

CHILDREN EDUCATION IN LITHUANIA: WHO HAS THE RIGHT TO BE INVOLVED?

Dr. Ausrine Pasvenskiene, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

Researchers have sought to evaluate the relationship between parental involvement in education and the academic achievement of school children for a number of decades now. Research in this area was once spurred raising a question: which is more important for children learning – the school or the family? The results of different studies and analyses demonstrate a significant relationship between the parental involvement in education and academic outcomes, moreover, child's well-being as a whole.¹ Research shows that parental involvement is strongly related to child's socio-emotional development, later reading proficiency, engagement and enjoyment of reading, high school completion, adaptation in society.²

Today nobody questions the benefit and the need of parental involvement in education. The main focus now is placed on the extent and the form and on how to implement it, having in mind existing traditional, fairly passive role of parents. For example, Finland, since the 1990s has been paying increased attention to parental involvement. It has established the parent-teacher conferences as means of engaging all parents in their children education which are now a regular practice in all schools throughout the country.³ The conferences are guided and regulated by local curricula, and their role and implementation varies among the municipalities and schools.⁴ It can be argued that the formal legal basis provided for parental involvement might contribute to increasing a conscious mutual commitment by parents and teachers to collaborate and support children's development and learning. Accordingly, this paper examines the role of parental involvement in school children education from the Lithuanian legal perspective. The main purpose of this paper is to identify how the role of parental involvement is perceived in legal regulation at national and institutional level. Using Epstein's framework of six types of parental involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community)⁵ the analysis will focus on examining the rights and the responsibilities related to parental involvement in education established in legal documents.

The Law on Education considers parents of the school children as the part of the school community. Together with the teachers and children they are connected by teaching relationships and by common educational goals.⁶ The Law on Education includes the following areas of parental engagement in education:

- 1) Parents have a right to choose between the subject of religion of a traditional religious community or association and the subject of ethics on behalf of learners who are under 14 years of age.⁷
- 2) Parents' active cooperation is required in cases when psychological assistance is needed to reinforce psychological strength and mental health of learners, to foster by preventive measures the creation of a

¹ Fan, X., Chen, M. (2001). Parental Involvement and Students' Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13(1).

² OECD. Review Education Policies. <http://gpseducation.oecd.org/revieweducationpolicies/#!node=41727&filter=all>

³ Karila, K., Alasuutari, M. (2012). Drawing Partnership on Paper: How do the Forms for Individual Educational Plans Frame Parent – Teacher Relationship? *International Journal about Parents in Education*, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 15.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappa*, 76(9), 701-712.

⁶ *Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania*, Official Gazette (1991, 23-593), art. 31.

⁷ *Ibid.*, art. 19.

safe environment favourable for education, to help learners regain emotional harmony, the ability to live and to learn.⁸

- 3) Parents have a right to receive social pedagogical assistance so that the child's right to education be exercised, to ensure the child's safety at school; to help a child choose a school according to his mental and physical abilities and to adapt at school. In case of social pedagogical assistance to learners, parents and teachers receive consultations.⁹
- 4) The cooperation with parents is established in the purpose of healthcare in schools to protect and improve health of learners.¹⁰
- 5) Parents have the right to choose the school.¹¹
- 6) Parents have a duty to pay for the meal service.¹²
- 7) Parents conclude an education agreement of children who are under 14 years old or give the written consent to their children (14-18 years old) to enter into an education agreement. The education agreement specifies the curriculum, the form of its completion, obligations of the parties, validity period of the education agreement, the basis and consequences of its termination, revision.¹³
- 8) Parents have the right: to receive information about education programmes and forms of studies; to participate in the selection of a curriculum, the form of education; to get information about the status of the child, educational and learning needs, progress, school attendance and conduct; to participate in the school's self-governance; to participate in the evaluation of child's special educational needs and to receive a comprehensive information about the evaluation results; to demand the provision of high-quality education to a child.¹⁴
- 9) Parents have a duty: to provide the child with sound and secure living conditions; respect the child, safeguard him against violence, intimidation and exploitation; ensure that the child undergoes timely medical check-ups; co-operate with the school principal, teachers, and other specialists who provide special, psychological, social-pedagogical, special-pedagogical assistance, healthcare in dealing with the issues of children's learning and follow their recommendations; develop the child's values, control and correct the child's behaviour; ensure the child's preparation for school, his learning according to the pre-primary, primary and basic education curricula until he reaches the age of 16; ensure child's punctual and regular school attendance; if the child cannot attend the school, immediately inform the school; participate in the selection of a curriculum and a school for the child with special educational needs.¹⁵
- 10) Parents have the right to participate in self-governance of a school becoming a member of the school council or the parents' council.¹⁶
- 11) Parents as the members of the school community have the right to participate in education management, and unite into associations, organisations and alliances of various interest groups that fulfill tasks and functions for education, culture, scientific research development.¹⁷

