicated prevention (individual – high need) levels and promotion of  
strengths and cultural identity.

\*It further includes lifelong learning dimensions, especially concerning  
social cohesion and active citizenship.

## **KEY QUESTION 2:**

**Is it clear that your municipality is adopting a holistic and differentiated approach to parental involvement for early school leaving prevention ?**

## SYSTEMIC ISSUES

A key theme in this report in response to challenging such issues of system fragmentation is to focus on development of centres, of accessible community based centres as a 'one stop shop' for family support, as well as centres for lifelong learning (both non-formal and formal).

Another level of system fragmentation that may need to be addressed is for more cross-department strategies and funding strands, for example, between health and education.

A less obvious example of fragmentation is a proliferation of pilot projects and small scale initiatives to address a systemic problem in a municipality. The danger is that these offer insufficient systemic intensity to bring enduring change.

The other major recommendations in the report are with regard to local community centre based initiatives.

a) community based family support centres, with multidisciplinary teams linked with preschools and schools, with a focus on child and parent mental health, emotional support and school attendance and

b) community based lifelong learning centres, with both non-formal and formal education classes, targeting areas of highest social marginalization.

\*An outreach approach to parental involvement for schools and municipalities requires active efforts to engage with groups in contexts where they feel most comfortable, such as in their homes and local community based contexts.

\*Outreach is where the school meets parents on their terms, whether individually in their home or communally in community based locations that are familiar and accessible to groups of parents as their 'own turf'.

\*An individual outreach approach is especially relevant to those parents and families at highest level of need (indicated prevention)

\*A community based outreach approach may also be needed for groups of parents at moderate risk (selected prevention). Outreach must also be firmly distinguished from mere information based efforts to reach socio-economically marginalised parents.

## **C1. OUTREACH**

### **C1.1 Family Support Outreach for Mental Health, Emotional Support and School**

**Attendance: Community based family support centres, with multidisciplinary teams linked with preschools and schools, with a focus on child and parent mental health, emotional support and school attendance**



A pervasive theme across research into family support, including emotional and mental health supports is that many services are not able to reach those parents who are most marginalised, who are at the highest levels of need for an indicated prevention strategy requiring intensive individualised work.

Family centres are designed to strengthen parenting skills as well as to improve compatibility of working life and family life. Acting as the hub of a network of family and child welfare services, the family centres offer parents and their children advice, information and assistance in all phases of life at an early stage (Eurochild 2011)

Beyond community centre focused outreach, there is also a need for individual outreach to some families' homes at the level of highest need (indicated prevention). Many such families may have a history of intergenerational substance abuse. High levels of unexplained nonattendance by a student at school is a clear behavioural manifestation associated with risk of early school leaving. This nonattendance issue is tied up with emotional and mental health issues in the family system and needs to be engaged with through an integrated holistic response, such as with outreach care workers or other professionals to provide psychological and practical support.

## **C1.2 FAMILY LITERACY OUTREACH**

The term family literacy typically describes literacy development work that focuses on how literacy is developed at home, and education courses that support and develop this dimension of literacy development. It can refer to a set of programs designed to enhance the literacy skills of more than one family member.

## **C1.3 LIFELONG LEARNING – COMMUNITY LIFELONG LEARNING CENTRES AS OUTREACH**

### **KEY QUESTION 3:**

**Can there be a common PREVENT strategy to lobby for funding for such Centres ?**

### **KEY QUESTION 2:**

**Is it clear that your municipality is adopting a holistic and differentiated approach to parental involvement for early school leaving prevention ?**

One avenue is to treat the local school as a community based lifelong learning centre, given that lifelong learning stretches from the cradle to old age. This raises the question for municipalities of opening school building doors after school hours and on weekends and in the summer to local community groups for classes and other cultural activities.

**The Hague:** 'Almost all our schools already open their doors after opening hours for various learning classes, like language courses for parents'

**Nantes:** 'Institutional and psychological deadlock with teachers. Even if buildings are owned by "Départements" for secondary schools and "Communes" for elementary with a complete theoretical autonomy to do what they want with the kind of use they would like after school time(of course in a certain way compatible with the general use), most of the teachers have the feeling that schools are their home. That's why we now have dedicated spaces for parents in new schools recently built up.'

On a scale of 1-3, where 3 means at least 80% of schools in your municipality open their doors after school hours for lifelong learning classes and 2 means at least 30% of schools do so and 1 means less than 30% of schools do so – which number best describes the situation in your municipality?

