

IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS' AT RISK

GUIDELINES FOR HEADMASTER

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Introduction

The headteacher is directly involved in the identification of students at risk in the organizational aspects, in the system of relations that are created in the school, in the assessment of learning outcomes and in the ability to design interventions. The guidelines thus cover all the actions that the headteacher puts in place for the identification of the problem and the different steps are linked to his ability not only to manage them, but also to establish effective relationships with the local area and with the social fallout of the school. For each step it is possible to have links, online resources and references to other projects.

Knowledge of the Problem

What do we mean with the term knowledge? First of all, we must consider the legislative system of each country regarding education and training, the different times of compulsory school, the organization of educational system and professional resources in the European context of EQF.(European Qualification Framework). It is important to know and compare the national systems of education, to take into consideration the European system of education concerning compulsory education, and also the different thematic areas concerning the main themes of education in Europe. Of course the headteacher must know National and Local guidelines of education and training systems. Each country has its own National Agency or similar who takes care of updating school laws, but, because of all the different specific systems, we also have to take into consideration the regional interventions on training and vocational schools. The headteacher must know all policies, all projects, all the different ways to tackle early school leaving, so as to transfer laws, projects and policies in any specific situation. This is a strategic step: each year the school needs to know how to work, how to manage students' risk of drop out, what to offer to students in need. After this step, the headteacher will decide “what” and “how” to transfer to his group of teachers and to all the actors involved in the educational and training process. He will also plan (usually in a shared leadership) the new school year, from teaching strategies to organizational aspects, from human to financial resources.

Websites

- [Facts and Figures](#)
European system of education and thematic areas from the website EACEA (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency).
- [Thematic Reports](#)
European system of education and thematic areas from the website EACEA (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency).
- [National Report](#)
The National Report on Early School Leaving Issues produced by each European project partner.
- [European Qualifications Framework](#)
The European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) provides a common reference framework which assists in comparing the national qualifications systems, frameworks and their levels.

Welcoming the New Students

The welcome period consists , for headteachers, of different actions :

- Creating a working group (teachers, other actors involved in the school activity)
- Designing an annual plan of activities for new students, with clear and fixed rules
- Organizing an internal - relational and administrative - communication system (see also step 3)

The welcome period lasts all the year round, so the headteacher needs to meet students, teachers and families when the problem is coming out: cooperation and quick information are of course required. In building the annual plan of activities, the headteacher will consider all possibilities, formal and informal, which can help identify and solve the problem. The headteacher cannot manage all the different aspects of students' risks: he needs to have a strong group to cooperate. One of the most important aims of the working group is to organize counseling actions, define when these actions can take place and how students in need of a counseling action can be identified. (Do we need to have different levels of counseling? Shall we start with a general action covering all students? And similar questions)

The ways and the times of internal and external communication are also very important. Such aspects are specifically dealt with in step 3.

Projects

- [Course on Prevention of School Early Leaving](#)
Documents, materials and teacher experiences for a good communication with difficult or truant pupils, parents of absent pupils, etc.
- [Autonomia, Life Skills E Peer Education](#)
To activate a working group, it can be useful to introduce forms of tutoring and peer education.

Communication: Teachers, Students, Families

In the identification of students at risk communication between all stakeholders is essential to act in a fair and timely manner, in the interest of the student and of his/her training. The role of the headteacher should be to identify the communication network and the times and manner of communication both inside and outside the school. First of all, the headteacher involves teachers who daily observe the students and can detect any potential risk behavior. The staff, especially if given specific roles within the classroom and the school, should involve families and possibly other operators to solve the problem and suggest the best opportunities. There are many communication tools that schools can use to identify students at risk. Thanks to information technology, control of some risk indicators such as absences or delays appears to be more immediate. Families themselves may be able to carry out this remote control. However, the headteacher may implement interventions even taking care of family education together with teachers on these issues through regular meetings at precise times of the school year and through a timely and effective communication on the school website.

Websites

- [Course on Prevention of School Early Leaving](#)
The School Inclusion Portal offers an online course for teachers with the aim to provide them with the necessary skills to effectively communicate with students and parents.
- [Product for teachers](#)
Products developed by the teachers involved in the Stay@School project and addressed to the other teachers in order to help them identify and prevent those behaviours and situations that may lead to early school leaving.

Methods and Projects

The headteacher has to disseminate new teaching methods in his work, because teaching methods are surely very important in the identification of students at risk. Actions to recover students at risk are proven successful when strictly connected with the students' practical experiences which makes them protagonists of their learning process. Hence the central idea of choosing that kind of actions as the basis for planning prevention activities. In this regard the most functional teaching method appears to be active learning as it allows to value those learning styles which are typical of students at risk. At the same time it gives a sound base for motivation, tries to promote knowledge through experience and reflection on experience (meta-cognition) and develops a gradually more formalized knowledge through induction, putting into practice the skills acquired in the field. Among all teaching methods, the headteacher should give priority to the most innovative, to involve and motivate students at risk. For example, Cooperative learning, Peer education, Active learning.

