

Englisch

Equal opportunity, justice, integration and school success: A declaration for cooperation between immigrant parents and schools

Introduction

Children with immigrant origins and socially disadvantaged children are overrepresented in lower school tracks. Why?

Sometimes immigrant parents are seen as the cause, sometimes the schools. The causes are more diverse and depend on various factors. Blaming just the parents or the schools is too simplistic and neglects to take the often difficult circumstances of socially disadvantaged families into account, especially those with immigrant background.

Factually speaking, school success in Switzerland depends heavily on social status and origin, as various studies indicate (for example PISA). That's why this initiative was launched by the "Voice of the Elected Immigrants for all", a coalition of immigrant elected officials at the local, cantonal and national levels, as well as additional partner organizations (see the list below). This "Declaration" has been developed as a support for fairer access for all children to education and the world of work. The declaration for cooperation can be used as a basis for dialogue towards strengthening mutual initiatives involving schools and immigrant parents. The goal is developing and carrying out structural and individual solutions.

All parents - regardless of their origin - have the same legal obligations and responsibilities for cooperation with the school. Parents and schools want to work together to further integration and the school success of all children, so that the children's potential is better realized. We are looking for a positive, solution-oriented cooperation between schools and parents to achieve equal opportunity and justice. We are convinced that these objectives can only be achieved when schools and families work together.

Schools and parents have common goals. Lack of resources and other pressures make it more difficult for parents as well as teachers – despite good intentions – to make the necessary effort. A clarification of responsibilities would promote effective cooperation and release needed resources. The following declaration briefly outlines first the role of the school (school authorities, teachers, etc.), then that of the parents.

Declaration – the Schools' Roles

The responsibility of the cooperating schools, school authorities and government is to actively work toward the following goals. The school is committed in principle to increase the educational success of immigrant children. The guidelines below describe how schools can achieve this:

Equal opportunities:

All children - regardless of their origin, social class or religion – are appropriately supported in school based on their individual needs in order to develop successfully.

Generally accessible early childhood education:

All children should have the chance before they enter kindergarten to develop in a playful manner their language, motor, cognitive and social skills. Early childhood education complements and reinforces family-based learning. (For this goal, cooperation with other authorities is required, depending on the jurisdiction.)

Appropriate, accessible information, advice and participation:

The school or the teacher provides the parents (or guardian) advice on their children's education and currently used teaching methods. Especially for parents who themselves did not attend Swiss schools, participation needs to be actively promoted. Information about the school system from kindergarten through apprenticeship and to academic school (Gymnasium) admissions test needs to be offered in several languages via DVD, parent evenings, etc. By promoting the participation of all parents, the school and its policies can better reflect all children's needs.

Equal learning support for all:

Children learn not only in school, but also through studying and homework. They need an appropriate and peaceful learning environment as well as - based on current practice - parental support and control. These learning conditions depend greatly on the housing situation and parents' own education. The considerable disadvantages which sometimes result need to be balanced by the school as far as possible through appropriate learning spaces and homework coaching.

Promoting cross-cultural skills for teachers¹ and students:

Schools commit themselves to improving the co-existence and cooperation in the multi-cultural context. Through intentional cultural encounters at school the children learn about each other and from each other.

¹ cf. „Empfehlungen zur Interkulturellen Pädagogik an den Institutionen der Lehrerinnen und Lehrerbildung“ COHEP 11/2007, Schweizerische Konferenz der Rektorinnen und Rektoren der Pädagogischen Hochschulen. („Recommendations for intercultural education in teacher's colleges“, COHEP 11/2207, Swiss rectors' conference of the pedagogical universities

Consideration of Multilingualism:

Linguistic diversity is considered in the curriculum development, instruction (including language training and HSK-courses about the own culture and language), supplemental education, selection for the secondary school, school evaluation, and more generally within the school system. This also applies when assessing individual achievements and potential. Multilingual students who exhibit the same performance as someone whose first language is the language of education are demonstrating more potential. This accomplishment deserves proper recognition - for example in selection decisions for secondary school.

More teachers and staff with immigrant backgrounds:

In our schools (almost) all teachers are of Swiss origin. Immigrant children and their families would benefit from role models and confidence building from a person with an immigrant background. Employees with an immigrant background and intercultural mediators are very important, especially until more teachers with immigrant background are hired.

Easy transfers in secondary school:

Comparative research shows that equal opportunity increases, if selection and segregation in secondary school is eliminated. As long as a selection continues, it should take place as late as possible and the transfers should be eased. Regular reclassification gives students an opportunity to improve. Selection decisions should not imply that all doors are permanently closed. In partnership with parents, the school should develop effective ways to enable promotion to a more demanding secondary school or "gymnasium".

Effective assistance in finding an apprenticeship:

Sufficient and appropriate apprenticeship training for each young person who is ready to learn is lacking. Where there is scarcity, it is often youth with immigrant backgrounds who cannot find an apprenticeship. Schools should target support for these young people in the often frustrating search for apprenticeships.

