

European Recommendation for Cooperation Between Parents and Schools

Presented by the COPASCH Network Partners

Belfast, 22nd May 2008



COPASCH is founded by the European Commission and coordinated by DGB-Bildungswerk Berlin-Brandenburg.

European Recommendation for Cooperation Between Parents and Schools

Foreword

The European network “Cooperation Between Parents and School” was established in 2005. Supported by funds from the EU, 19 partners from 11 countries have come to an understanding about how cooperation between parents and schools can be improved. The following recommendations are the result of an intensive exchange of experiences from the partner countries. On the basis of these experiences, scientific studies and international political statements, they point out the growing importance of creating general standards for common frameworks and the tangible implementation of cooperation between the most important educational partners; as well as containing concrete suggestions for further efforts from the European Commission.

1. Introduction

1.1 Aim of the recommendation

Parents and teachers bear equal responsibility

The education and upbringing of children and adolescents is most successful if parents and teachers recognise each other as partners in that upbringing. Precisely at a time when education is becoming more and more of a key resource for social opportunities and thereby laying firm foundations in life, it is important to stress the significance of a cooperative alliance between parents and schools.

In many European countries, educational opportunities and success are linked with a family’s social, cultural and educational resources. There is the possibility of improving equal opportunities if parents with low educational backgrounds are more actively included in their children’s school lives. Parents can contribute much to their child’s success at school through a supporting and positive attitude towards learning. If necessary, they must be given the appropriate support and assistance with this.

The general conditions for and practice of cooperation between parents and schools differ in European countries, to some degree quite markedly. This recommendation should help in making the experience of different countries generally accessible.

Putting the COPASCH network on a broader basis

With the foundation of COPASCH, an important basis was laid for European cooperation between parents and schools. This meant establishing new partnerships, as well as building up and extending existing ones. Those who see what others are doing receive encouragement. Those who share their experience to others receive confirmation.

The valuable process which has been introduced with the formation of the COPASCH network should be continued and placed on a broader basis. In future,

the experience of partnerships and the mutual exchange of ideas should be made accessible, especially to parents, who so far have not been a target group of the European Commission's educational programmes.

These recommendations should form the basis for continued work on the theme of parent-school cooperation by the EU. The European Council set high targets for the development of general and vocational education in the states of the European Union with the so-called 'Lisbon Strategy' of 2000. The importance of comprehensive inclusion of all partners in educational institutions was stressed in the "joint Council and Commission interim report concerning measures within the framework of the detailed work programme to reach the targets of the systems of general and vocational education in Europe". In the summer of 2007 the Offices of the European Union Commission published a working paper, "Schools for the 21st Century", in which the importance of the participation of parents, teachers and pupils as both part of a democratic culture and as the basis for the development and strengthening of school communities was explicitly stressed. The work of the COPASCH network leads on from previous European Union activities towards the development of general and vocational education and lifelong learning and wants to give new impetus, particularly to the strengthening of partnerships between protagonists in educational institutions.

In future, the improvement of parent-school cooperation should be reinforced by new support programmes. We propose that the EU Commission develops a new sub-programme within the framework of Lifelong Learning (subsequent programme by ARION), in which parents are explicitly designated as a target group. The programme has previously been aimed at teachers and pupils. Parents must also have the chance to get to know other structures and facts about schools and link up internationally via partnerships and international exchanges.

Whilst putting the 'Lisbon objectives' into action, more value should be placed on the question of cooperation between educational protagonists. Cooperation between parents and schools must be included as a determining factor in the improvement of pupils' performance. This cooperation should be recognised as an integral part of schools which provide a general education. This should be reflected in future European Commission information and reports and in its working groups.

1.2 Necessity for a Recommendation

Education belongs to the central resources which young people need in order to prepare themselves for a life in which they take personal responsibility. The work of educating and bringing up a child cannot be successfully managed solely by families or the education system alone; it is rather a responsibility shared by both social institutions. In order to ensure educational success, all parties involved need to work together. Such cooperation needs to be properly structured with clear responsibilities. All parties involved in events at schools (parents, teachers, pupils) benefit equally from improved cooperation.

Demands on education are changing. Increasing international cohesion and new specifications in education in line with this, make it necessary to utilise all available resources. One resource not yet fully utilised, is the involvement of parents.

