EARS - Educational Agreement as a Response to School-dropout
2021-1-IT02-KA220-SCH-000032619
Programme Erasmus+ KA220 Cooperation Partnership in School Education
KA2 Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices

PR1: EARS Standardized 4-Countries Anti-Dropout Protocol

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PREAMBLE

This handbook has been realised within the Erasmus+ project EARS - Educational Agreement as a Response to School-dropout" (2021-1-IT02-KA220-SCH-000032619).

It has been created and developed from October 2022 to June 2023 by the partnership composed by GEMEENTE 'S-HERTOGENBOSCH - WEENER XL (Netherlands), IC Copparo (Italy), FONDAZIONE CFP C.E.S.T.A. (Italy), ASOCIATIA EDULIFELONG (Romania), SISERA (Greece), OPEN UP (Greece), Wusmed (Spain), TIRANTES (Netherlands), DANMAR COMPUTERS (Poland), as a collaborative effort aimed at addressing one of the most pressing challenges in education today: the early school leaving.

Through meticulous collaboration and cross-cultural dialogue, we have focused strategies employed by educators in our partner countries. By identifying common patterns and synthesizing critical aspects of various approaches, we have crafted a compendium of actionable insights that align with the standards set forth by the European Union.

Partners were actively engaged in gaining a profound insight into the methodologies of their counterparts. This involved identifying commonalities and distinctive features within their best practices, allowing for the extraction of key elements that contribute to successful interventions. The resulting approaches presented in this handbook have been carefully selected by the partnership, representing a collective endorsement of the most impactful strategies from each country.

At its core, this handbook is a testament to our unwavering commitment to inclusive and accessible education for all. It embodies the spirit of innovation and cooperation, offering practical guidance to teachers and education providers as they navigate the complexities of student retention and success.

As we embark on the journey of implementing the strategies outlined in this handbook, let us remain committed to the shared goal of creating an educational environment where students thrive, stay engaged, and successfully navigate their academic paths, thus mitigating the challenges posed by early school leaving.

Together, through the dissemination and application of these best practices, we can make significant strides in reducing school dropout rates and fostering a more inclusive and supportive educational landscape.

Together, we can build a future where every child has the opportunity to realize their full potential.

STRUCTURE OF THE HANDBOOK

The handbook is organised into four chapters, which describe the following topics:

Chapter A: the introduction briefly overviews how this handbook came about and its goal to share information and best practices for teachers and educators to support students' participation and engagement and prevent early school leaving. Prevention of drop-outs requires a multi-faceted and comprehensive approach that targets the root causes of drop-out rates and implements strategies based on a whole school community to keep students engaged and motivated throughout their educational journey.

Chapter B: understanding the drop-out crisis and its impact refers to a detailed report that analyses the reasons for the drop-out crisis and the significant consequences that can affect individuals, communities, and society. It is essential to deploy and invest in adequate measures to describe this drop-out phenomenon to comprehend why students leave school before completing their education and its significant impact on individuals and society.

Chapter C: the model provides information and best practices gathered by the project partners to prevent early school leaving through effective teaching methods and approaches, increased social support and targeted interventions to reduce the drop-out crisis and ensure that all learners have equal opportunities to succeed in their education. The starting point is the school-wide approach focusing on learner-centred education through STEM methods. The roles of school management, teachers, family and various stakeholders are explained, emphasising the importance of their involvement and partnerships.

Chapter D: **professional development** describes practical training to support teachers and educators on how to engage students by taking measures and thereby more successfully counteract early school leaving. The training, which consists of 3 pillars, namely 1. family involvement, 2. learning the future and 3. labour market, covers all topics described in this handbook.

A. INTRODUCTION

1. The goal of the handbook

The school is a crucial factor in tackling early school leaving, but it cannot work in isolation, as there are factors outside the school that will influence a learner's level of engagement and success. Therefore, a 'whole school approach' to early school leaving is needed. In this approach, the school community (school leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff, learners, parents and families) engages in a cohesive, collective and collaborative action, with strong cooperation with external stakeholders and the community.

This handbook aims to share information and best practices for teachers and educators to support students' participation and engagement and prevent early school leaving.

The 'whole school approach', based on a broad educational community, can be more successful if all partners and stakeholders involved are willing to establish a formal agreement/protocol. From this

perspective, the EARS model aims to provide a list of recommendations that can be implemented at school level and taken into account by schools and stakeholders when formalizing or adapting their protocol.

Furthermore, to be successful, we need to address all the psychological needs of students. It's all about security: identity, belonging, purpose and competence. In addition to the psychological needs mentioned, it is essential to consider other areas that can support students' participation and prevent early school leaving. Here are some additional conditions to consider:

- **Social Support:** Students need to feel connected to their peers, teachers, and other school community members. Encouraging positive relationships, fostering a sense of belonging, and promoting a supportive environment can help students feel more engaged and motivated to stay in school.
- **Academic Engagement:** Students should be actively engaged in their learning experiences. Providing a meaningful and relevant curriculum, incorporating interactive teaching methods, and offering opportunities for hands-on learning can enhance student engagement and reduce the likelihood of early school leaving.
- **Personalisation:** Recognising and accommodating students' needs and learning styles can make a significant difference. Differentiated instruction, personalised learning plans, and tailored support can help students feel valued and empowered in their educational journey.
- **Emotional Well-being:** Supporting students' emotional well-being is crucial for their overall success in school. Promoting a positive school climate, providing access to counselling services, and teaching emotional regulation and resilience skills can contribute to a supportive and nurturing environment.
- **Parental Involvement:** Building strong partnerships between schools and families is essential. Encouraging parental involvement, fostering open communication, and providing resources for parents to support their child's education can create a supportive network that promotes student success.
- **Future Orientation:** Helping students envision their future goals and aspirations can provide them with a sense of purpose and motivation. Offering career guidance, mentorship programs, and exposure to real-world experiences can help students understand the relevance of their education and the opportunities it can bring.
- **Student Voice and Agency**: Empowering students by involving them in decision-making processes, giving them a voice in shaping their learning experiences, and providing opportunities for leadership and responsibility can foster a sense of ownership and commitment to their education.
- **Confidentiality and data protection:** Responsible data management can have a positive impact on student motivation and help prevent early school leaving provided that it respects the privacy of (migrant) students and their families. In other words, we must comply with legal requirements regarding data protection and ensure that personal information is managed securely. Not only respect their fundamental rights, but also create a safe environment to encourage learning, active participation and school success.

2. Working method

This handbook results from a contextual adaptation of best practices in the project partner countries (Greece, Italy, Romania, Poland. Spain and the Netherlands). It's based on an exchange of know-how to find a synthesis and a convenient balance between procedures, tools and competence applied by teachers and education providers involved in contrasting drop-outs. Partners were engaged in an accurate insight of their peers' methodologies, finding common patterns in their best practices and synthesising some critical aspects of different and complex procedures, in line with the EU acquis in standardisation. The approaches suggested in this handbook have been selected by the partnership among all the best practices experienced in each country.

B. UNDERSTANDING THE DROP-OUT CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT

According to the theoretical framework of the PR3 - Impact Research of EARS project, the crisis of student drop-out, as a social or atomic phenomenon or as a manifestation of weaknesses in the educational system, is characterised by complexity and is influenced by a range of many different individual, social, and educational factors which imply to a multi-level examination of the causes and consequences of the phenomenon (Institute of Educational Policy / Observatory on the issues of recording and dealing with leakage, 2017). This crisis can have a potential impact which can be identified into three different levels:

On a **personal level**, repeated academic setbacks can significantly affect the self-perception of young individuals. Such setbacks often lead to feelings of anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, and a negative self-image. These young people might lose their sense of accomplishment and lack the drive to grow and improve. Consequently, their chances of finding suitable employment become limited, trapping them in a cycle of continuous failure. Additionally, they may perceive themselves as disadvantaged compared to their peers and the broader social context, leading to a lack of confidence in their abilities and potential (Bosniadou & Papatheofilou, 1998)

Research from various studies (Na, 2017; Adelman & Szekely, 2016; Sum et al., 2019; Lamp et al., 2010) indicates that adults lacking qualifications tend to exhibit several common characteristics, such as the next:

- Vulnerability and Sensitivity: These individuals often feel vulnerable and sensitive to criticism and negative feedback.
- Guilt: They may experience a sense of guilt, possibly stemming from their perceived inadequacies.
- Poor Self-Image and Low Self-Esteem: Adults without qualifications typically have a negative self-image and struggle with low self-esteem.
- Low Self-Confidence: Their lack of qualifications can diminish self-confidence in various areas of life.
- Lack of Activation: They might find initiating action or motivating to achieve their goals challenging.
- Aggressive or Resigned Behavior: In response to their circumstances, they may display tendencies of aggression or resignation.
- Increased Vulnerability: Their disadvantaged position makes them more susceptible to being victimised by others.

Moreover, teenagers with low self-esteem and a diminished sense of personal efficacy commonly demonstrate the following traits:

- Dependency on Others: They often rely heavily on others for validation and decision-making.
- Lack of Imagination: Their creative thinking and imagination may be limited.
- Social Skills Deficit: They struggle with interpersonal interactions and may have difficulties in social situations.
- Lack of Assertiveness: The ability to assert themselves and communicate their needs is typically lacking.
- Constant Defense Mode: They may frequently need to be defensive to protect their self-esteem.
- The utilisation of Alienated Mechanisms: Unhealthy defence mechanisms are employed to cope with challenges.
- Avoidance of Self-Criticism: They tend to avoid critically evaluating their actions or behaviour.
- Reduced Creativity and Flexibility: A lack of confidence may hinder their ability to think creatively and adapt to new situations.
- Conformity to Social Values: They often adhere strictly to the values and norms of their social environment.
- Increased Authoritarianism: They may display more authoritarian tendencies in their attitudes and behaviour (Adelman & Szekely, 2016).

At the **social level,** individuals who drop out of education face various challenges, such as:

- Feelings of Disadvantage: They experience a sense of disadvantage compared to their peers who have completed their education.
- Difficulties in Social Recognition: Their lack of qualifications may hinder their social recognition and acceptance.
- Lack of Social Skills: They may lack essential social skills needed for interpersonal interactions due to inadequate education.
- Seeking Social Contacts Based on Embarrassment: They may seek social contacts primarily based on embarrassment and disadvantage.
- Increased Likelihood of Delinquency, Social Discredit, and Exclusion: Drop-outs are more prone to engaging in delinquent behaviour, facing social discredit, and being excluded from certain social circles (Lamb et al., 2010).

Furthermore, drop-outs contribute to the rise of unemployment rates. According to data from the European Commission (2016), individuals with low qualifications (ISCED levels 0-2) had an employment rate of 48.5% in 2015, close to the EU-28 average. Meanwhile, those with medium qualifications (ISCED levels 3-4) had an employment rate of 56.4%, considerably lower than the EU average. The low-skilled population's lack of skills and qualifications increases the risk of adopting antisocial behaviors.

Regarding **the professional and financial impact** of dropping out of school, individuals who leave education prematurely experience several limitations, such as the next:

- Reduced Career Opportunities: Their lack of educational qualifications means they have fewer options for potential careers.
- Inability to Find Quality Jobs: They struggle to secure jobs with good prospects and quality without the minimum formal qualifications.
- Uncertain Future Prospects: Dropping out leaves them unsure about their future and professional trajectory.
- Forced into Unrelated Jobs: Often, they are compelled to work in positions that do not align with their potential, capabilities, or interests.

- Employment in Low-Skilled Jobs: They typically find work in auxiliary, manual, or seasonal roles as unskilled personnel.

This limited job market participation results in lower incomes than graduates or skilled workers. In the case of unemployment, society incurs additional expenses such as unemployment benefits, question allowances, and school review allowances[1] (Farrington et al., 2017).
Numerous studies examining the school drop-out phenomenon highlight a wide range of adverse effects and advocate for prevention and intervention strategies (Kaplan & Peck, 1995; Kirazoglu, 2009; Barclay, 1966; Lessard et al., 2010; Crowder & South, 2003; Franklin & Streeter, 1995; Frotin et al., 2010; Figueira-McDonough, 1992).

Not graduating from school has far-reaching implications, affecting individuals, families, and society. Those at risk of dropping out often experience depression, dissatisfaction, and alienation. Abandoning school is associated with poor mental and physical health and an increased likelihood of engaging in criminal activities or relying on government support programs (Grossman & Kaestner, 1997; Rumberger, 1987; Witte, 1997). These individuals are more susceptible to joining gangs, abusing alcohol and drugs, and adopting violent or criminal behaviors (Blakemore & Low, 1984).

(For the full report, see PR3 EARS Impact Research).

C. THE MODEL

RISK PROFILING

Detecting students at risk of early leaving or dropping out as early as possible is of utmost importance. Early identification allows educators and support systems to intervene promptly and provide the necessary assistance to help these students stay on track. By identifying warning signs such as poor attendance, declining grades, behavioral issues, disengagement, or lack of motivation, teachers and support staff can implement targeted interventions to address the underlying challenges. When at-risk students receive early help and intervention, it can significantly improve their chances of staying in school and achieving academic success. By identifying their specific needs, implementing tailored interventions, and providing additional resources, educators can help these students overcome obstacles, catch up academically, and develop the necessary skills for success.