The Hague	3
Gijon	3
Tallinn	2
Stockholm	2
Antwerp	1
Usti	1
Munich	1
Nantes	1
Sofia	1

## **KEY QUESTION:**

**Is there some way the PREVENT municipalities can support each other to help all municipalities lobby to make this a feature in their schools ?**



## **CULTURAL BRIDGES AND IDENTITY IN SCHOOL SYSTEMS**

Festivals involving the arts are an innovative outreach strategy going well beyond mere informational approaches that can foster that sense of assumed connection between an educational institution and a target group that has traditionally been detached from such institution.

## C2.1 SLEEP DIFFICULTIES OF PUPILS

It is important to recognise that an issue such as sleep patterns on schooldays may be highly variably culturally across Europe, not only between countries but also within subcultures in a given country.

The emphasis given here to the issue of sleep loss is:

1. it is an issue that directly bears on the role of parents in their engagement with their children and it is a potentially malleable pattern of behaviour.
2. sleep loss exerts a real influence on a range of issues central to early school leaving prevention and school performance – it affects children and young people's concentration, learning, motivation, memory, mental health, as well as interaction and behaviour with both peers and teachers. At a strategic level, it is an issue that needs to be addressed, to interrogate the relevance and scale of this issue as a problem in a given municipality

## **C2.2 ALTERNATIVES TO SUSPENSION/EXPULSION FROM SCHOOL: FROM STRUCTURES OF EXCLUSION TO MULTIDISCIPLINARY MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS**

The complexity of a student's needs may require a multidisciplinary response to engaging with them, one that goes beyond simply relying on response of an individual teacher. It is evident that there are a number of individual initiatives across municipalities seeking to engage with the issue of violence and aggression in school.

Both Usti and Munich municipalities report having no alternatives to suspension approaches in place.

A dialogue process between school and student on this issue must also involve parents. It is far from clear that there is a transparent dialogue process and procedure in place across municipalities and schools that engage both students and parents in conversation with the school about agreed steps forward to address issues of problematic behaviour. If alternative strategies are to be put in place, they need ownership by the student and also by parents' of the student.

## C2.3 FIRST-LANGUAGE PROBLEMS OF PUPILS

The need for a multi/interdisciplinary team to engage in targeted early intervention for oral language development emerges from international research regarding language impairment as a risk factor for correlates of early school leaving, such as engagement in disruptive behaviour.

Language development is clearly a mental health related issue.

## **KEY QUESTION:**

**Can each municipality identify where each of these recommendations features in their future strategies as:**

- **A) Already Mainstreamed**
- **B) Existing as pilot projects but needing mainstreaming**
- **C) Pilot projects need to be developed**
- **D) Need assessments/research needs to be firstly undertaken**
- **E) Lobbying for funding needs to take place**
- **F) Other – please explain**

## **C1 Outreach**

**C1.1 Family Support Outreach for Mental Health, Emotional Support and School Attendance**

**C1.2 Family Literacy Outreach**

**C1.3 Lifelong Learning – Community Lifelong Learning Centres as Outreach**

**C1.4 Cultural Bridges and Identity in School Systems**

## **C2 Health**

### **C2.1 Sleep Difficulties of Pupils**

### **C2.2 Alternatives to Suspension/Expulsion from School: From Structures of Exclusion to Multidisciplinary Mental Health Supports**

### **C2.3 First-Language Problems of Pupils**



## **C3 Democracy – Inclusive Systems as Emotional-Relational Communicative Systems**

**C3.1 Communication between Parents and Teachers, including Parental Involvement in School Policy Making**

**C3.2 Communication between Students and Teachers**

**C3.3 Bullying**

## Outreach Structural Indicators

Outreach strategy to individual families in home for child-centred support at high levels of need (indicated prevention, high nonattendance at school)

**YES/NO**

Community outreach strategy through centres for lifelong learning (nonformal and formal) **YES/NO**

At least 80% of schools opening doors after school hours for lifelong learning courses for parents/adults **YES/NO**

At least 30% of schools opening doors after school hours for lifelong learning courses for parents/adults **YES/NO**

Community outreach strategy through multidisciplinary 'one stop shop' centres for family support **YES/NO**

Clear bridges between schools and multidisciplinary community 'one stop shop' centres for family support **YES/NO**

Community centre in a convenient physical location for target groups to access **YES/NO**

Community centre in a neutral space in the community so psychologically/culturally accessible for target groups **YES/NO**

Cultural identities of target groups clearly visible in physical environment of community centres **YES/NO**

Representativeness principle in place in community centres to employ members of target groups **YES/NO**