Concerted efforts are being made worldwide to evaluate the efficiency of educational systems and to implement measures to increase efficiency. However, these measures make hardly any use of the synergy derived from systematic cooperation with parents. In contrast to policies in many other areas of the educational system, parental-school cooperation has hardly changed in shape over the last few decades.

Often the patterns of communication and cooperation between school protagonists have not been able to keep up with the standards which have been established in other professional areas of our democratic society's public discourse. As in other areas of team-orientated work, a levelling of hierarchical differences and open communication structures can lead to an increased feeling of identity with school as an institution, and an improvement in the standing of school education and its social reputation. Higher esteem and setting schoolwork in a familiar context improves attitudes to learning and pupils' involvement.

Demographic changes (e.g. both parents working, single parents, immigration, social deprivation) make new and effective forms of cooperation between parents and schools necessary in order to solve the Europe-wide problem of guaranteeing educational success even in disadvantaged population groups.

American studies (cf. *Diverse Studies* by Joyce I. Epstein et al.) prove that well conceived programmes for the inclusion of parents with regard to academic success have at least the same importance as social factors (race, social background, family structure). For this reason it seems necessary to view cooperation between families and schools as an integral component of educational policy and school development, as well as teacher training and further education, and to guarantee institutional conditions for constant improvement in policies in this area.

Existing forms of information, further education and parent's participation in decision-making prove to be less effective in practice, in the sense that often only a small proportion of parents make enough use of what is on offer. It therefore seems essential that concerted efforts are made to gradually improve the level of participation, with the aim of involving all parents on as even a scale as possible. Moreover, it is necessary to ensure that cooperation between parents and school does not remain a predominantly female domain; an increased involvement of fathers should be strived for.

In order to bring the efficiency of the European educational system to a similar level, it appears necessary to plan processes of change in a coordinated form and to strive for as coherent a course of action as possible.

1.3. Current situation/general conditions

Legally regulated forms of cooperation between parents and schools developed through practice differ between various European countries. They range from non-existent regulations in Denmark through to regulations for participation in decision-making laid down in the Education Act in Germany. However, legal conditions for cooperation between schools and parents are only a framework, which above all has to contain human values such as acceptance and mutual openness in order to find opportunities for cooperation in jointly organised encounters.

At present, activities between schools and parents usually mean one thing, for example the organisation of school festivals, planning projects or accompanying a class trip. In individual cases, where there is consistent collaboration, this selective assistance is extended to cover after-school clubs, partnerships or caring for individual pupils. However, it is clear that contact between teachers and parents frequently only relates to the usual parents' days and parent-teacher meetings.

At the various levels of cooperation there are often no obligatory schemes which follow prescribed standards, and a written document listing exact responsibilities is lacking. There are often good regional and local approaches, which, however, depend upon the involvement of individual people and organisations, but have no institutional or legal security.

In order to consider and plan effective cooperation between parents and schools, the following levels are important.

✎✎ The **structural level** regulates the framework and responsibilities for successful parent-school cooperation.

✎✎ The **administrative-political level** concerns social acceptance and implements political involvement for decision makers.

✎✎ The **school orientated level** defines the exact fields of cooperation and is the actual point of any successful outcome.

✎✎ The **quality level** takes objectives and successes into account and evaluates the cooperation between parents and schools by means of agreed standards.

An intensifying of parent-school cooperation can only be successful if these levels actively fulfil their specific functions and designed tasks.

2. Recommendations

'Recommendation 1

Cooperation between parents and schools should become an integral component set into educational programmes and school organisation. The involvement of parents promotes the opening out of schools to the community and improves cooperation between educational activists in the interests of child development.

Rationale:

Cooperation between parents and schools has two central functions: As part of European countries' social being, school should reflect the democratic character of those European states as well as develop and promote such in young peoples' consciousness. If interested parties are involved in a school's design, this is a form of democratic participation. The more place there is for democratic participation in a society, the broader the social basis is for democracy as a form of government. The

effect of parents setting an example for their children is of exceptional significance for the development of independent personalities. Children, who experience their parents being allowed and able to participate at school, learn the importance of participation and taking on responsibility for themselves.

Recommendation 2

Cooperation between parents and schools should be obligatory and clearly regulated in the form of participation, decision making and information rights.

Rationale:

The rights of participation, decision making and information are essential aspects of cooperation between school and the parental home. These must be regulated for each school. They can be stipulated within the framework of national state or federal legislation or at a school authority, community or individual school level.