Moreover, early detecting and addressing drop-out risk is more cost-effective than trying to re-engage students who have already disengaged or dropped out. Early intervention reduces the need for extensive remedial measures or alternative education options, ultimately saving educational institutions and society resources. Early detection and intervention impact a student's immediate educational journey and have long-term effects on their prospects. It is a proactive approach that benefits both individual students and the educational system as a whole.

Adopting a systematic approach to identifying learners at risk of early leaving is a crucial first step in effectively addressing the issue. Education and training providers can identify at-risk students and

[1] Financial support or incentives provided to schools to undergo assessments or evaluations to ensure their adherence to educational standards and quality. It is a process in which schools are examined, often by external bodies, to assess their curriculum, teaching methods, infrastructure and general educational environment. School review allowances are generally designed to improve the quality of education by identifying areas for improvement and providing resources to address them.

implement appropriate interventions through a structured and comprehensive process. A systematic approach ensures that the identification process is consistent and standardised across educational settings. Furthermore, they can minimise subjectivity and ensure fairness in the identification process by establishing clear criteria and procedures for identifying at-risk students. It allows for a comprehensive assessment of multiple risk factors contributing to early leaving. It involves gathering data on various aspects, including academic performance, socio-economic background, attendance records, behavioral indicators, and student engagement. This holistic assessment provides a more accurate picture of the student's overall risk level and helps tailor interventions to their needs.

SYNTHESIS PROVIDED BY THE BEST PRACTICES

COOPERATION AMONG SCHOOL: Establish collaboration and coordination with schools of different orders and grades to support the transition of at-risk students from one cycle to another. It involves both digital tools and analogic tools such as School-to-school transition forms. This approach ensures identification and intervention efforts over time, enabling long-term impact and reducing drop-out rates.

EARLY WARNING SYSTEM: Implement a system for regular monitoring of risk factors (such as behavior, disengagement, learning disorders, disabilities, and immigration issues) to early identify students' signals of risk of dropping out. Establish a care route to be followed by teaching and non-teaching staff as soon as students observe signs and use monitoring forms, in which qualitative data are periodically collected starting from the beginning of the school year. Signaling moments/data such as:

- Data from the primary school
- Profiling of the families
- Signaling by teachers/mentors/counsellors
- Discussions about the students and report meetings, and qualified tests
- A periodic meeting between the coordinator and professional staff.

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING: Collect relevant data about the risk indicators (such as attendance, absences, poor grades, and grade repetition) and use it to make evidence-based choices regarding interventions and resource allocation. The data-driven approach enhances the effectiveness of interventions and ensures that resources are targeted where they are most needed. It involves digital tools, including automated alerts or reports, and analogic tools, such as an observation grid for early detection of risk factors.

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

1. The school as a collaborative learning environment

The school community (school leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and families) and external stakeholders take responsibility for helping all learners develop to the best of their abilities. That means applying a strategic **'whole school approach'**. The objective of assisting the learners to fulfil their unique potential is promoted consistently and systematically across all dimensions of school life, i.e., ethos and the environment; curriculum; teaching, learning and assessment; connections with the community and other external actors, etc. A strategic vision is needed for inclusive, learner-centered education to prevent and reduce early school leaving and promote educational success for all learners. The school's primary mission is to ensure that all learners can benefit from quality education and reach their full growth potential irrespective of socio-economic status or individual or family-related circumstances. A learner-centered strategic vision focuses on creating safe, welcoming and caring learning environments where learners are engaged and can grow and develop as individuals and community members, feel respected and valued, and have their specific talents and needs recognised.

A 'whole school approach' must systematically engage in **collaborative strategic planning.** A process to integrate all the activities into a coherent plan and to monitor and evaluate the progress. This school development/improvement plan serves as a reference document which guides school activities and facilitates monitoring and self-evaluation. As a strategic plan, it should clearly and simply set the school's priorities, measures to raise standards, resources needed, and the key outcomes and targets it intends to achieve.

School planning is not just a task for those in the school community. Still, it should also involve the input and perspectives of all relevant stakeholders in a participatory process focused on the school's future. Stakeholders include public authorities (as appropriate, depending on the national context); parents, families and community groups; external partners, for example, social care and support services; and school community members, including the learners.

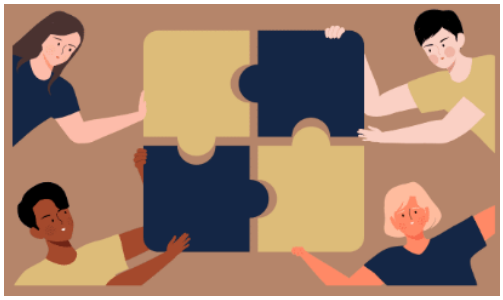
2. Effective leadership and school governance

Effective leadership and governance are necessary to promote a more cohesive and collaborative culture and ethos in schools and to establish good cooperation with the broader community. Schools must have **sufficient flexibility and autonomy**. School staff are in the best position to identify and respond to their learners' concrete and sometimes complex needs to determine appropriate teaching practices and approaches to curriculum implementation.

School leaders should be able to share authority by distributing leadership roles within the school. In a **'distributed leadership'** model, leadership, teaching and non-teaching staff, learners, parents and families are encouraged to take on leading roles in a particular area of expertise, to assume responsibility, and individually or as part of a group, to take the initiative.

It is essential to obtain a **supportive school culture**, but there are some challenges regarding human resources management. It may include, for example, convincing school staff of the benefits of collaboration, creating diverse teams of teaching and non-teaching staff, and ensuring the sustainability of collaborative work. Therefore, providing teachers adequate time and space for collaborative work is recommended.

3. Networking and Formal collaboration



Cooperation within education systems can take different forms – from networking to more formalised collaboration of schools. **'Networking'** includes teachers and other school staff coming together to discuss ideas and share good practices on specific topics or reciprocal sharing of resources to benefit the individual schools and communities. **'Formal collaboration'** is usually a more formal grouping of several schools in the same city or local region, with joint vision and development processes and decision-making. School representatives collaborate to share resources or work on more significant initiatives contributing to schools and areas. Think about:

- Facilitating transitions between education levels (e.g., early childhood education and care to primary education, primary education to secondary education, including vocational education and training).
- The continuity of learner support across schools/regions and throughout a pupil's education.
- Working in multidisciplinary teams, able to take a variety of approaches but in a coordinated way.
- Parental involvement.
- Teacher training and continuous professional development of teachers.
- Collaboration with the Labour market **(**career guidance, labour market needs, etc.).

4. Specific school situation and critical aspects

Several critical aspects require careful consideration and attention to ensure the school operates smoothly, provides quality education, and creates a safe and conducive learning environment for all students. Among them, we mention the location and accessibility of the school, type and size of the school, student diversity and inclusion, staff recruitment and retention, financial Management and Sustainability and School Policy.

Urban or Rural Location:

- Access to Resources: Urban schools have better access to libraries, museums, technology, and extra-curricular activities. Rural schools may face challenges in providing equal access to these resources.
- Diversity: Urban schools often have a more diverse student population regarding ethnicity, culture, and socio-economic backgrounds, providing students with different perspectives and experiences. Rural schools can have a more homogeneous student population.

- Infrastructure: Urban schools usually have better infrastructure, including well-equipped classrooms, labs, and sports facilities. Rural schools may struggle with limited infrastructure due to budget constraints and lack of resources.
- Community Support: Rural schools often benefit from strong community support and engagement, fostering a sense of belonging and collaboration. Urban schools may face challenges in building community connections due to the transient nature of urban neighborhoods.
- Safety and Security: Urban schools may encounter higher safety concerns due to crime rates and transportation challenges. Rural schools generally have a safer environment but might face issues like distance and transportation for students living in remote areas.

Type and Size of the School:

- Student-Teacher Ratio: A low student-teacher ratio allows for more personalised attention and support, enhancing the learning experience. Smaller urban or rural schools may have an advantage in maintaining a lower ratio.
- School Type: The type of school, such as public, private, charter, or magnet, can affect the curriculum, teaching methods, and available resources. Each type has its advantages and challenges, influencing the educational experience.
- School Size: Smaller schools often offer a tight-knit community, closer relationships between students and teachers, and a sense of belonging. Larger schools may provide more diverse academic programs, extra-curricular activities, and resources.

Student diversity and inclusion:

- Socio-economic Status: Students' socio-economic backgrounds can impact their access to resources, educational opportunities, and academic achievement. Schools need to address disparities and provide support to students from low-income families.
- Cultural and Linguistic Diversity: Students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds bring unique perspectives and experiences to the classroom. Schools should promote inclusivity, provide English language support, and celebrate diversity.
- Special Needs and Disabilities: Schools must cater to students with special needs or disabilities, ensuring they receive appropriate accommodations, individualised education plans, and support services.

Financial Management and School Policy:

- Budget Allocation: Effective financial management ensures equitable allocation of funds to support teaching staff, learning resources, infrastructure maintenance, and extra-curricular activities. Transparent budgeting processes and policies are crucial.
- Fundraising and Grants: Schools may need to engage in fundraising efforts or apply for grants to supplement their budgets. Developing strategies to secure additional funding is essential for maintaining quality education and technology integration.
- Risk Assessment and Mitigation: Schools should conduct thorough assessments to identify potential financial risks and develop mitigation strategies. It may involve contingency planning, financial forecasting, and monitoring of expenditures.
- Policy Development and Implementation: Well-defined school policies regarding financial management, fee structures, scholarships, and financial aid programs promote transparency,

accountability, and fairness. Regular policy review and adaptation are necessary to address changing needs.

TEACHER'S ROLE AND SUPPORT

1. Teacher's skills and competences

The role of a teacher calls for the use of **a wide variety of methods, tools and approaches** tuned to the learners' needs. Teachers need new skills and competencies to work with students and stakeholders within and outside the school to provide timely support to learners. The intended teacher in the EARS model is the one who:

- Builds powerful, positive and trust-based relationships with learners from all backgrounds.
- Provides learners with feedback and supports progress toward learning goals.
- Leads and acts as change agents[2] and mentors within and beyond the classroom.
- Communicates and cooperates with fellow teachers, support staff, parents, and other relevant professionals.
- Ensures through regular meetings and updates that everyone knows the student's progress, challenges, and supports requirements.
- Involves parents in their children's learning and development.
- Shows competence and willingness to cooperate with and involves external partners, including local employers.
- Has knowledge and awareness of students' cognitive, social and behavioral development (e.g., well-being).
- Developpes an orientation dimension in teaching as a key competence for the twenty-first-century school to help students master their life path and gain self-knowledge based on their attitudes, needs, and goals. The "orientational education model" aims to help all students acquire self-awareness and autonomy in thought and action through a social context where relationships with others provide space for personal and social growth. Shaping individual personalities capable of making choices and decisions about, experimenting with, and projecting their learning and implementation paths, as well as accepting change and uncertainty with creative and personal responses, begins at school. For this reason, the teacher and the school can only orient to make each individual aware of himself and his learning styles to develop the ability to participate actively in his training process.

[2] According to the research of dr. H.R.M.A.van der Heijden supported by the Netherlands organisation for scientific Research (NWO) you can recognize teachers as change agents by four general characteristics, which in turn can be broken down into nine sub-characteristics.
1. Mastery - focus on students and on student learning, confidence in one's own abilities and professional motivation
2. Collaboration - professional collegiality
3. Entrepreneurship - focus on classroom-level innovation and focus on school-level innovation
4. Lifelong learning - focus on personal development and focus on professional action

2. STEM education

STEM education is **crucial to meet the needs of a changing world** and, thus, an important part of **learning the future**. It is a paradigm shift from traditional education based on repeating and reproducing knowledge to a more modern working method. It is an interdisciplinary approach that helps students succeed in college and their future careers. The focus of STEM education is hands-on, problem-based learning. Teaching is not merely about providing knowledge to students. It must answer what students can do with that knowledge in the future. Education has to be **an active, constructive process** and not a receptive process. Investigative, discovering and designing learning are central.

The STEM teacher will be responsible for developing learning activities and hands-on material, tending to individual student needs, and communicating regularly with parents. These include the following:

- Putting the student in **the center of learning**
- teaching in the role of **facilitator** of the learning process
- **Developing STEM** learning activities and hands-on material for classes.
- **Showing awareness** and **encouraging** students from different backgrounds/ cultures in various ways to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment.
- **Encouraging females** to engage in STEM studies to raise awareness about the value of technical and scientific training, and to counter gender stereotypes.
- Providing **extra support** to students who need it.
- Monitoring student growth to **identify strengths and areas for improvement**.
- Providing **regular feedback** to students.
- Focusing **on 21st Century skills** such as problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, decision-making, leadership, entrepreneurship, acceptance of failure, etc.

