PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS FOR CREATING AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

POLICY ROAD MAP

North Macedonia

Empowering School Principals for Inclusive School Culture HEAD

This publication is one of the outputs of the *HEAD: Empowering School Principals for Inclusive School Culture* project that aims to address the professionalization and continuous professional development of school principals in primary and secondary schools, focusing on inclusive education.

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FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURAL INITIATIVES
ЧЕКОР ПО ЧЕКОР • STEP BY STEP

Project partners in North Macedonia:
Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiatives Step by Step

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BACKGROUND

According to UNESCO (2005, 13–15), "*Inclusive education is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion from education and from within education.*" The principal's vision of the educational processes in the school, goals, and leadership practices have a significant impact on how inclusive the school culture and practices are. The role of school leadership is crucial for building an inclusive school culture, specifically in the following aspects:

- the development of understanding of diversity and inclusiveness,
- the promotion of inclusive pedagogical practices within the school, and
- developing cooperation between the school and the community.

Since creating an inclusive school culture is a complex process involving many factors, the school principals need quality and substantial professional support in order to develop the required competencies.

Inclusive educational practices are essential for quality learning, academic achievements and the mental health of children/students. Taking into consideration the need for the improvement of inclusiveness of educational processes in the country in various aspects, as well as the importance of principals' role in leading toward democratic and progressive change, there is a need for the improvement of the professional development (PD) of principals in order to enrich their competencies for creating an inclusive school culture.

The matter of the competencies needed for the position of school principals is regulated by the Law on training and exam for principals of primary schools, secondary schools, school dormitories and open workers' university for lifelong learning[1] from 2015. Since 2016, the basic training is realised by a programme consisting of six modules, dedicated respectively to: Application of information technology in managing education, Theory of organisation, People in organisations, Principals as pedagogical leaders, Legislation, and Finances. The exam tests the candidate's skills to apply theoretical knowledge in managing a school. However, the programme focuses more on the legal and administrative aspects of the principals' work and does not include topics such as creating an inclusive school culture, diversity and/or social justice. Hence, it has a disputable predictive validity about future candidates' competencies as principals - for the successful development of

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1   Службен весник на Република Македонија бр. 10/15, 145/15, 192/15, 30/16, 120/18 и 140/18

an inclusive culture in the school. An additional problem for principals is that they have limited opportunities for continuous training in the area of creating an inclusive culture in schools.

In the context of the training and competencies of school principals, a study on principals' needs for professional development in the area of creating an inclusive school culture was conducted during 2020.[2] The study was conducted on a sample of 187 principals of schools in the country (51% females), where 14% answered the questionnaire in the Albanian language. 40% of principals were from secondary schools. The participants have 21 years of working experience on average, with 3.5 years on average as a principal. The majority of schools (75%) have between 101 and 1,000 students, up to 75 teachers (78%) and up to 5 members of support staff (81%), while not having any other assistants.

According to the results of the study, in the context of principals' previous professional development activities in the field of creating an inclusive school culture, the principals reported that the activities that provided opportunities to practise *new ideas* and those that built on *their prior knowledge* have the greatest positive impact on their school leadership. They also emphasised that training activities need to be *adapted to their personal development needs* and to provide opportunities for *active learning*.

The focus of the study was to estimate the principals' needs for professional development in different areas related to creating an inclusive school culture. Principals-participants reported the highest needs for PD in the areas of:

- supporting inclusive student learning experiences,
- organising and coordinating support for diversity in school,
- preparing the school staff to respond to the students' diversity,
- supporting collaboration among the teachers, students and other school staff and implementing an inclusive school development plan,
- creating an inclusive physical environment,
- raising awareness in staff about their own beliefs of diversity and inclusion.

Based on the results, a programme was developed for empowering school principals for inclusive school cultures (HEAD). It was realised as a pilot programme in Croatia and North Macedonia, with the participation of 81 school principals from

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2   Mlekuz, A., Veldin, M. (2020). *Principals' needs for professional development in the area of creating an inclusive school culture*. Ljubljana: Educational Research Institute.

The study was realised within the framework of the project in cooperation with NEPC, MCEC and Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiatives Step by Step funded with support from the European Commission.

primary and secondary schools, on the following themes: democratic school governance, cooperation with stakeholders, inclusive school policies, and awareness of school challenges to inclusiveness. After the realisation of the pilot programme, an impact study was conducted. It shows that the implementation of the PD programme specifically designed within the HEAD project had a significant influence on the improvement of inclusive climate/culture in both primary and secondary schools in the country. The results confirm the need and the benefits of the programme for the improvement of the competencies of school principals for creating inclusive school cultures.