Clear regulations or agreements are a starting point to comprehensively establishing obligatory cooperation between schools and parents. This must be an integral component of school policy and teachers' professional self-image. At present, mandatory regulations have been developed quite diversely in national states, in both their organisation and level of commitment, or do not exist at all.

Initially, the main point should be to establish which information, participation and decision-making rights parents have on both school and provincial levels in the design of the school system. As key figures in their children's development and education, parents must be able to participate in the democratic decision-making bodies of the school. The opportunities and manner of involvement should be determined jointly by the school's constitution and curriculum.

It is up to the politically responsible authorities to create the appropriate general conditions, and to support putting these into action and maintaining them. This includes the provision of appropriate material resources.

Secondly, parents are entitled to and have the duty to receive information about school matters concerning their children. This requires the school determining how regular contact with parents can be established. The school's responsibility to ensure this contact must be legally defined and carried out.

Recommendation 3

Cooperation between parents and schools should be a quality criterion for a good school and included in the respective quality standards for schools in all countries.

Rationale:

Successful cooperation between those involved in school life is a central aspect of a school's standing. Such cooperation has an immediate effect on the atmosphere in

the school, easing arbitration and solving problems. It results in stronger identification with the school and its aims, allowing lessons to be more effective and the school's efficiency to be increased. Establishing parental-school cooperation in the catalogue of quality criteria would effect systematic consideration of the further development of educational systems and what schools have to offer, initiating a process of continual evaluation and improvement of policy in this area.

Recommendation 4

Successful cooperation assumes that parents can exercise their role as guardians and participants in the educational field. Varied support should be set up for parents concerning questions about participation, education etc.

Rationale:

To some degree there are problems of understanding and fear of contact between parents and schools, but possibly also a lack of opportunity for exchanging ideas and views. This impedes successful cooperation. It is therefore sensible to clear these barriers out of the way, so that schools and other educational institutions, parents' groups, EU programmes etc, have or gain the possibility to implement a suitable range of support and to receive the necessary resources. Parents should be informed about their rights of participation and opportunities to join in decision making. Similarly, they should receive support regarding questions about lessons and education.

In this regard, it is particularly sensible to set up further education and consultative courses at schools or regional centres, at which parents are supported by experts, teachers or other parents.

Recommendation 5

The development of "Parental contact concepts" should be supported by every school. In this respect, involvement of parents in school life should be clearly defined.

Rationale:

In order for a cooperative atmosphere, it is important how a school plans the involvement of parents into its specific school situation and how it carries this out with transparency. This means parental participation and the exchange of information between parents and school. In addition to this, parents also need the opportunity to exchange views and support each other. School can be an appropriate place for this. Schools also benefit from closer cooperation if parental resources are included for curricular and extracurricular work.

As a rule, teachers and parents only get in touch with one another if there are problems relating to the child. Therefore contact is often irregular and mainly problem-orientated.

In order to achieve continued improvement in cooperation between parents and schools, each school should develop a concept addressing its specific concerns and needs for cooperative work between school and parents and, in doing so, should refer to its specific conditions.

Recommendation 6

Cooperation with parents should be part of teachers' professional self-image and secured as such in training and further education.

Rationale:

A school's task in social and academic education can only be reasonably implemented when teachers and parents work together closely. This assumes that teachers have the necessary skills at their disposal in order to coordinate this successfully. For this purpose, adequate resources should be devoted to educational research, as well as to teacher training and further education. These competencies include not only communication and arbitration skills, but also knowledge of social conditions and developmental trends. Currently, these subjects only play a secondary role in the area of teacher training and further education and are generally acquired via 'learning by doing'. A professional grounding is necessary, especially during teacher training.

Recommendation 7

Successful cooperation between parents and schools demands clear responsibilities in schools and school authorities and the provision of necessary resources.

Rationale:

Constant evaluation and further development of policy with regard to cooperation between parents and schools is only really guaranteed if responsibility exists at all levels of school organisation (individual schools and school administration) to control the necessary coordination, management and accountability for this area. For this purpose, job specifications for coordinators to work with parents should be drawn up at both school and administrative levels in each country, and the necessary resources should be provided.

3. Conclusions:

Improved cooperation and communication between parents and schools would bring the following definite advantages for interested parties involved in school events:

?? For parents:

- More transparency about the social behaviour, achievement and mental state of their children
- A better knowledge of opportunities for effective support
- More participation in the day-to-day life of their children and thereby a tendency towards an improved atmosphere within the family
- Increased feelings of self-confidence, responsibility and participation in parents with regard to school, due to a stronger perception of participation and the implementation of their rights in planning and decision making.