STEM methodologies can significantly support and enhance the learning experience by fostering an engaging, interactive, and problem-solving-oriented approach to education.
Think about:

- **Real-world relevance** methodologies emphasising the practical applications of knowledge in real-world contexts.
- **Inquiry-based learning** methodologies to nurture curiosity and problem-solving skill
- **Technology integrational methodologies** to help students become familiar with relevant tools and prepares them for a technology-driven world, such as the use of robotics or virtual reality, etc**.**
- **Interdisciplinary connections** allowing students to see the relationships between different fields, promoting a holistic understanding of complex issues.
- **Collaboration and teamwork** teaching students to communicate effectively, share ideas, and appreciate diverse perspectives.

(See also ANNEX 1: Methods and practical tools to apply STEM)

3. Teacher education, support and continuing professional development

The quality of teachers is essential to guarantee a good education. It implies recruiting and retaining highly qualified and skilled teachers who are passionate about teaching and possess subject matter expertise. It is essential to provide professional development opportunities to enhance their instructional practices and keep them updated with the latest educational research. Teachers should also be

encouraged to **build networks** with other teachers, experts and researchers for information exchange and knowledge building on improving inclusive education and tackling early school leaving. A focus on understanding Early School Leaving should become a **core element** of initial teacher education and continuous professional development programs. There are **several areas** for which teachers need continuing development, such as:

- Having the competence to diagnose learners at risk.
- Knowing the causes and consequences of early school leaving.
- Applying measures for prevention, intervention and remediation of early school leaving.
- Working with parents.
- Teaching cross-curricular skills.
- Teaching in multilingual and multicultural settings.
- Study career counselling and guidance.
- Teaching learners with special educational needs.
- New technology in the workplace, including schools.
- Approaches to individualised teaching and learning.
- Conducting classroom-based individual and collaborative research.

Some of the most **effective ways** to implement continuing professional development that also enhances collaborative cultures in schools are:

- Building professional communities and teacher networks.
- Peer-to-peer learning and Peer observation.
- In-service (internal) training.
- Mentoring and coaching among staff and other professionals.
- Giving teachers space for collective reflection and inquiry to discuss and solve current problems, improve learning, strengthen the school climate, and exchange observations, experiences, and views.
- Online or face-to-face (external) courses.
- Research to test innovative teaching practices.
- Teaching practices database to share knowledge on effective practices.

- Regular teacher evaluations

SYNTHESIS PROVIDED BY THE BEST PRACTICES

ANTI-DROPOUT SPECIALIST: Integrate the school staff with a professional (included in the teaching or even non-teaching staff) specifically dedicated to supervising the monitoring of drop-out phenomenon) and help teachers or class coordinators in touch with at-risk students to activate an effective and personalised orientation action towards the student in collaboration with social and health referents and other stakeholders.

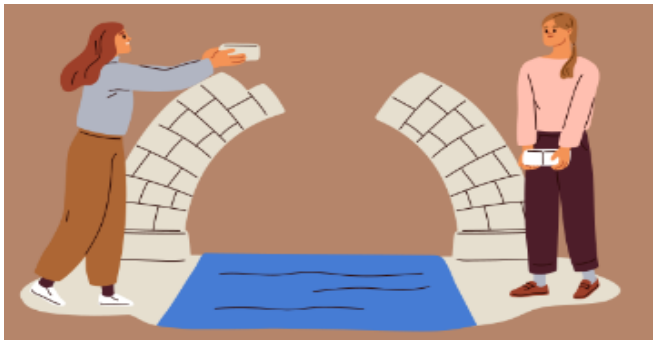
MENTORSHIP: A mentor is an excellent support for the teacher, as a figure that can build a good relationship with the pupils in the class, leaving time and space for the teacher to focus on individual learning goals.

LISTENING CENTER: (see also Family Involvement) that provides an individual advisory/ consultant service for teachers and non-teaching staff, mainly led by psychologists. It is a space for discussion and reflection on the understanding of issues that may arise in professional practice to understand better the problem situations related to the class group or individual students and identify possible ways and strategies of intervention.

SUPPORT TEAM: This practice involves creating a team consisting of professionals (like as a School social worker; support Coordinator; behavioral specialist/remedial educationalist; School doctor/school nurse; Counsellors, Tutors and Pedagogists) who work collaboratively to identify and address the needs of these students. The team's primary goal is to provide comprehensive support, intervention, and resources to help students overcome challenges and increase their chances of success in school.

PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING BETWEEN TEACHERS, WORKSHOPS, TRAINING SESSIONS, SEMINARS, AND CONFERENCES: Regular interventions focused on topics related to drop-out prevention strategies, identification of students at risk, techniques for supporting students who may be at risk of dropping out, are worthy to improve the quality of teaching, and ensure that teachers are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to educate their students effectively.

4. Teachers and their relationships with pupils and parents



A supportive long-term relationship between the teacher and learner is crucial for improving learner engagement and achievement. **Trust-based, respectful and cooperative relationships** between teachers, learners, their parents, and the wider community also influence positive learning outcomes. Essential elements for such associations include:

- Build and maintain an **inclusive, safe classroom environment** and a culture of trust.
- Develop their knowledge, competencies and skills related to **understanding diversity** in all its forms.
- Accept that some learners may have different family and socio-economic backgrounds, which may influence their learning process and may need **extra support**.
- Be aware that your attitudes, expectations, and words may significantly impact and influence learners. **Communication skills** are also needed to work effectively with parents, other school staff and professionals outside of school (for example, avoiding less well-known terminology).
- Recognise the significant role **of parents** (and other adults and peers).

LEARNERS SUPPORT

1. Achieving a safe, trustful and open environment

Learners (particularly those with learning difficulties or disabilities or who face personal, social or emotional challenges) need **easy access** to teachers and other professionals who can support their educational and personal development. Consideration should be given to the **impact of critical life events** (including traumatic events) on the unique story of a young person. Emotional and psychological support services also include social and family-related services. These services must be provided **in the school or connection with local agencies and services.** They should build the learner's self-confidence, trust and motivation, enabling young persons to think more positively about their future. **Peer coaches** or **mentors** may also be effective in providing socio-emotional support. Also, consider school anti-bullying strategies.

2. Learner's involvement in school

It's crucial in order to involve and engage learners in school to create a positive and interactive learning environment that fosters active participation and student-centered approaches. The key to involving and engaging learners is creating an inclusive and interactive learning environment that values student input, encourages curiosity, and supports their needs and interests.

Here are some strategies to accomplish this: (*see also 2. STEM education and ANNEX 1: Methods and practical tools to apply STEM*)

- **Build a supportive classroom culture:** Establish a safe and inclusive environment where students feel respected, valued, and comfortable expressing their thoughts and ideas. Encourage collaboration, empathy, and active listening among students.
- **Incorporate hands-on activities**: Integrate hands-on experiences, experiments, and projects into the curriculum to promote active learning. It allows students to engage with the material directly, enhancing their understanding and retention.

- **Use technology and multimedia:** Apply educational tools, multimedia resources, and interactive online platforms to make lessons more dynamic and appealing. Incorporate videos, interactive quizzes, educational games, and virtual simulations to enhance student engagement and understanding.
- **Differentiate instruction:** Recognise students' diverse learning styles, abilities, and interests. Differentiate instruction by providing multiple learning pathways, offering various activities, materials, and resources that cater to individual needs.
- **Encourage active participation:** Promote student involvement by using strategies such as class discussions, group work, debates, and role-playing. Allow students to take ownership of their learning by encouraging questions, offering choices, and involving them in decision-making.
- **Relate content to real-world applications:** Help students understand the relevance and practical applications of their learning by connecting concepts to real-life situations. Show how the subject relates to their lives, careers, and world.
- **Provide meaningful feedback:** Offer timely and constructive feedback to students, focusing on their strengths and areas for improvement. Encourage self-assessment and peer feedback to foster a growth mindset and a sense of ownership over their learning.
- **Incorporate experiential learning:** Arrange field trips, guest speakers, and hands-on experiences outside the classroom to expose students to new environments, perspectives, and learning opportunities. These experiences can make learning more tangible and memorable.
- **Foster creativity and critical thinking:** Encourage creative expression, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills through open-ended assignments, project-based learning, and opportunities for innovation. Provide opportunities for students to explore their interests and pursue independent research.
- **Celebrate achievements**: Recognise and celebrate student achievements, both big and small. It can be done through verbal praise, certificates, displays of student work, or class-wide celebrations. Positive reinforcement encourages continued engagement and motivation.

3. Career guidance and support

Career guidance and support should be integrated into the curricula from the earliest stages of education. A wrong school orientation, or a total lack of direction, often leads to school drop-out and early school leaving. Students with a career plan[3] are likelier to remain in school and engage more with their education. It may be developed separately or embedded in the curriculum, for example, within the context of several different subjects. Supporting career guidance at school is essential for helping students make informed decisions about their future. Career guidance is an ongoing process that requires collaboration among teachers, counsellors, administrators, and student's families. By actively supporting career guidance initiatives, you can play a vital role in helping students make informed decisions about their future careers.

Here are some suggestions on how you can contribute to career guidance at school:

- **Encourage exploration**: Encourage students to explore a wide range of career options. Help them understand that numerous paths are available and that changing their minds is okay. Provide resources such as books, websites, and guest speakers to expose them to various careers.
- **Collaborate with career counsellors:** Work closely with the school's career counsellors. They have expertise in guiding students and can provide valuable insights. Coordinate with them to organise career fairs, workshops, or individual counselling sessions.
- **Facilitate networking opportunities:** Arrange for professionals from different fields to visit the school and interact with students. These interactions can inspire students, provide firsthand knowledge about various careers, and help them build a professional network.
- **Organise informational sessions:** Conduct sessions where professionals or alumni can share their career journeys, experiences, and advice. It will help students gain insights into various industries and understand the skills and qualifications required for different careers.
- **Implement aptitude and interest assessments:** Support the administration in implementing student aptitude and interest assessments. These assessments can provide valuable insights into students' strengths, interests, and potential career matches. Use the results to guide discussions and provide tailored advice.
- **Provide internship opportunities:** Foster partnerships with local businesses, organisations, or community members who can offer internship opportunities to students. Hands-on experience can help students gain practical knowledge, build skills, and explore career paths.
- **Offer career-related workshops:** Conduct workshops on resume writing, interview skills, job search strategies, and professional etiquette. Equip students with the skills to navigate the job market and succeed in their chosen careers.
- **Maintain a career resource center:** Establish a dedicated area or online platform where students can access career-related resources, including books, websites, job postings, and scholarship information. Ensure the resources are regularly updated and easily accessible.

[3] A career plan lists short- and long-term career goals and the actions you can take to achieve them. Career plans can help you make decisions about what classes to take, and identify the extracurricular activities, research, and internships that will make you a strong job candidate.

- **Foster mentorship programs**: Facilitate mentorship programs that connect students with professionals in their fields of interest. Mentors can provide guidance, share their experiences, and help students set career goals.
- **Continuously assess and improve**: Regularly assess the effectiveness of career guidance initiatives and seek feedback from students, parents, and staff. Use this feedback to improve and tailor the guidance to meet students' needs.

SYNTHESIS PROVIDED BY THE BEST PRACTICES

CAREER FAIRS: organise career fairs where students can interact with representatives from colleges, universities, vocational schools, and employers. It allows them to learn about educational programs, job opportunities, and industry trends. It would be advantageous to let students participate in workshops to learn about different careers, explore their interests and skills, and understand the educational pathways and job prospects associated with various fields.

PROFESSIONAL GUEST: invite professionals from different industries to speak to students about their career journeys, job responsibilities, and the skills required for success. Interviews can provide valuable insights and inspire students.

4. Extra-curricular and out-of-school educational activities

Extra-curricular and out-of-school educational activities, primarily when organised with stakeholders, refer to actions outside the regular school curriculum and provide additional learning experiences for students. These activities are designed to enhance students' knowledge, skills, and personal development beyond the confines of traditional classroom learning. Extra-curricular and out-of-school educational activities should complement curriculum delivery and maximise learner participation and social inclusion.

Here's a description of common types of extra-curricular and out-of-school educational activities:

- **Clubs and Organisations:** Schools often offer various clubs and organisations catering to different interests and hobbies. These can include academic clubs (e.g., math club, science club), cultural clubs (e.g., drama club, music club), sports clubs, debate teams, and more. Students can join these clubs to pursue their passions, develop new skills, and engage in collaborative and creative activities with like-minded peers.
- **Sports and Physical Activities:** Participating in sports teams and physical activities outside regular physical education classes can provide numerous benefits. It promotes physical fitness, teamwork, discipline, and leadership skills. Students can engage in various sports, such as soccer, basketball, tennis, swimming, track and field, and martial arts.
- **Community Service:** Community service activities involve students volunteering their time to help others and contribute to their communities. These activities include organising fundraisers, participating in charity events, tutoring younger students, assisting in local environmental projects, or

volunteering at hospitals or nursing homes. Community service promotes empathy, social responsibility, and a sense of civic duty.