Specific key workers in school for parental involvement **YES/NO**

Specific key workers in school for parental involvement are part of a wider multidisciplinary team **YES/NO**

Family literacy initiatives in place across targeted areas of municipality **YES/NO**

Festivals organised by parents from target groups for bridge building with schools **YES/NO**

An arts strategy (visual arts, photography, music, drama, dance) to build bridges between socio-economically marginalised parents and schools in a nonthreatening environment **YES/NO**

## Health Structural Indicators

Primary and Post-primary student survey to include focus on sleep patterns to identify scale of issue of sleep loss **YES/NO**

Awareness programmes (with school and/or municipality) for parents and students on issue of sleep needs **YES/NO**

Alternatives to suspension/expulsion in school with a multidisciplinary approach to address complex needs in a holistic way **YES/NO**

Transparent dialogue process and procedures in place that engage both students and their parents in conversation with the school about agreed strategy for change to problematic behaviour **YES/NO**

Strategy for active intervention of parents in their child's language development with speech and language therapists for first language development problems **YES/NO**

Supports for parental intervention in first language development available at suitable times for parents **YES/NO**

## **Structural Indicators for Promoting Democratic Systems in School – Inclusive Systems as Emotional-Relational Communicative Systems**

Promoting dialogue process through anonymous pupil questionnaires and focus groups (in school but by external agency to school) at late primary level, including a focus on pupils at risk of nonattendance and early school leaving **YES/NO**

Promoting dialogue process through anonymous student questionnaires and focus groups (in school but by external agency to school) at different ages of post-primary school, including a focus on students at risk of nonattendance and early school leaving **YES/NO**

Providing neutral mediating spaces in the municipality for parents to be aware of pupils'/students' responses and to actively respond to school policy issues based on the pupil/student responses **YES/NO**

Clear focus on centrally involving marginalised parents in these neutral mediating spaces in the municipality for dialogue with the school **YES/NO**

Anonymous recording (questionnaires, interviews) of teachers' unofficial perspectives on parental involvement in a given municipality **YES/NO**

Anonymous recording (questionnaires, interviews) of school principals' unofficial perspectives on parental involvement in a given municipality **YES/NO**

Parental involvement in formulation and review of school anti-bullying policies and practices **YES/NO**

Process for parental involvement in their child's individual behavioural contract/education plan for bullying prevention **YES/NO**

National/Municipal Quality Mark on democracy for schools regarding pupils'/students' voices and holistic parental involvement **YES/NO**

Overcoming System Blockage for Inclusive Systems: Structural Indicators Clarity of roles in school on levels of responsibility for parental involvement **YES/NO**

Parental involvement embedded in whole school planning **YES/NO**

External inspection of schools includes a focus on parental involvement for marginalised groups **YES/NO**

Parental involvement in new teachers' contracts as a core part of role **YES/NO**

Parental involvement in contracts for teachers' promotional posts as a core part of role **YES/NO**

Clear confidentiality protocols in place for schools and communication of these to parents  
**YES/NO**

Clear confidentiality protocols in place for multidisciplinary teams and communication of these to parents **YES/NO**

Shared framework for goals and outcomes of multidisciplinary teams and a process in place to achieve this **YES/NO**

Clarity on who is leading a multidisciplinary team or cross-agency response to avoid diffusion of responsibility **YES/NO**

Integrated data systems on school nonattendance and early school leaving available to municipality to inform strategic planning and targeting of resources **YES/NO**

System interventions beyond pilot projects **YES/NO**

Clarity on incentives offered by municipality to schools to increase parental involvement for marginalised parents **YES/NO**

Recommended Structural Indicators for Holistic and Differentiated Parental

## **Recommended Structural Indicators for Holistic and Differentiated Parental Involvement: EU Level**

EU Quality Mark on democracy for schools regarding pupils'/students' voices and holistic parental involvement **YES/NO**

EU Policy communication on alternatives to suspension/expulsion **YES/NO**

EU level shared framework on goals and outcomes for multidisciplinary teams as part of a distinct funding strand to support multidisciplinary teams for early school leaving prevention **YES/NO**

EU Policy communication and funding strand to promote community lifelong learning centres with both non-formal and formal education courses **YES/NO**

EU Policy communication and funding strand to incentivise opening schools after school hours for lifelong learning courses for parents and adults from marginalised communities **YES/NO**

Promote shared experiences and learning of municipalities across EU in response to the overall framework of structural indicators for holistic and differentiated parental involvement **YES/NO**