The analysis of the Law on Education captures the formal types of parental voice. Listed norms demonstrate the existence of the basic legal assumption for the parental involvement in education. However, it is rather difficult, or

⁸ *Ibid*, art. 19.

⁹ *Ibid*, art. 20.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, art. 22.

¹¹ *Ibid*, art. 29.

¹² *Ibid*, art. 34.

¹³ *Ibid*, art. 45.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, art. 47.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, art. 47.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, art. 60.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, art. 63.

even impossible, to derive a clear and solid legal framework for parents – school partnership or cooperation. It should be mentioned that in reality, parental involvement in Lithuania, such as perceived being beneficial, is still at the premature level. We can either identify its very fragmented and rudimentary stage or notice its incorrect application. Scholars argue that instead of uniting the forces and acting together for the sake of the children, these two different camps (schools and parents) continue to clash and openly oppose to each other. Parents often don't know what they want from schools, quite often their demands are harassing and unrealistic. At the same time, children are often resistant to teachers and provoke them, while the school is afraid to open the door and does not have the intention to change its traditions, the way of everyday work and is against finding the new solutions.¹⁸ The problem often is, that despite the potential benefits of greater communication and co-operation among parents and teachers, many teachers receive little, if any, preparation and training on how to work effectively with families, and therefore lack the necessary communication skills for effective parent-teacher co-operation¹⁹

National education strategy 2013-2020 stresses the low level of partnerships between the schools and the parents and encourages schools to be more open for cooperation with parents and enter into initiatives for broadening the diversity of study content.²⁰ We argue that the attention should be brought towards the parents and schools cooperation and partnerships not only because of its significant impact on the children success but first of all, because of its legal rationale.

The Lithuanian Constitution states that “education shall be compulsory for persons under the age of 16”.²¹ And it is absolutely natural to understand this norm as the duty of the parents to take their children to school and the duty of the state and of the schools to provide education. Many parents believe that only the school is responsible for educating their children. However it is also important to stress that the Civil Code entails both, the parents' right and a duty to properly educate their children, to create favourable conditions for their full and harmonious development so that the child should be ready for an independent life in society.²² Similar obligation is also stated in the Law on Fundamentals of Protection of the Rights of the Child.²³ It can be argued that it's not only the parents right to be involved in children education but it's also their duty. Accordingly, parents and teachers should be prepared to effective communication and partnership. For this reason we argue that certain regulation at municipal or institutional level should be established in order to encourage teachers and parents cooperation and provide the initial framework.

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¹⁸ Grudienė, S. (2017). Tėvai mokykloje? Ne, ačiū! <<https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/svietimas/solveiga-grudiene-tevai-mokykloje-ne-aciu-233-773216>>.

¹⁹ OECD (2017), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume V): Collaborative Problem Solving*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264285521-en>.

²⁰ *The National Education Strategy 2013-2022 approved by Resolution No. XII-745 of the Parliament of Lithuania of 23 December 2013*, Official Gazette (2013, no. 140-7095).

²¹ *Constitution of Republic of Lithuania*, Official Gazette, (1992, No. 33-1014), art. 41.

²² *Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania*. Official Gazette (2000 No. 74-2269), art. 3.155(2).

²³ *Law on Fundamentals of Protection of the Rights of the Child of the Republic of Lithuania*. Official Gazette (2006 No. I-1234), art. 31(2).

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