- **Competitions and Olympiads:** Competitions and Olympiads provide opportunities for students to showcase their knowledge and skills in various fields. These can include academic competitions (e.g., science fairs, spelling bees, math competitions), art competitions (e.g., music festivals, art exhibitions), and sports competitions. Participating in these events fosters healthy competition, critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and perseverance.
- **Workshops and Skill Development Programs:** Workshops and skill development programs also organised in the school during extra-curricular time offer focused training in specific areas of interest. These include coding workshops, creative writing programs, leadership development courses, STEM, technical and entrepreneurship seminars, and language immersion programs. Students can gain new knowledge, refine existing skills, and explore potential career paths through these programs.
- **Field Trips and Excursions:** Field trips and excursions provide opportunities for students to learn outside the classroom by visiting museums, historical sites, science centers, zoos, botanical gardens, libraries and other educational venues. These experiences offer hands-on learning, promote curiosity and discovery, and allow students to connect theoretical knowledge to real-world applications.

Participating in extra-curricular and out-of-school educational activities can broaden students' horizons, foster personal growth, build social connections, and develop essential life skills. These activities complement classroom learning and contribute to a well-rounded education.

5. Learner-centered approaches

A learner-centered approach, also known as a student-centered approach or learner-focused approach, is an educational philosophy and methodology that places the learner at the center of the learning process. It emphasises the active involvement of students in their learning, promoting their autonomy, engagement, and critical thinking skills. A learner-centered approach can be very effective in preventing school drop-out. Identifying and addressing early learning gaps makes it possible to prevent students from falling behind. In addition, it provides extra support and resources to help struggling students catch up and give them confidence in their abilities.

Here is a description of learner-centered approaches and their key characteristics:

- **Active Learning:** Learner-centered approaches encourage students to engage in learning actively. Rather than passively receiving information from teachers, students are encouraged to participate, explore, and discover knowledge through various activities such as discussions, group work, experiments, and projects.
- **Personalised Learning:** Learner-centered approaches recognise that each student has unique interests, abilities, and learning styles. Teachers strive to create a learning environment that caters to individual needs and preferences, allowing students to learn at their own pace and pursue topics of interest.
- **Collaboration and Peer Learning:** Learner-centered approaches promote collaborative learning environments where students work together to solve problems, share ideas, and learn from one another. Practising peer learning activities, such as group projects and peer feedback, foster communication skills, teamwork, and a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

- **Problem-Based Learning:** Learner-centered approaches often employ problem-based learning strategies. Students are presented with real-world problems or scenarios that require critical thinking, analysis, and problem-solving skills. They are encouraged to actively seek solutions, research information, and apply their knowledge to solve these problems, promoting a deeper understanding of the subject matter.
- **Inquiry-Based Learning:** Learner-centered approaches encourage students to ask questions, explore topics of interest, and actively seek answers through research and investigation. Teachers facilitate the learning process by guiding students' inquiries, helping them develop research skills, and fostering a sense of curiosity and exploration.
- **Competence-based learning**: learner-centered approaches focus on developing relevant skills and knowledge, encourage active involvement in the learning process and promote a better understanding of the subject matter. It also helps accommodate students' needs and learning styles, making education more accessible and inclusive.
- **Assessment for Learning**: Learner-centered approaches focus on continuous evaluation and feedback to support student learning. Instead of relying solely on traditional tests and exams, formative assessments, such as projects, presentations, portfolios, and self-reflection, are used to gauge students' understanding, progress, and areas for improvement.
- **Student Autonomy and Ownership:** Learner-centered approaches empower students to take ownership of their learning. They are encouraged to set goals, choose, and reflect on their learning process. Teachers act as facilitators and guides, providing support and resources and allowing students to drive their learning.

Overall, learner-centered approaches shift the focus from a teacher-centered model to one that prioritises students' needs, interests, and active engagement. These approaches aim to create lifelong learners prepared to navigate an ever-changing world by fostering autonomy, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

6. Monitoring learners at high risk

Learners may go through difficult periods in their social or family lives or may have negative school experiences that throw them off track. Early detection of learning difficulties, socio-emotional distress, or disengagement is vital – before they manifest through school absenteeism or inappropriate behaviour. Beyond "ordinary" signals of dropping out, it is essential to monitor specific categories of students who are statistically more at risk of leaving school prematurely. Monitoring learners at high risk involves closely observing and assessing students at a higher risk of academic, behavioral, or emotional challenges. This process aims to proactively identify and address potential issues to provide appropriate support and interventions. Different methods and routines may be used, but identifying at-risk learners must be followed by rapid and targeted intervention. Three levels of intervention are:

1. Universal support – for all students.
2. Targeted support – for groups of students at moderate levels of risk or need.
3. Individual support – intensive intervention at high levels of risk or need.

7. Refugees, Migrants and Roma

Children from disadvantaged ethnic minority backgrounds are disproportionately represented among the underperformers at school and are more at risk of early school leaving (ESL). Often, socio-cultural factors such as linguistic barriers, discrimination or (assumed) mismatches in cultural capital can also be at the root of underachievement. Children with migrant and Roma backgrounds, in particular, are often culturally marginalised within the education system. Although comparative data are scarce, the available evidence shows that learners with a Roma background are more likely to leave school before finishing. Strategies in this area include:

- **Create a welcoming environment:** Ensure that the school fosters an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere for all students, regardless of their background. Promote diversity and respect for different cultures, languages, and experiences.
- **Provide language support:** Many migrants may face language barriers. Offer language support programs, such as language classes or bilingual staff, to help them overcome these challenges and integrate into the school community more effectively.
- **Assess educational needs:** Conduct assessments to determine the educational needs and skills of migrant students. It will enable you to tailor educational programs and provide appropriate resources to support their learning and development.
- **Offer cultural orientation:** Help migrant students and their families understand the local culture, customs, and educational system. Provide orientation sessions or workshops to familiarise them with the school's policies, procedures, and available support services.
- **Intercultural education:** implies a school climate that expresses a positive appreciation toward the learners' migrant and ethnic minority cultural background and facilitates communication among learners through bilingual coordinators and intercultural advisors.
- **Engage with parents and guardians:** Establish effective communication channels with parents or guardians of migrant students. Keep them informed about their child's progress, activities, and any support services available. Encourage their involvement in the school community and seek their input on matters affecting their child's education.
- **Provide counselling, cultural mediation and social support:** Migrant students may face various challenges, including emotional and social adjustment issues. Offer counselling services or connect them with support networks, such as cultural associations or community organisations, which can provide tailored assistance.
- **Collaborate with external agencies:** Develop partnerships with relevant government agencies, non-profit organisations, or community groups specialising in supporting migrants. These collaborations can provide additional resources and expertise to address the needs of high-risk migrant students better.
- **Monitor and address discrimination:** Be vigilant about detecting and addressing any discrimination or prejudice towards migrant students. Implement anti-discrimination policies and promote a safe and inclusive environment for everyone in the school community.
- **Professional development for staff:** Provide training and professional development opportunities for teachers and staff to enhance their cultural competence and understanding of the unique challenges faced by migrant students. It will enable them to provide better support and tailor their teaching strategies accordingly.

8. Learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and learning difficulties

Monitoring learners with special educational needs (SEN) and learning difficulties is vital to providing inclusive education and ensuring all students receive the support they need. Adequate support for learners with disabilities and learning difficulties relies on a whole school approach, including a clear focus on learning for all; recognition of different kinds of achievement (not only academic success); effective and distributed school leadership; collaboration of schools with the local community; and, participation of learners and their families in decisions about their learning. Here are some key points to consider when it comes to monitoring these learners in a school setting:

- **Individualised Education Plans (IEPs):** Students with SEN often have an individualised education plan that outlines their specific learning goals, accommodations, and support strategies. Regular monitoring helps track their progress towards these goals and identifies areas where additional support is required.
- **Assessments and Evaluations:** Schools may use various assessments and evaluations to gauge students' academic, social, and emotional development with SEN. These assessments can be formal (standardised tests) and informal (teacher observations, checklists, portfolios). The results help in understanding the student's strengths and areas of difficulty.
- **Progress Tracking**: Ongoing monitoring is crucial for tracking learners' SEN progress. It can involve regular data collection and analysis to assess their development over time. It allows educators to identify areas of improvement, modify strategies, and make necessary adjustments to their educational plans.
- **Intervention and Support Services:** Monitoring allows educators to identify when additional intervention or support services are needed. It can include specialised teaching methods, assistive technologies, therapy services, or counselling. Regular monitoring helps assess these interventions' effectiveness and makes necessary adjustments.
- **Feedback and Reflection:** Monitoring SEN learners also involves providing feedback and reflecting on their progress. Teachers and support staff can provide constructive feedback to students, focusing on their achievements and areas for improvement. Regular reflection helps identify successful strategies and areas where somebody may require further support.
- **Inclusion and Differentiation:** Schools should identify and highlight specific indicators to create an inclusive learning environment where students with SEN can fully participate. Monitoring helps determine the effectiveness of inclusive practices and differentiation strategies that cater to individual learning needs.

It's important to note that monitoring should not solely focus on deficits or challenges but also recognise and celebrate the strengths and achievements of learners with SEN. The goal is to provide targeted support and create an inclusive educational experience that maximises their potential.

SYNTHESIS PROVIDED BY THE BEST PRACTICES

INDIVIDUALISED EDUCATION PLANS: develop personalised education plans that outline specific accommodations, modifications, and support to address students' unique learning needs. Provide specialised instruction, assistive technologies, and resources to help students with difficulties access the curriculum and actively participate in classroom activities.

SKILLS AND APTITUDE ASSESSMENTS: offer skills and aptitude assessments to help students identify their strengths and areas of interest. These assessments can provide insights into suitable educational and career paths and help students and teachers align their educational choices accordingly. This evaluation can be carried out through paper or multimedia questionnaires and interviews.

SCHOOL COUNSELLORS: they provide guidance and support to students, helping them face academic, personal, and social challenges. They can work closely with students at risk of dropping out, offering counselling, interventions, and connecting them with resources to address their needs.

CULTURAL ORIENTATION REPRESENTATIVE: can be a teacher who helps students understand and adapt to their new cultural and educational environments by providing orientation programs, cultural sensitivity training for staff, and opportunities for students to share their cultures. It is essential to provide language support if needed.

BRIDGE PROJETS: projects designed to provide students with an out-of-the-classroom experience that could empower and support them in returning to school or transitioning from school to VET training or the labour market (e.g., apprenticeship-internship, STEM workshops, classroom lessons alternated with technical professionalising lab activities in collaboration with VET centers or enterprises).Switching from a content-driven to a learning-by-doing approach stimulates motivation to learn.

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FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

1. Communication and information

Schools are essential in developing and maintaining communication and information flows with parents. There are **several communication tools** that schools can use to reach families effectively. The choice of tools will depend on the school's resources, the families' preferences, and the communication's nature. It's also important to consider the privacy and security aspects of the communication tools, ensuring that sensitive information is shared through secure channels. Formal tools to be used:

- **Parent-Teacher Conferences:** Organise face-to-face meetings between parents and teachers to discuss the child's progress, address concerns, and set goals. These conferences provide an opportunity for detailed and personalised communication.
- **Newsletters**: Send regular newsletters to families, providing updates on school events, important dates, academic tips, and other relevant information. Newsletters can be printed, sent home, or distributed electronically via email or school websites.
- **School Website:** Maintain an updated and informative website where families can find information about school policies, programs, events, and announcements. Ensure that the website is user-friendly and accessible for all families.

- **Mobile Apps:** Utilise mobile apps specifically designed for school communication. These apps can send push notifications to parents' smartphones, providing real-time updates on school activities, assignments, attendance, and other important information.
- **Social Media:** Leverage social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram to engage with families. Share school news, photos, achievements, and reminders. Social media can be an effective way to reach a broad audience and encourage parent engagement.
- **Email:** Utilise email as a means of communication, sending regular updates, reminders, and announcements directly to parents' email addresses. Ensure that the emails are concise, clear, and easily readable.
- **Text Messaging:** Implement a text messaging system to send parents quick reminders, urgent announcements, or time-sensitive information. Text messages are often read promptly, making them an effective tool for immediate communication.
- **Automated Phone Calls:** Use an automated phone call system to deliver important messages, such as school closures, emergency alerts, or event reminders. Automated phone calls can reach a large number of families quickly.
- **Digital Portfolios:** Implement digital portfolio platforms where teachers can share student work, progress, and achievements with parents. It gives parents a real-time view of their child's academic journey.

It is beneficial to survey families to understand their preferred communication methods and make efforts to accommodate their preferences whenever possible**. In addition to the formal methods of communication, complementary measures are needed** to reach different groups of parents, including those with different parenting styles and levels of 'distance' from the school. Attempts to reach out to these target groups may include:

1. personalised invitations,
2. outreach activities,
3. employ cultural mediators, mentors and support from local NGOs.