Declaration – the Parents' Roles

Immigrant parents (like all other parents and guardians as well) are responsible to actively pursue the following goals. The parents agree to work for their childrens' school success. The guidelines below describe how to achieve this:

Conducive learning environment:

Parents ensure that their children have enough time and a suitable, quiet place, where they can learn and do their homework.

Commitment to the school:

Parents encourage their children to respect school rules and develop a positive attitude toward learning on a regular basis.

Enough sleep:

Parents see to it that their children go to school prepared and well-rested every day.

Promoting informal learning, healthy nutrition and social development:

Parents promote their child's development through puzzles, crafts, hobbies, excursions into nature, to the zoo or to museums and through joint parent-child activities like reading stories and discussions (also in their first language). Parents inform themselves and their children about social learning (e.g. politeness, conflict management) and health promotion (e.g. dental hygiene, nutrition). The children are encouraged to learn outside the school by participating in age-appropriate, healthy recreational activities.

Understanding the Swiss educational system:

Parents inform themselves about the Swiss educational system in order to further the school success of their children.

Language acquisition:

Children should learn their native language and the local language early (if needed with assistance). Parents should also seek to learn the local language so they can cooperate with the school for their children's education.

Participation in events parents:

Parents should participate in school events (e.g. parent-teacher conferences, parent meetings, parent organizations) - when necessary with cross-cultural interpreters to promote understanding and cooperation - and maintain an information exchange with teachers.

 We are looking for school boards and directors who are interested in furthering the school success of children from immigrant backgrounds, who wish to implement concrete steps and to statistically verify and regularly evaluate their progress with technical support.

Initiators: Voice of the elected immigrants for all

Stimme der gewählten MigrantInnen für alle (as of 30.11.10)

Ricardo Lumengo, Nationalrat
 Antonio Hodgers, Nationalrat
 Mustafa Atici, Grossrat Basel Stadt
 Rithy Chheng, Stadtrat Bern
 Salvatore Di Concilio, Gemeinderat Zürich
 Ylfete Fanaj, Grossstadtrat Luzern
 Alice Heijman, Grossstadtrat Luzern
 Lilliam Jennifer Maldonado, Wohnerrätin Gemeinde Kriens
 Bülent Pekerman, Grossrat Basel Stadt
 Ivica Petrusic, Wohnerrat Aarau, Grossrat Aargau
 Halua Pinto de Magalhães, Stadtrat Bern
 Hasim Sancar, Stadtrat Bern
 Rupan Sivaganesan, Kantonsrat und Gemeinderat Zug
 Lathan Suntharalingam, Grossrat und Grossstadtrat Luzern
 Fatma Tekol, ehem. Kantonsrätin Solothurn und Gemeinderätin Biberist
 Atilla Toptas, Grossrat Basel Stadt
 Mehmet Turan, Grossrat und Bürgergemeinderat Basel Stadt

Supporting Organizations

(as of 30.11.10)

ARGE Integration Ostschweiz
 Ausländerbeirat der Stadt Zürich
 Bildungsmotor.ch
 Fachstelle Elternmitwirkung
 integrationsnetz zug
 KAAZ, kantonale Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Ausländerfragen Zürich
 «Migrantenförderprojekt ChagALL (unterstrass.edu)»
 NCBI Schweiz
 Netzwerk Bildung und Migration, Aargau
 schooling, Zug
 Verein Katamaran

Statement of the Swiss Federation of Teachers LCH

"The Federation of Swiss teachers LCH welcomes the idea that immigrants encourage parents of students with immigrant backgrounds to actively participate in and guide their children's educational success. The LCH wishes the "Gewählte Stimme/Voice of the elected immigrants" every success. The teachers will try to do their part in the success of this ambitious collaboration. "

Statement of Markus Truniger, Program Director "Quality in multi-cultural schools (QUIMS)", Educational Department, Canton Zurich

"In our multi-cultural population, a good cooperation between school and parents is not always a matter of course. But it is of great importance, so that children can progress well in school. Therefore, the initiative of the 'Gewählte Stimme' (Voice of the elected immigrants) is welcome in developing this letter of intent. This means that school representatives and parents can show that they are not only willing to talk, but also to share responsibility for this cooperation. This is an important prerequisite for a good school."

Statement of Andrea Lanfranchi, Prof. Dr., Head of research: "Infants, children and youth with special education needs," Intercantonal School of Special Education Zurich

Stimme der gewählten MigrantInnen für alle
Voix des migrant(e)s élu(e)s pour toutes et tous
Migranti elette ed eletti – una voce per tutti

GEWÄHLTE
STIMME

"What we need today is educational partnerships with parents, not simply carving turnip lanterns for 'Räbeliechtlì' processions. This is easier said than done. Recent studies on the conditions for school success show us in any case, that the cooperation with parents must become an integral part of schools."

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