Website

- [Teaching methods](#)
From the section Training package of School Inclusion Portal, some collaborative teaching strategies that seem to be particularly fruitful.

Evaluation

The assessment of the school is a tool for intervention for the school manager. It helps check the effectiveness of the training and re-design measures in tackling and preventing risky situations. An assessment tool is the CAF (Common Assessment Framework). The headteacher will arrange a group of people for the school self-evaluation and will build a plan to improve actions regarding students at risk. The process of internal and external assessment has the purpose of identifying risk factors, considering all the aspects of organizational learning, according to the CAF model.

Websites

- [EIPA European Institute of Public Administration](#)
Europe's leading centre of excellence on European integration and the new challenges for public management.

Monitoring

In the various stages of the school year, the headteachers shall prepare the monitoring actions necessary to identify risk factors and to provide the solutions to the problem. First, the monitoring follows the strategic phases of the school year, paying attention to indicators such as the repetition, the pattern of enrollment, dropouts, absences and delays, the pattern of notes and disciplinary punishments. It is important to prepare, together with the staff with teachers, a leaflet, a book, a digital resource simple and easy to read, transferable to the outside in the first place to the families.

Websites

- [External Support & Co-operation Module](#)
It is an interactive module inviting participants to engage with the early school leaver, explore the causes, consequences and the supports in tackling the issue.

Analysis

What data should the headteacher choose to identify the main factors of risk? As it comes to quantitative analysis, what kind of readings can give you these data? As these data can be connected with the statistics normally required by the central and local level about outcomes and training? How to make it easy to read out these data? Each school and training system has obviously a different approach to the problem of early school leaving, and it is often difficult to compare data among different countries. Surely a good starting point could be the analysis of international tests (as OCSE PISA) in literacy, as they offer news about the context, the social level and similar.

Websites

- [Education Indicators in Focus \(EDIF\)](#)
A mix of text, tables and graphs presented in order to make compelling reading, describing the most interesting topics of the policies and practices of education setting them in an international context.
- [OCSE EDIF Education Indicators in Focus](#)
A series of booklets OECD published on a regular basis, on specific indicators in education drawn from the OECD's annual publication "Education at a glance" and that are of particular interest to educators and policy makers.

Report

The construction of an annual report on risk factors and drop out rate is primarily intended to project to the outside of the school, to make education and the social responses known to the community. The report must be made during the school year through a series of observations, questionnaires, reference cards, focus groups, and for this reason, it appears to be closely connected to the paths of self-assessment and quality.

How to build a report: making a collection of testimonials (teachers, families, students, other workers of the schools), comparing the testimonials with other tools made by the school during the year.

Other possibilities: prepare a survey form for teachers, students and families during the various stages of the school year in relation to difficult cases dealt with. After you have picked up and read the results of the cards, you should build a report.

Websites

- [Teachers' testimonials](#)
Testimonials by teachers about the resources and practices for early school leaving prevention available in the Stay@School portal.
- [Success Story](#)
A collection of success stories on the prevention of early school leaving that presents the perspectives of all of the main actors involved: school headmasters, teachers, students and parents.

How to Design and Plan for the Future

At the end of the activities carried out during the school year the headteacher and the work-group can re-design interventions for the future. At this stage it is important to make guidelines for the re-designing phase, according to the SWOT (**S**trengths **W**eaknesses **O**pportunities **T**hreats) model. Of course the use of the SWOT model is in preparation for the future plan for the identification of students at risk, but it is also connected with the general choice of quality in the school and it can be used inside other models, like CAF.

Websites

- [SWOT analysis](#)
A general introduction to SWOT model.
- [RapidBi](#)
Tools for education in SWOT model.
- [EIPA European Institute of Public Administration](#)
Reference to Caf assessment of quality.

Collection and Dissemination of Good Practices

The record of the interventions, the collection of teaching methods and effective practical cases dealt with in the field of risk situations at school, are the basis for documenting all the good practices that the school has put in place in a certain period of time. The use of good practices and their dissemination can occur in the forms that the school considers the most appropriate, from the institutional ones to those chosen at a local level. The dissemination on the Internet (better if schools work as a network) can be a good starting point, but the daily confrontation of all the actors involved in the educational process at school allows you to turn good practices into action, through associations, networks and consortia and through the direct involvement of stakeholders.

Websites

- [Best practice](#)
A method for dissemination and implementation of project results.
- [PBworks](#)
Capture and disseminating lessons learned, case studies and good practices.
- [L'accountability nella scuola](#)
An Italian publication on the accountability in the school.
- [Accountability](#)
Widely-used standards, leading research, and strategic advisory services that help organizations to become more accountable, responsible, and sustainable.