School leaders and teachers need to have or develop relational and communication skills. Communication should consist of the following:

- **To be mutual, balanced and ongoing**. On the one hand, it is vital to make sure that parents and families receive the necessary information about the school activities and the performance and progress of their child(ren), what their obligations and responsibilities are as a parent, and how they contribute to their children's learning. On the other hand, schools also need to listen to parents' views, including parents who are less engaged in their children's schooling.
- **To be clear** and consider each family's different cultural and economic backgrounds.
- **To be diversified** and reach heterogeneous groups of parents such as inviting parents to meet teachers, or more informal initiatives, such as welcome sessions at the beginning of the school year, open days and optional or festive activities to reinforce communication and mutual understanding and also organising interim sessions to explain the school's curriculum, values and mission and career guidance.

EARS
Educational Agreement as a Response to School Dropout

Co-funded by the European Union

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WHATSAPP GROUPS: create a dedicated WhatsApp group for school communication with families. You can use this group to share important updates, reminders, announcements and general information about school events and activities. If you have families who speak different languages, consider using WhatsApp's translation feature or offering multilingual support. It minimises language barriers and makes it understandable for all families to understand the information shared.

HOME VISITS: Home visits can be a powerful strategy to tackle the drop-out phenomenon and engage families in supporting their children's education. They provide an opportunity to establish personal relationships between teachers and families and to build trust by showing genuine interest in the well-being and success of the student. Understanding the student's home environment, cultural background, and family dynamics can help teachers tailor their approach to better support the student and address any challenges they may face. After a home visit, it's essential to maintain regular communication with families and provide ongoing support and follow-up to implement the discussed strategies and monitor the student's progress. It's important to note that home visits require adequate planning, resources, and training for school staff. Schools should establish protocols and guidelines to ensure the safety and effectiveness of home visits, including obtaining appropriate permissions and adhering to ethical considerations and privacy policies.

LISTENING CENTERS: a listening center in a school for parents of students at risk of dropping out serves as a dedicated space or resource where parents can express their concerns, seek support, and receive guidance. It aims to provide a safe and welcoming environment for parents to share their perspectives and experiences. Designate a private and comfortable space within the school where parents can have confidential conversations with trained staff members. This space should be inviting and conducive to open communication. Assign trained staff members, such as counsellors, social workers, or parent liaison officers, to work in the listening center. These individuals should have excellent communication skills, empathy, and the ability to listen and provide support actively. Provide parents with information about available resources, both within the school and in the community, which can assist them in addressing their concerns. It may include counselling services, support groups, educational programs, or social services. Encourage parents to provide feedback on their experiences at the listening center and use this feedback to improve the services provided continuously. Follow up with parents to ensure their concerns are addressed, and they receive the necessary support.

PARENTS REPRESENTATIVE(S): If you don't have it in your school, implement a nomination process to identify interested parents who are willing to serve as representatives. Provide clear guidelines and criteria for nomination, such as a commitment to attend meetings, ability to communicate effectively, and a genuine interest in supporting student success. Depending on the number of interested parents, you can either select parent representatives or hold elections to choose them. Ensure a fair and transparent process, allowing parents to have a voice in selecting their representatives. Provide information about the educational system, school policies, and strategies to engage and support at-risk students. Initiate regular meetings or forums where parent representatives can collaborate with school staff, administrators, and other stakeholders. These meetings can be used to identify specific challenges contributing to dropout, share insights from parents' perspectives, and jointly develop strategies and initiatives to address the issue. Encourage parent representatives to advocate for the needs and concerns of parents and students at risk of dropping out. They can serve as a bridge between the school and parents, effectively communicating the challenges and recommendations to stakeholders. Recognize and appreciate the contributions of parent representatives in fighting against school dropout. Show appreciation through public recognition, certificates of appreciation, or involvement in decision-making processes.

2. Parental involvement in school governance

The ideal situation is a direct collaboration between teachers and parents to help the child in the education process. We must distinguish between Parent engagement and parent involvement. They are two different concepts, though they both exist to help the child succeed in school and life. Parent involvement equals the participation of parents in school activities and projects. Here teachers are those that set the educational goals.

Meanwhile, parent engagement is the degree to which parents commit to prioritising their children's studies and supporting them at home. Parent involvement in schools leads to higher attendance, academic achievement, better School-to-Parent Communication, sharing expertise and the well-being of students.

Broad parental participation in learning decisions and the organisation of the school and its activities promotes transparency and better adaptation to real family needs. It creates a greater sense of shared responsibility around education. There are formal procedures to ensure parents' rights to participate in some forms of school decision-making, e.g., through representation of parents on school boards and councils. Parents should be encouraged to participate in the various school and class councils.

You can implement several good practices to involve families in the school and prevent school drop-out. Every community and school is unique, so assessing the specific needs and resources available to tailor these practices is essential. Regular evaluation and feedback from parents and students can help refine these efforts and ensure their effectiveness in preventing school drop-out.

Remember, too, that less formal approaches are needed to accommodate all parents. It is crucial to ensure that parents and families from more vulnerable socio-economic backgrounds are adequately represented in school decision-making. Less formal gatherings can help reach and involve more remote parents in school life. School leaders are important in promoting parent involvement through participatory planning and evaluation processes. Practical strategies to apply are:

- **Parent Association:** The Parent Association works with the principal, staff and management board to build effective home and school partnerships. It can advise the principal and Board of Management on policy issues and incidents that may require a review of school policy, e.g., Bullying, Safety, Homework, Enrolment, Behaviour problems etc. Other tasks may include supporting parents in the school, suggesting and organising extra-curricular activities, and inviting speakers to address the parents on topical or relevant issues.
- **Parent Councils:** A Parent Council is a group of parents representing all the school's parents. Any parent with a child at the school can volunteer to join the Parent Council. Parents can be members of the Parent Council for as long as they choose. The role of the Parent Council is to support the school in its work with parents; represent the views of all parents; promote contact between the school, parents, pupils, and the wider local community; report to the Parent Forum (all parents) at least annually and even fundraise (unless a separate Association does this on behalf of the school)

SYNTHESIS PROVIDED BY THE BEST PRACTICES

SURVEYS AND FEEDBACK MECHANISMS: develop surveys or feedback mechanisms to gather input from parents on important school governance matters. It can include online surveys, suggestion boxes, or open forums where parents can share their thoughts and suggestions. Actively analyse and consider the feedback received, incorporating it into the decision-making process.

ANTI-DROPOUT BOARD OPEN TO FAMILIES: form a core team of school staff, parents, and community members passionate about addressing school drop-out. This team will be responsible for planning and implementing the anti-dropout board initiative. Clearly define the objectives of the anti-dropout board, such as raising awareness about drop-out rates, fostering parental involvement, and implementing strategies to prevent drop-out. Ensure that these objectives align with the school's mission and goals. Decide on the composition of the anti-dropout board. It should include representatives from different stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, students, school administrators, community leaders, and local organisations. Ensure diversity and representation of different perspectives. Encourage families to express interest in participating in the board. Schedule regular meetings of the anti-dropout board, preferably once a month or as needed. Ensure the meetings are inclusive and provide open discussion, brainstorming, and collaborative decision-making opportunities. Provide resources, workshops, and information sessions for parents on the importance of education, parenting skills, academic support, and communication strategies. Equip parents with tools to support their child's education and address potential barriers to drop-out prevention.

3. Parental involvement in educational activities

Parents' engagement is a shared responsibility with teachers to help children in their educational goals. Teachers need to know the degree students can count on their parents and whether students receive guidance at home. The less guidance children receive from their parents, the more teacher involvement needs**.**

Strengthening family-school partnerships and increasing parental participation in educational decision-making can reduce early school leaving. Parents influence their children's educational outcomes by reinforcing specific aspects of school-related learning. In involving themselves in parts of children's schooling, parents often give their children interest, attention, praise, and rewards related to behaviors fundamental to varied aspects of school success.

Schools must also pay attention to involving parents in educational activities from different cultures or with diverse educational experiences to increase the number and diversity of interactions. Each child comes from different backgrounds, has different needs, passions, and degrees of understanding. Thus, being an involved parent can guide teachers toward the points they need to focus on for each child. It is the only way a child can have a successful education path.

A positive school culture depends a lot on the well-being of the students. In a classroom where students lack engagement, self-esteem, fear failure, and have difficulty understanding the course, the effect is more negative than positive. However, when students know that there is support at home, at school and in educational activities and that their needs are met, their motivation and self-confidence increase.
Some effective strategies are using parents as volunteers:

- To chaperone trips or dances, help in classrooms (e.g., reading to the class, teacher's support), or run a school event.
- To translate newsletters into other languages, make phone calls to inform others about school-related activities, or work on materials for school events.
- To assist in homework clubs and after-school programs
- To organise cultural and sports activities
- To participate in activities linked to career education and guidance, for example, by talking about their profession and work experience.

SYNTHESIS PROVIDED BY THE BEST PRACTICES

FAMILY ART EXHIBITIONS OR PERFORMANCES: showcase student artwork, performances, or talent shows where families can participate and appreciate their children's creative endeavors. It promotes self-expression, builds confidence, and encourages parental support for students' artistic pursuits.

CAREER EVENTS/WORKSHOPS: plan a career event, workshop or fair where parents can share information about their professions and career journeys. It allows students to explore various career options and gain insights from their parents and other professionals.

MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS: establish mentorship programs where parents or community members can serve as mentors for at-risk students. Mentors can provide guidance, support, and encouragement, acting as positive role models and helping students stay motivated to complete their education.

CELEBRATE ACHIEVEMENTS: recognize and celebrate the achievements of students and their families. This can include awards ceremonies, graduation ceremonies, and other events that highlight the importance of education and motivate students to stay in school.

OPEN HOUSE EVENTS: where parents and families are invited to visit the school, meet with teachers and staff, and learn about the school's programs, policies, and activities.

4. Family Learning

'Family learning' refers to any activity involving children and adult family members (with everyone working on their learning outcomes) and contributing to **a culture of learning in the family**. Raising parents' educational level is a successful approach to preventing early school leaving. When parents engage in self-educational activities, various cultural and educational interactions within the family are fostered. Family learning encourages family members to learn together as and within a family. It is sometimes called 'intergenerational learning'. The learning taking place can be formal or informal. It includes everything from certified long-term education courses to short family fun activities and everything in

between. Families can learn together anywhere with a focus on intergenerational learning. These family learning activities enable parents to support their children's learning

There should also be a range of complementary programs targeting the needs of specific groups, including low-income families and ethnically diverse groups.

Family learning significantly impacts children, adults, and the wider community. It can help families tackle disadvantages and improve their life chances. Taking part in active learning as a family develops confident and lifelong learners.

Through family learning, parents can reconnect to education and transform their lives. For adults that have disengaged from learning, it offers a chance to step back onto the learning ladder – often because they are motivated to help their children. Family learning programs can encourage parents to go on to further training, qualifications, and employment. Community learning is critical to family learning, supporting and empowering adults to make positive changes through learning.

Many professionals work with families in learning contexts, supporting the development of children, young people and families. It includes teachers, teaching assistants, tutors, early years practitioners, health and social care professionals, librarians, and those working in local government, family hubs, museums, galleries, heritage sites, music venues and arts organisations. They play a crucial role in supporting the development of families who learn together.

Some examples of how to use 'Family learning':

- **Parent-child learning activities:** organise parent-child learning activities where parents and students can collaborate on educational projects or assignments. It includes science experiments, art projects, or joint research projects.
- **Family fitness and wellness programs**: conduct fitness and wellness programs that involve both parents and students. It includes family fitness classes, yoga or mindfulness sessions, or sports events where families participate together.
- **Community service projects:** engage families and students in community service projects that positively impact society. It involves volunteering at local shelters, cleaning up parks, or organising fundraisings for charitable causes.
- **Parent-student technology workshops:** conduct workshops where parents and students learn about digital tools, coding, or other technological skills together. Set up interactive stations where families can engage in hands-on experiments, challenges, and problem-solving activities. It promotes digital literacy and fosters collaboration in the digital age.
- **Science fair:** organise a science fair where students and their families can showcase scientific experiments, research projects, or innovative inventions. Encourage families to explore scientific concepts through interactive exhibits and demonstrations.
- **Parent-student sports tournament:** arrange a friendly sports tournament where parents and students can form teams and compete in various sports or games. It fosters teamwork, sportsmanship, and healthy competition.
- **Career exploration expo:** create an event where families can learn about different career paths and explore various professions. Invite guest speakers, host career workshops, and provide opportunities for families to ask questions and gain insights into several industries.

STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVEMENT

School communities are essential for a whole-school approach. They are vibrant and dynamic social groups that consist next to students, teachers, administrators, staff members, parents also (in the educational and social field) of Educational Organizations, Local government, Youth Organizations, Health and Wellness Organizations, Cultural Organizations, Social Service Organizations, Non-profit organisations and foundations, Volunteer Organizations and
Business and industry. These communities come together within a school environment where learning, growth, and development occur.