Additionally, in May 2022 a Policy Lab was held in Skopje, which gathered a group of interested stakeholders (policymakers, academics, NGOs and principals) with the aim to discuss ideas about the systemic professional development of school principals for inclusion.

The findings, opinions, ideas and suggestions from all these actions were used as a base for developing this policy roadmap.

POLICY GOAL

The policy goal of this document is to improve the actual system of professional development of school principals in order to establish advanced systemic measures for the creation of an inclusive culture in the schools.

The vision of the policy development is to create conditions for quality education, with school principals as leaders of progress toward building a holistic system of inclusive education - where every child and student will have an equal opportunity to reach their potential. Here, *quality education for all* is understood as a public good and a fundamental social value. In such a system, a network of competent school principals, through participatory and collaborative processes develop appropriate programmes and measures for their continuous professional development, they successfully implement those measures, and appropriately evaluate the inclusive education practices using quality methods for data gathering about the effectiveness of the measures. These processes use both bottom-up and top-down approaches, in active collaboration of all relevant stakeholders. The gathered data is then used for evidence-based quality assurance measures, as well as for the improvement of the teaching/learning processes and the creation of an inclusive school culture.

The implications of such a vision mean that society will have well-educated citizens, who actively and competently participate in all societal developments and processes. These citizens would significantly contribute to building an inclusive and learning society built on knowledge. The principals would have an important and active role in developing the democratic governance of the schools as the basic and essential cells of society, in the promotion of democratic values, and the assurance that democratic practices are incorporated into school policy documents. Such school leaderships would be able to address the challenges to inclusiveness not only in schools but in the wider community too.

STEPS IN IMPLEMENTATION

Taking into consideration the current regulation in the area, and based on the information gathered from the actions explained in the previous chapter, the following specific steps of implementation are envisioned for the further improvement of the competencies of school principals for creating an inclusive culture in the schools.

1. To improve the current regulation for continuous PD of principals in the context of quality inclusive education for all, and building an inclusive culture in the schools. It is also necessary to harmonise the solutions for the funding of continuous PD of principals, as well as the governance of the process.
   In addition, it is necessary to further improve the regulations in order for inclusiveness to be relevantly covered by the self-evaluation of schools, as well as the indicators of inclusion to be relevantly incorporated into the integral evaluation of schools. Related to the previous is the need of establishing processes of the quality collection of inclusion-related data in schools.

2. To improve the programmes for the PD of principals in the area of creating an inclusive culture in schools. In order to be effective, this process should be flexible as to allow accounting for principals' previous experiences work context, and it should be based on their professional needs. Content wise, the programme should include and emphasise different strategies of establishing collaboration with other stakeholders connected to the school, preparing school staff to respond to students' diversity, supporting the active participation of parents in school life and supporting inclusive student learning experiences. The programme should also include other topics related to improvement of principals' competencies in the areas of: building an inclusive school culture, school leadership and personal and professional role in the context of the school and school leadership planning and acting for inclusive school culture.

3. To support schools in developing school policies for creating a democratic and inclusive school culture. Policy documents need to include material about how to provide:

   • support for the teachers in practising inclusive teaching,

   • support for students' learning in the environment of diversities,

   • the development of an inclusive atmosphere in school – supportive in expressing and valuing and respecting diversity,

   • the development of an inclusive and safe physical environment in the school.

   In order to create, develop and sustain an inclusive culture in the school, the school needs its development plans and school policy documents to be grounded and built on inclusive philosophy and values, where curriculums are also developed and implemented in an inclusive manner.

4. To support a school's staff to develop skills about how to gather quality data on the current state and changes in the context of inclusiveness (the development and implementation of inclusive school policies and how inclusive the school practices are), and further to develop appropriate measures for the promotion, prevention and interventions in the area of inclusiveness - based on the collected evidence.

5. To provide support to build practices and networks of cooperation between school-relevant stakeholders. The school's staff, students, parents, municipality, governmental institutions and NGOs need to have active collaborative participation in the decision-making processes in the school. Special attention should be placed on the support networks of school principals. Furthermore, all the stakeholders need to know how to address the challenges to inclusiveness individually or collaboratively, as well as to know about the possibilities and opportunities who to address in order to get assistance in organising and coordinating support for diversity.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND ROADMAP IN IMPLEMENTATION

Based on the findings and data gathered through studies and the consultation process, the following recommendations have been developed with a roadmap of the implementation of the envisioned steps for developing principals' competencies for creating an inclusive culture in schools.