?? For teachers:

- Increased effectiveness of work carried out in lessons through higher pupil motivation and support of parents
- Professional organisation of school procedures via comprehensive and direct lines of communications and feedback mechanisms.
- Higher regard of their work and therefore higher job satisfaction

?? For pupils:

- Better motivation via higher level of participation and regard of their schoolwork by parents
- More productive work and willingness to cooperate via improved attitude towards school
- Improved communication within the family
-

?? For the public:

- Improved efficiency in the school system
- Reduction of social inequality in the field of education and improved integration of children with an immigrant background
- Empowerment of civilian society via increased openness of schools to the general public and wider parental participation
- Parents becoming dependable partners for schools

Partners of COPASCH Network

1st Lyceum of Karditsa (GR)
Bundeselternrat (DE)
Bundesgymnasium und BORG Graz-Liebenau (AT)
Bündnisverein - Drusto "VEZI" (SLO)
democariss e.V. (DE)
Fontane Gymnasium Rangsdorf (DE)
Gimnazjum nr. 25 Poznan (PL)
Grundschule Alhaisten koulu Salo (FI)
Landeselternrat Brandenburg (DE)
Marie-Curie-Gymnasium Ludwigsfelde (DE)
Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport des Landes Brandenburg (DE)
North Eastern Education and Library board (UK)
Piarista Szakiskola Gymnazium (PL)
Privatschule Grindsted (DA)
ProBilingua Lauterbourg (F)
Profesorado y Recursos de Aviles (ES)
St. John's Primary School (UK)
Zavod Republike Slovenije za Solstvo (SLO)

DGB Bildungswerk Berlin-Brandenburg „Wilhelm Leuschner e.V.“ (Coordinator) (DE)

The Partners of COPASCH Network

Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport Brandenburg



Landeselternrat des Landes Brandenburg



Bundeselternrat



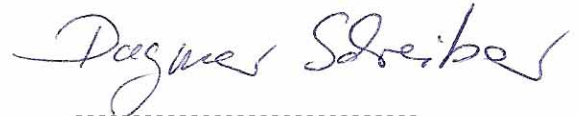
Marie-Curie Gymnasium Ludwigsfelde

.....

democaris e.V.



Fontane Gymnasium Rangsdorf



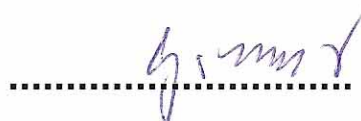
Grindsted Privatskole



Grundschule (Alhaisten Koulu) Salo



Probilingua Lauterbourg



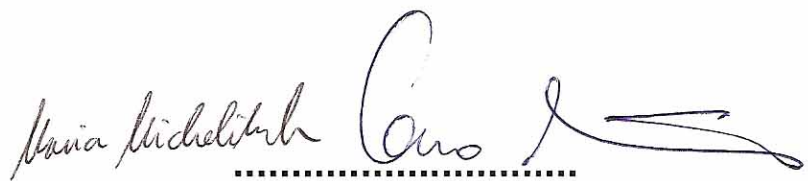
1st Lyceum of Karditsa



North Eastern Education and Library Board Ballymena



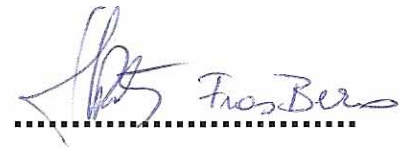
St. John's Primary School



BG und BORG Graz-Liebenau

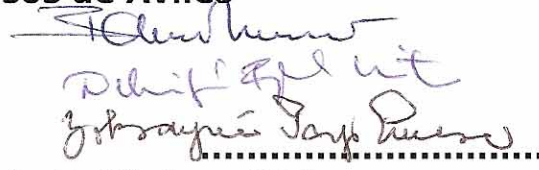


Bündnisverein - Elter, Schüler, Lehrer Drusto "VEZI"



Zavod Republike Slovenije za solstvo

Centro del Profesorado y Recursos de Aviles



Piarista Szakiskola Gimnázium és Kollégium Göd

DGB-Bildungswerk Berlin-Brandenburg e.V.



Belfast, 24th May 2008



Socrates

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.