School communities provide a sense of belonging, shared goals, and collective identity. They foster collaboration, teamwork, and mutual respect among all its members. Together, they create an inclusive, educational, labour-market oriented and supportive environment that promotes learning, personal development, and overall well-being for everyone involved. The composition of a school community can vary depending on the educational institution. In general, it should include:

1. Multidisciplinary teams within and beyond the school

Multidisciplinary teams within schools refer to professionals from various fields collaborating to support students' academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs.

These teams have the potential to offer a range of services to support young people at risk of educational disadvantage and Early school leaving. It includes, for example, a focus on children's language development, mental health support, emotional support, bullying prevention skills, outreach to marginalised families and support for developing parenting skills.

The multidisciplinary team must develop a coherent approach to address complex needs and engage in interventions at different levels across the individual, group, class, school, family and community. Rather than each team member working separately to address their priorities, this requires all to have a shared understanding of the outcomes they want to achieve for each learner and to determine how they can bring their combined expertise together. In other words, a strategic and holistic approach based on:

- **Collaborative Planning**: Multidisciplinary teams work together to develop comprehensive plans and strategies to address students' individual needs. It may involve teachers, administrators, counsellors, special educators, and other professionals collaborating to design inclusive learning environments and support systems.
- **Design of Individualised Education Plans:** Teams create individualised plans for students with disabilities or special needs, outlining specific goals, accommodations, and services required for their educational success. These plans involve input from teachers, parents, specialists, and the student, ensuring a collaborative approach to meeting their unique requirements.
- **Student Support and Intervention:** Multidisciplinary teams identify students who require additional support, whether academic, behavioral, emotional, or social. They can implement targeted interventions, such as tutoring programs, counselling services, social skills training, or behaviour management plans, to assist students in overcoming challenges.

- **Professional Development:** Multidisciplinary teams engage in ongoing professional development activities to enhance their skills and knowledge. It may include workshops, conferences, or training sessions focusing on inclusive education, differentiated instruction, mental health awareness, or cultural competency.
- **Data Analysis and Assessment:** Teams collaborate to analyse student data, including academic performance, attendance, and behaviour, to identify trends and areas of improvement. They can make informed decisions about instructional strategies, curriculum modifications, or targeted interventions to support student progress using assessment data.
- **Parent and Community Engagement:** Multidisciplinary teams actively involve parents and the broader community in education. They can organise parent-teacher conferences, workshops, and outreach programs to foster positive relationships, gather input, and promote home-school collaboration for student success.
- **Referral and Consultation:** Teams refer students to external professionals, such as psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, or social workers, when specialised expertise is needed. They can also collaborate with these professionals by seeking their input and guidance on individual cases.
- **Transition Planning:** Multidisciplinary teams facilitate smooth student transitions between grade levels, schools, or educational settings. It involves developing transition plans, conducting assessments, and coordinating with relevant personnel to ensure continuity of support and minimise disruptions.
- **Research and Innovation:** Multidisciplinary teams use research and innovative practices to improve teaching and learning outcomes. They can explore new instructional methodologies, technologies, or evidence-based approaches, contributing to educational advancements and sharing best practices within the field.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Teams advocate for policies and practices promoting equity, inclusivity, and students' well-being. They may participate in advocacy groups, educational committees, or policy dialogue to influence local, regional, or national decision-making.

These measures and actions support multidisciplinary teams' collaborative and comprehensive approach to guiding students' academic, social, emotional and physical development within or outside school settings.

2. Partnerships between school and the Labour market

Awareness and understanding of the world of work is integral to education. Businesses have an important role in supporting career choices and enriching the learning experience for young people. These stakeholders have every interest in preventing school drop-out as it aligns with their need for a skilled workforce, talent acquisition, diversity, reduced recruitment costs, corporate social responsibility, long-term sustainability, and social and economic development. In addition, this type of collaboration provides opportunities for at-risk or high-risk students to gain work experience. It leads to effective results for students who suffer from theoretical learning and respond better to practical experiences. Therefore, a collaboration between schools and the labour market is essential. This partnership aims to bridge the gap between academic education and the practical skills and knowledge needed in the workforce. Such partnerships produce significant benefits for all involved: most importantly, they benefit young people's awareness and experience of the world of work, their

understanding of job demands and employer expectations, and the relevance of schooling to employer needs.

Benefits of school-business collaboration on the prevention of early school leaving:

- **Curriculum alignment:** educational institutions collaborate with employers to align their curricula with the skills and competencies required by the job market. It ensures that students receive relevant, up-to-date education that prepares them for the workforce.
- **Internships, apprenticeships and workplace visits:**–This ensures students' learning paths that allow them to gain practical experience, apply their knowledge in real-world settings, and develop industry-specific skills. Internships and apprenticeships make students aware that learning is crucial to acquire competencies.
- **Guest speakers and industry experts:** Schools invite professionals from various industries to speak to students, share their experiences, and provide insights into the demands and requirements of the labour market. It helps students understand different career paths, industry trends, and specific skills in demand.
- **Job fairs and career guidance**: educational institutions organise job fairs and career guidance sessions where employers can interact directly with students. It facilitates networking opportunities, exposes students to potential job opportunities, and helps them understand the expectations of the labour market.
- **Collaborative projects and research:** Schools collaborate with businesses and industries on research projects, innovation initiatives, and problem-solving activities. It allows students to develop 21st-century skills, work on real-world challenges to gain practical skills and enable organisations to benefit from new perspectives and ideas.
- **Advisory boards:** Schools may establish advisory boards comprising representatives from the labour market, including employers, industry experts, and alumni. These boards guide curriculum development, industry trends, emerging skills, and workforce needs to ensure that educational programs remain relevant and responsive.
- **Professional development for educators:** Schools collaborate with employers to provide professional development opportunities for educators. It helps teachers and professors stay updated with industry advancements, teaching methodologies, and emerging skill requirements, enabling them to better prepare students for the labour market.
- **Workforce planning and research:** Schools and employers collaborate to analyse labour market needs, identify skill gaps, and plan educational programs accordingly. This collaboration ensures that the supply of skilled graduates meets the demand of the job market, reducing unemployment rates and enhancing economic development.

Collaboration between schools and the labour market fosters a mutually beneficial relationship. It enhances the educational experience for students, equipping them with the necessary skills for successful employment while providing businesses with a competent workforce aligned with their needs.

3. Partnerships between school and local (regional) organisations and municipalities

Partnerships between schools and local (and regional) organisations and municipalities are collaborative relationships established to enhance educational experiences and support the overall development of students. These partnerships unite educational institutions and external entities to work towards common educational goals, share resources, and provide diverse learning opportunities. Early school leaving is a complex phenomenon. It depends on various factors (such as psychological problems, health problems,

economic disadvantages, family problems, etc.). It is crucial to consider all these aspects and coherently address them. The type of support learners require depends on their specific circumstances and sometimes a series of interventions on many dimensions.

It means that different stakeholders (from various domains such as civil society organisations, health organisations, cultural organisations, the business community, etc.) work with the school to combat early school leaving. A multifactor problem requires a multidimensional or school-wide approach. These types of partnerships require a more holistic understanding of how schools, families, communities and civic society can work together to improve life outcomes for young people and nurture their self-esteem and confidence. It also requires an improved understanding of how schools can impact the broader community to influence the family and social contexts within which children and young people learn. It may benefit parents and families from disadvantaged backgrounds or parents with negative school experiences.

Benefits of a broad educational community:

- **Establish partnerships:** Schools actively seek partnerships with local and regional organisations, such as businesses, non-profits, community centers, and government agencies. Identify organisations that align with the school's mission and educational goals.
- **Engage in joint projects:** Schools and organisations collaborate on projects that provide real-world learning experiences for students. For example, a school could partner with a local environmental organisation to create a community garden where students learn about sustainable agriculture and the importance of ecological conservation.
- **Internships and mentorship programs:** Schools work with local businesses and organisations to develop internship programs that provide students with hands-on work experience. Additionally, you can establish mentorship programs, connecting students with professionals from various fields who can provide guidance and support.
- **Sharing resources and expertise:** Schools and organisations share resources and expertise to enhance educational opportunities. For instance, a local museum could provide access to its exhibits and experts, allowing students to learn from primary sources or engage in research projects.
- **Participate in community events:** Schools actively participate in local and regional events organised by municipalities and organisations. This involvement can include student performances, exhibitions, or presentations that showcase the school's talents and achievements.
- **Collaborative problem-solving:** Schools, organisations, and municipalities collaborate on addressing community issues. They develop innovative solutions by working together, such as preventing drop-out and early school leaving, implementing after-school programs to address youth unemployment, or organising joint campaigns to promote health and wellness.
- **Grant opportunities:** Schools explore grant opportunities from local or regional organisations and municipalities. Many organisations have funding programs specifically designed to support educational initiatives. You can strengthen collaborative projects through such financial support.
- **Parent and community involvement**: Schools encourage parents and community members to participate in school activities and serve as volunteers actively, foster a sense of community and provide opportunities for collaboration.
- **Regular communication and meetings:** Schools establish communication channels inside, outside and among other schools, organisations, and municipalities, including meetings, newsletters, online platforms, or dedicated committees to ensure ongoing collaboration and exchange of ideas.

SYNTHESIS PROVIDED BY THE BEST PRACTICES

ANTI-DROPOUT SCHOOL BOARD: set an anti-dropout school board that establishes clear goals and priorities for drop-out prevention (such as reducing drop-out rates, improving graduation rates, promoting student engagement and academic achievement, etc.). The school board collaborates closely with district administrators to ensure the effective implementation of drop-out prevention initiatives across all districts. This collaboration involves regular communication, monitoring progress, providing guidance, and evaluating the impact of interventions.

CREATE A COMMUNITY OF STAKEHOLDERS WITH A SHARED AGREEMENT TO FIGHT SCHOOL DROP-OUT: identify the key stakeholders who have a vested interest in addressing school drop-out. It may include parents, teachers, administrators, students, community organisations, local businesses, and government agencies. Organise a meeting or forum where stakeholders can come together to discuss the issue of school drop-out, its impact, the importance of collaborative action, establish common goals, and foster commitment among stakeholders. Define clear and measurable goals that all stakeholders can work towards. These goals may include reducing drop-out rates, improving graduation rates, increasing student engagement, or enhancing support systems for at-risk students. Create a formal agreement and an action plan that outlines each stakeholder's strategies, activities, and responsibilities in achieving the shared goals. Assign tasks, establish implementation timelines, and ensure that the plan is realistic and achievable. Create opportunities for stakeholders to share successful strategies, interventions, and best practices for addressing school drop-out. You can do it through workshops, presentations, or discussions where stakeholders can learn from each other's experiences and replicate effective initiatives.

SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECTS: service-learning projects can foster students' sense of purpose, social responsibility, and connection to their community. Schools can collaborate with community organisations to identify meaningful projects that allow students to apply their skills and contribute positively to society.

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS AND TUTORING: By partnering with community organisations, schools can offer after-school programs that provide academic support, enrichment activities, and safe student space. These programs can help students strengthen their academic skills, explore interests, and build positive relationships with peers and mentors.

LABOR MARKET COOPERATION: where employers, governments, employee and employer organisations, educational institutions and other organisations work together on a resilient labour market.

CAREER FAIRS: Job fairs, also known as career fairs or job expos, are events designed to bring together job seekers and employers in a single location. These events provide a platform for employers to showcase their organisations, promote job openings, and connect with potential candidates. Career fairs typically occur in large venues such as convention centers, hotels, or college campuses.

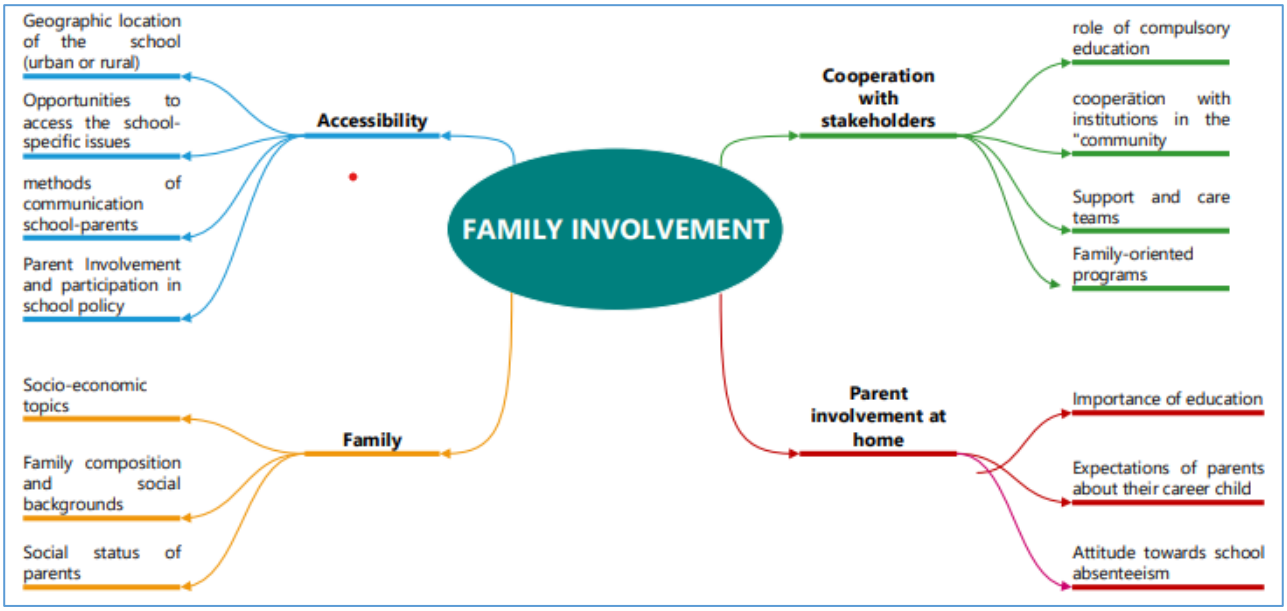
VIRTUAL REALITY: Virtual reality (VR) can be a valuable alternative to company visits, offering immersive and interactive experiences that simulate real-world environments. But VR can also be used as an alternative for teaching student's skills, diagnoses, application skills, etc.