OVERALL POLICY GOAL

IMPROVE THE CURRENT SYSTEM OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN ORDER TO ESTABLISH ADVANCED SYSTEMIC MEASURES FOR THE CREATION OF AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE IN SCHOOLS.

Specific goals

1. MAKING THE RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF PRINCIPALS AVAILABLE AND REGULATED

Recomendation

1.1. TO IMPROVE REGULATIONS RELATED TO THE WORK OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

1.1.1.

To support the organisation of a wider consultation of relevant stakeholders about the system of the continuous professional development of principals - on the following topics:

- the possibilities for the improvement of the training programme for PD of principals in the area of inclusiveness, with the active participation of principals in its creation
- the possibilities for the funding of PD programmes for principals
- the possibilities for introducing a one-year masters or specialisation studies in school leadership
- the possibilities for professionalisation of the position of principals
- the creation of a catalogue of competencies needed for the position of school principal
- incorporating competencies for education leadership in study programmes at pedagogical faculties
- the possibilities for mentoring principals in their first year after appointment
- the possibilities for the validation of non-formal and informal learning of (candidate) principals in the process of licensing.

Who and with whom

State Examination Centre (SEC) together with the Association of School Principals (ASP) should lead, and jointly with the Bureau for Development of Education (BDE), initiate wider consultation including all relevant stakeholders;

Other involved stakeholders:
- Teachers' Associations (TAs)
- MOES; State Educational Inspectorate (SEI)
- Centre for Adult Education (CAE)
- Municipalities; Academia;
- Training providers

Level of implementation

National

1.1.2.

To discuss on the institutional level how to effectively incorporate indicators for inclusive practices in the work of the school leadership/principals - in the process of the integral evaluation of schools

Who and with whom

ASP should initiate the process; Other involved stakeholders:
- MOES
- SEI
- TAs

Level of implementation

National

Recomendation

1.2. **TO PROVIDE INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPING THE PD PROGRAMME FOR IMPROVING PRINCIPALS' COMPETENCIES FOR BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE IN SCHOOLS**

1.2.1.

To support institutions and principals in the revision of regulation/directives for the PD of principals in order to improve their competencies for developing an inclusive culture in schools:
- to support the Association of School Principals in the development of their activities for the improvement of PD and an inclusive school culture
- to develop and introduce a training module dedicated to the creation of an inclusive culture in schools
- to harmonise the official training for principals with a PD programme/module dedicated to an inclusive culture in schools (such as Curriculum Framework: Empowering School Leadership, for inclusive school culture NEPC 2022)

Who and with whom

ASP and State Examination Centre (SEC) with support from MOES should initiate and lead the process of the improvement of regulations;
- Other involved stakeholders:
- TAs
- State Educational Inspectorate (SEI)
- Centre for Adult Education (CAE)
- Municipality
- Academia
- training providers

Level of implementation

National

Recomendation

1.3. **TO UPGRADE THE EXISTING TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR PRINCIPALS AIMING AT THE IMPROVEMENT OF COMPETENCIES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

1.3.1.

To provide wider conditions for developing a programme for the continuous professional development of principals in order to create an inclusive culture in schools.

- Programme development needs to ensure the active participation of school principals, teachers and students/parents.
- The programme should be based on the working experience of principals and teachers.

Who and with whom

ASP should initiate and lead the process with support from SEC and MOES;
Other involved stakeholders:
- TAs
- State Educational Inspectorate (SEI)
- Academia
- Students/parents

Level of implementation

ASP National

1.3.2.

Through the PD programme, to support principals in developing their skills to recognise students' diversity and students' needs related to learning and to personal development.

Who and with whom

ASP with other principals' networks to initiate and lead the process, with support from: TAs, School staff, Students/parents, Academia

Level of implementation

Schools

1.3.3.

Through the PD programme, to support principals in developing their skills to recognise the various aspects that make the school and the learning process inclusive and safe: incorporating modules about inclusive and safe physical environments, antidiscrimination, respect of diversity, prevention of bullying etc.

Who and with whom

ASP/principals' networks to initiate and lead the process, supported by: Municipalities, TAs, School staff, Students/ parents, Academia, SEI

Level of implementation

Schools

1.3.4.

Through the PD programme, to support principals in developing their competencies for managing financial and human resources to support inclusion.

Who and with whom

ASP/principals' networks to initiate and lead, supported by: SEC, SEI Municipalities

Level of implementation

Schools

Specific goals

2. PROMOTING AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

Recomendation

2.2. TO PROMOTE THE PHILOSOPHY OF INCLUSIVENESS

2.2.1.

To support schools and principals to develop actions for increasing the awareness about the importance of inclusion in the school community; and to spread the values of inclusion, respecting diversity, the importance of safe and inclusive environments (physical and psychological).