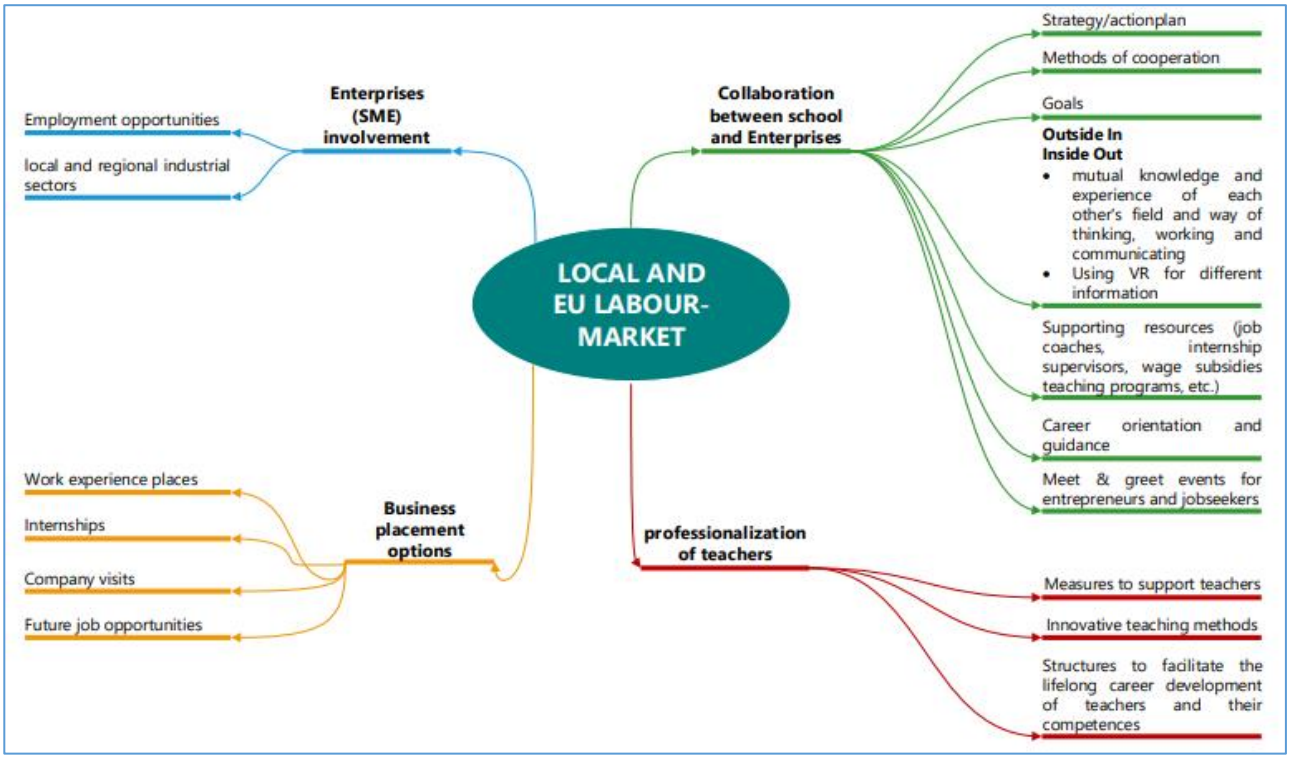
Remember that each collaboration will be unique, and it's essential to tailor the approach to the specific needs and resources of the school, organisations, and municipality. Regular evaluation and feedback mechanisms should also be in place to assess the effectiveness and impact of the collaborations.

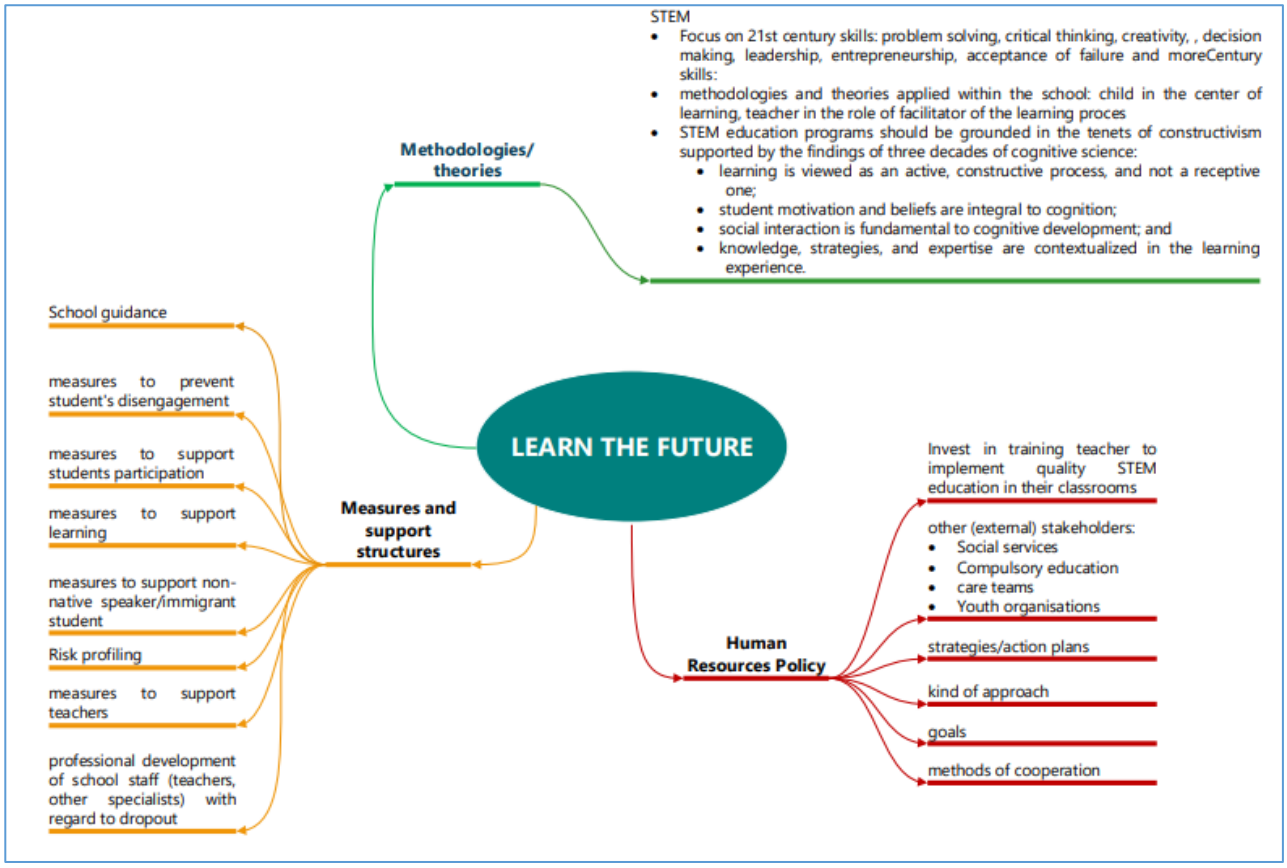
D. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This handbook that collects the best practices to prevent and avoid early school leaving represents one of the main background factors to design a training program (PR4) for professionals involved and students at risk of school drop-out.

From the collection of best practices and research about the situation and needs in each partner country, three fundamental pillars of the teacher's training arise family involvement, labour market and learning the future. You can read the topics covered for each pillar in the images below.




LOCAL AND EU LABOUR-MARKET
Enterprises (SME) involvement
Employment opportunities
local and regional industrial sectors
Collaboration between school and Enterprises
Strategy/actionplan
Methods of cooperation
Goals
Outside In
Inside Out
mutual knowledge and experience of each other's field and way of thinking, working and communicating
Using VR for different information
Supporting resources (job coaches, internship supervisors, wage subsidies teaching programs, etc.)
Career orientation and guidance
Meet & greet events for entrepreneurs and jobseekers
Business placement options
Work experience places
Internships
Company visits
Future job opportunities
professionalization of teachers
Measures to support teachers
Innovative teaching methods
Structures to facilitate the lifelong career development of teachers and their competences


LEARN THE FUTURE
STEM
Focus on 21st century skills: problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, , decision making, leadership, entrepreneurship, acceptance of failure and moreCentury skills:
methodologies and theories applied within the school: child in the center of learning, teacher in the role of facilitator of the learning proces
STEM education programs should be grounded in the tenets of constructivism supported by the findings of three decades of cognitive science:
learning is viewed as an active, constructive process, and not a receptive one;
student motivation and beliefs are integral to cognition;
social interaction is fundamental to cognitive development; and
knowledge, strategies, and expertise are contextualized in the learning experience.
Methodologies/ theories
School guidance
measures to prevent student's disengagement
measures to support students participation
measures to support learning
measures to support non-native speaker/immigrant student
Risk profiling
measures to support teachers
professional development of school staff (teachers, other specialists) with regard to dropout
Measures and support structures
Invest in training teacher to implement quality STEM education in their classrooms
other (external) stakeholders:
Social services
Compulsory education
care teams
Youth organisations
Human Resources Policy
strategies/action plans
kind of approach
goals
methods of cooperation

It also reveals which competencies have to be developed by educational professionals to detect, face and act appropriately to the drop-out risk. These are the contents related to those competencies and the main activities to do, oriented to develop the defined competencies.

In a complementary way, the analysis of the risk profiling and the different factors involved in this process has also oriented us about how to design the training to support at-risk students and how to arrive at them, taking into account each specific situation and needs, designing a training using a wide variety of methods, tools and approaches, developing STEM learning activities and creating a platform useable in a flexible and personally oriented way.

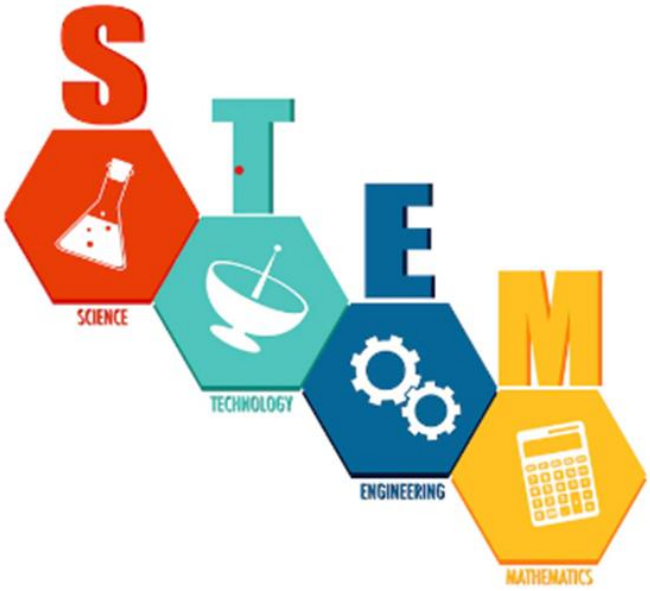
Early school leaving has multiple reasons, and there are different profiles of at-risk students; each student is singular and has different needs. One of the goals of our training design is to make available for teachers and students a wide diversity of tools to promote inclusive and equitable education practices.

Finally, one added value of our training design is the collaboration across countries to share the own needs of each partner and the good practices and experiences to apply broadly. Building networks among teachers, experts and researchers, exchanging information and experiences about how to approach inclusive education and tackling early school leaving is a core element for the professional development of educators.

(Ears PR 4 includes the complete training module.)