Who and with whom

ASP should initiate and lead the process of collecting and sharing good practices;
Other involved stakeholders:
- TAs
- Academia
- Students/parents
- Municipalities

Level of implementation
Schools Regional

Recomendation

2.1. TO SUPPORT DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE SCHOOL POLICIES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

2.2.2.

To support schools and school principals to develop school-tailored policy documents (annual school plans and other relevant documents), which will map the actual situation in the school community with regard to inclusiveness, and will be roadmap for improvement of the inclusive educational processes in the schools. The development of such documents needs to employ top-down and bottom-up approaches.

Who and with whom

ASP and SEI should initiate and lead the process;
Other involved stakeholders:
- TAs
- Academia
- Students/parents
- MOES
- SEC

Level of implementation

Schools Regional, National

2.2.3.

To support schools in the development of a strategic document for creating inclusive and safe environments - physical and socio-emotional.

Who and with whom

ASP and SEI should initiate and lead the process; Other involved stakeholders:
- Teachers
- Students/parents
- Academia

Level of implementation

Schools, National

2.2.4.

To support all school teachers and staff to develop an annual personal development plan, which ensures an inclusive approach.

Who and with whom

TAs and support staff's associations to initiate the process with support from Principals, Students/parents, Academia

Level of implementation

Schools, National

2.2.5.

To support schools – principals and teachers – to provide the active participation of parents in creating an inclusive school life.

Who and with whom

School principals to initiate the process in cooperation with teachers and parents

Level of implementation

Schools

2.2.6.

To improve the process of self-evaluation of schools based on the Index of Inclusion and other relevant indices of inclusion.

Who and with whom

School principals to initiate the process in cooperation with SEC, supported by teachers

Level of implementation

Schools

Recomendation

2.3. **TO SUPPORT DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES IN BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE IN SCHOOLS**

2.3.1.

To develop procedures and practices for the cooperation of all stakeholders in the school aiming to improve the inclusive culture in the school.

Who and with whom

School principals to initiate the process in cooperation with teachers, staff and parents

Level of implementation

Schools

2.3.2.

To support schools in creating collaborative practices and measures for the promotion of inclusive practices, for the prevention of malpractices, and for intervention in situations of malpractice.

Who and with whom

School principals and BDE to initiate the process in cooperation with teachers, staff and parents

Level of implementation

Schools

2.3.3.

To support schools in the revision of the composition, roles and responsibilities of the schools' inclusive teams. Currently, their focus is on students with disabilities. The schools' inclusive teams need to be reorganised in order to address all the students' needs and support their learning.

Who and with whom

School principals and BDE to initiate the process in cooperation with:
- school teachers,
- TAs
- support staff
- state resource centres
- parents

Level of implementation

Schools

2.3.4.

To support schools in creating procedures and practices for the participation of children/students in creating school-inclusive policies and measures.

Who and with whom

School principals to initiate the process in cooperation with teachers, staff and students

Level of implementation

Schools

2.3.5.

To support schools in creating school procedures and practices for students, teachers, principals and parents on how to react and who to address in situations of need, bullying or other malpractices.

Who and with whom

School principals to initiate the process in cooperation with teachers, staff, parents and students

Level of implementation

Schools

2.3.6.

To assist principals in building support networks of school principals.

Who and with whom

ASP to initiate the process in cooperation with principals' networks and municipalities

Level of implementation

Schools Regional National

2.3.7.

To support schools and principals in creating effective cooperation with municipalities, state education-related institutions and NGOs.

Who and with whom

ASP and municipalities to initiate the process in cooperation with BDE, MOES, NGOs

Level of implementation

Schools Regional National

Specific goals

3. MONITORING THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF PRINCIPALS AND INCLUSIVENESS IN SCHOOLS

Recomendation

3.1. TO SUPPORT DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE PRACTICES OF DATA COLLECTION RELEVANT TO INCLUSION

3.1.1.

To support principals and teachers/staff in data collection relevant for inclusion, and to further develop practices and/or adapt the current practices based on the evidence gathered, as well to create interventions if needed - based on evidence.

Who and with whom

ASP and SEC to initiate and lead the process;

Other involved stakeholders:
- TAs
- Academia
- Students/parents

Level of implementation

Schools, National

3.1.2.

To support schools in improving the process of self-evaluation: how to gather data relevant for quality inclusive education and to know how to use the data in the improvement of teaching-learning processes.

Who and with whom

ASP and SEI to initiate and lead the process;

Other involved stakeholders:
- SEC
- TAs
- Academia
- Students/parents

Level of implementation

Schools, National