APPENDIX

ANNEX 1: Methods and practical tools to apply STEM



A. ICT and Digital Themes

1. **Videos:** with **iMovie (Mac)** or **Windows Movie Maker (Windows),** you can create and edit videos and add effects, transitions and music; with **Adobe Premiere Rush**, a simplified version of Adobe Premiere Pro, youngsters can create professional-looking videos with user-friendly features.
2. **Photography:** such as **Snapseed,** a powerful photo editing app that offers a wide range of editing features including filters, adjustments and special effects and **Adobe Lightroom**, a professional photo editing software that offers extensive editing options, presets and the ability to organise and sync photos between devices.
3. **Multimedia presentations:** such as **Adobe Spark, VoiceThread, Prezi, SlidesGo, Adobe Premiere Pro, Intuiface, Zoho Show, Visme** or **Google slides** are designed to challenge learners to think creatively by combining multiple media sources such as text, images, sound/audio, animation or video. Moreover, they make learners more confident in using different digital tools. Moreover, it requires learners to think about writing and presenting their product to other learners. It encourages reflection and develops writing and speaking skills.
4. **Web tools:** like **Wix**, is an easy-to-use website builder that allows youngsters to create their websites with drag-and-drop features, templates and customisable designs. **Canva** is an online graphic design programme that offers a wide range of templates, images and fonts to create stunning graphics for websites, social media, etc. **WordPress** is a popular content management system that allows young people to develop and customise websites or blogs with themes, plugins and widgets.
5. Also consider social media tools such as **YouTube**, **Instagram** and **TikTok**.

B. Technical Topics

6. **Digital tools**:
   The following tools are designed to be beginner-friendly, allowing youngsters to engage in creative and educational activities while exploring their interests in different areas:
   - **Tinkercad:** a browser-based 3D design tool that is easy to learn and allows youngsters to create simple 3D models for designing toys.
   - **LEGO Digital Designer:** a free software that allows youngsters to design digital LEGO models and create virtual toy creations.
   - **Fashion Playtes:** an online platform for young fashion lovers, where they can create and customise virtual clothing creations.
   - **SketchUp Free:** a 3D modelling software with a simple and intuitive interface that allows young people to create basic architectural and environmental designs and explore their creativity in 3D modelling.
   - **NASA World Wind: is** an open-source virtual software that allows young people to explore the Earth and other celestial bodies and gain an understanding of geographical and environmental issues.
   - **Piktochart:** A user-friendly online tool that allows young people to design infographics and visual presentations.
   - **CustomInk:** An online platform where young people can design T-shirts, hoodies and other garments.
   - **Google Expeditions:** An immersive virtual reality app that allows young people to take virtual excursions to different locations around the world, increasing their knowledge and understanding.

7. **3D modelling tools:**
   Here are some user-friendly tools for 3D modelling that young people can apply. It is always advisable to deploy these tools under the guidance and supervision of an adult or an experienced mentor to ensure safe and appropriate use.
   - **SculptGL is** free sculpting software that allows youngsters to form 3D models using virtual clay. It offers various sculpting brushes and tools to manipulate geometry and create organic shapes.
   - **Blokify:** a 3D modelling app designed specifically for children. It features a block-based modelling system where youngsters can stack and arrange virtual blocks to build their 3D models. It provides a playful and interactive environment for creating simple objects and structures.
   - **3D Slash**: a voxel-based 3D modelling tool that uses a Minecraft-like interface. Youngsters can chisel and shape 3D models with a combination of cubes and tools. It is easy to use and offers a fun and creative approach to 3D modelling.
   - **Morphi:** is an easy-to-use 3D modelling application for iPad and Mac. It offers a simplified interface with intuitive touch controls, allowing youngsters to create 3D models using various geometric shapes and tools.
   - **Wings 3D:** Wings 3D is a free and open-source 3D modelling software that focuses on polygonal modelling. It provides a simple interface with essential modelling tools, making it accessible for young people to create and edit 3D models

8. **Technical applications within regional or local professional areas**
   Integrating the local or regional context into vocational education is indispensable to enable students to develop skills and knowledge that are directly relevant to their communities. By linking classroom learning with real-world applications and visiting companies, students can gain a better understanding of vocational fields and actively contribute to the growth and development of their local environment. Some examples:
   - **Local business development and entrepreneurship:** Schools can teach local business development and entrepreneurship. Students can learn about market research, creating business plans and marketing strategies specific to the local or regional area. They can develop business ideas, create marketing materials and participate in local business competitions.
   - **Green building and construction:** students can learn about sustainable building practices relevant to the local environment. These could include green materials, energy-efficient building designs or rainwater harvesting systems. For example, students can collaborate on projects on designing and building eco-friendly structures or retrofitting existing buildings for energy efficiency.
   - **Environmental conservation and restoration:** Students can explore local environmental problems and conservation efforts. They can learn about local ecosystems, biodiversity and conservation strategies. Schools can organise field trips to local natural areas, involve students in habitat restoration projects or educate the community about local environmental issues.
   - **Hospitality and Tourism Management:** Schools can offer programmes that focus on hospitality and tourism management, highlighting local attractions, hotels and restaurants. Students can learn about customer service, event planning and unique features of the local tourism industry. They can gain practical experience by organising and hosting events or supporting local hospitality businesses.

C. Coding Themes

9. **Scratch is** a visual programming language, developed by MIT, that uses colourful blocks to create interactive stories, animations and games. It is a fun and intuitive way for young learners to understand coding concepts.
10. **Robotics and Arduino:** Robotics is a hands-on field that combines coding with physical components. Youngsters can learn to programme robots using platforms such as **LEGO WeDo, LEGO Mindstorms** or **Arduino**, which they can use to build and control their robots.
11. **Python:** Python is a popular and beginner-friendly programming language. It has a clear syntax and is widely used in various fields. Youngsters can learn Python to develop simple programs, build games, perform data analysis or create web applications using frameworks like **Django** or **Flask.**

D. Artistic/Cultural Resources

12. **Drawing and painting applications, such** as **Procreate, Adobe Fresco** or **Autodesk** SketchBook
13. **Music-making apps such** as **GarageBand (iOS)** and **Soundtrap** (available on multiple platforms) provide intuitive interfaces to create and experiment with music. These apps offer

virtual instruments, loops and recording capabilities, allowing you to compose songs, explore different genres and learn the basics of music production.

14. **Animation and digital art**, such as **Toontastic** and **Puppet Pals**, enable young people to bring their stories to life through digital animation. These apps provide ready-made characters, backgrounds and sound effects so they can create animated stories that boost their creativity and storytelling skills.
15. **Storytelling and interactive fiction**: code by creating their own interactive stories, choose-your-own-adventure games or text-based adventures with platforms like **Twine** or **Bitsy**. This allows them to combine their storytelling skills with basic programming concepts.
16. **Virtual museums and art exploration apps**, such as **Google Arts & Culture** and **Artsology**, offer virtual tours of famous museums and collections around the world. Young people can explore different works of art, learn about different artists and art movements and participate in interactive activities that enhance their art appreciation and knowledge.

This method develops pupils' digital skills. It may involve using online tools to collaborate, create or code and program. It is also essential to teach them about online safety, including protecting their personal data, recognising phishing attempts and creating strong passwords. Discuss the importance of antivirus software and caution when interacting online.

E. Project-based Learning (PBL)

In **PBL,** pupils work on a long-term project that requires them to apply knowledge and skills in a real-life context. This learner-centred approach helps pupils develop critical thinking, collaboration, communication and problem-solving skills. Consider **Real-World projects** to connect pupils' lives and the world around them. These projects are often interdisciplinary and enable students to apply knowledge and skills from different subject areas.

Some examples:

1. **Sustainable community design (Science/Social Studies):**
   Students research and design a sustainable community, considering factors such as renewable energy sources, waste management systems, green spaces and transport options. They create blueprints, models or digital presentations to showcase their designs.
2. **Entrepreneurship and business plan (business economics):**
   Students develop a business plan for a real or hypothetical business idea. They conduct market research, create a marketing strategy, formulate financial projections and present their business plans to a panel of experts or investors.
3. **Historical documentary (History/Communications):**
   Students research an important historical event or figure and make a documentary. They conduct interviews, collect archival material, write scripts, film and edit the documentary and organise a screening for the school or community.
4. **Public health campaign (Health/Communications):**
   Students identify a public health issue or problem in their community, such as healthy eating, mental health awareness or substance abuse prevention. They create informative campaigns with videos, posters, social media content or community events to raise awareness and promote healthier habits.

5. **Urban planning and design (geography/architecture):**
   Students analyse urban areas in their communities and propose urban planning solutions. They create 3D models, maps or interactive presentations to showcase their ideas for improving traffic flow, public spaces, accessibility or environmental sustainability.
6. **Environmental Conservation Project (Science/Environmental Science):**
   Students identify an environmental problem in their community, such as water pollution or deforestation, and develop a conservation project. They create awareness campaigns, organise clean-up operations or work with local organisations to tackle the problem.
7. **App development (computer science/design):**
   Students work in teams to develop a mobile app that addresses a specific need or problem in their community. They go through the entire app development process, from ideation and design to coding and testing, and present their apps to fellow students or industry professionals.
8. **Community service project (Citizenship/Social responsibility):**
   Students identify a social problem or need in their community, such as homelessness, poverty or literacy, and design a service project. They organise fundraisers, volunteer activities or awareness campaigns to support and realise a positive impact.

F. Flipped Classroom

In the flipped classroom, students provide their own knowledge and the teacher is present as coach and mentor. The starting point is always that classroom teaching time is not spent providing instruction. Students do that themselves by, for example, taking an online refresher lesson, taking a compact video lesson on a basic concept or by doing an online workshop with assignments. During class time, students can continue working on the material with each other, ask their questions to the teacher or work further on in-depth assignments. This approach allows for more personalised learning and helps students develop communication and collaboration skills.

Gerstein's model[4] divides a flipped lesson into four phases:

Phase 1: Make a collaborative start

When starting a new topic, make a collaborative start first. Make students curious so that they feel like learning further. Choose a way that suits you. Do an experiment together, a game format, tell a story or choose an interactive activity. The aim of this phase is to generate interest in the topic.

Stage 2: Students engage with the instruction independently

In this phase, students continue acquiring knowledge in their own time. This is the instruction phase that normally takes place in class. Use existing or homemade material. For example, pupils can watch what experts say about the topic or explore underlying theory with a video lesson or TEDTalk.

Stage 3: Independent processing of content

In the third phase, pupils process the content from phases 1 and 2. They do so with assignments that make them think. You can plan the activities from phase 2 and 3 simultaneously, or alternate

[4] https://www.amazon.nl/Flipped-Classroom-Full-Picture-English-ebook/dp/B008ENPEP6

them. For example, during a video lesson, give an assignment, possibly with feedback, after which the video lesson continues. Invite students to ask questions to each other or to you in a digital way.

Phrase 4: Back in class together

In this phase, make use of the time together to take learners a step further. You do this using your expertise and the interaction between learners. For example, by solving a complex problem together. Or by giving targeted individual guidance or feedback. What matters is that you make optimal use of the 'time gained

ANNEX 2: Glossary

1. **Accessibility:** The extent to which students have easy and equitable access to educational resources, facilities, and opportunities, often influenced by the school's location and infrastructure.

2. **Active Learning:** An instructional approach that involves engaging students in the learning process, encouraging them to participate, solve problems, and think critically, rather than passively receiving information.

3. **Alignment:** Alignment refers to the adjustment or arrangement of different elements, processes, or systems to ensure they work together in a coordinated and harmonious way. In the context of education and the workforce, alignment often involves matching educational programs or curricula with the skills, competencies, and demands of the job market. This alignment ensures that students receive relevant and up-to-date education that prepares them for their future careers.

4. **Apprenticeships** are a form of on-the-job training or vocational education in which individuals, typically referred to as apprentices, learn and develop specific skills, competencies, and knowledge related to a particular trade, profession, or occupation. These programs combine practical work experience under the guidance of a skilled mentor or journey worker with classroom instruction or theoretical training. Apprenticeships are common in various industries, including construction, manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, and more. They offer a practical pathway for individuals to enter the workforce, gain valuable skills, and establish a career in a specific field.

5. **At-Risk Students:** Students who show signs of being in danger of early leaving or dropping out from educational institutions. These signs may include poor attendance, declining grades, behavioral issues, disengagement, or lack of motivation.

6. **Collaborative Culture:** A working environment in schools that promotes cooperation, sharing of ideas, and mutual support among teachers, students, and other stakeholders.

7. **Collaborative Learning Environment:** An educational setting where the school community, including school leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents, and external stakeholders, work together to help all learners reach their full potential. It involves a strategic "whole school approach."

8. **Community Engagement:** The active involvement and participation of community members in supporting and collaborating with the school to create a positive learning environment.

9. **Community Learning:** A form of education that supports and empowers adults to make positive changes through learning within their local community.

10. **Cultural Mediation:** The practice of facilitating communication and understanding between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds.

11. **Culture of Learning:** A shared attitude and environment in which learning is valued, encouraged, and actively promoted among family members.

12. **Distributed Leadership:** A leadership model where leadership responsibilities are shared among various members of the school community, including teaching and non-teaching staff, learners, parents, and families. This approach encourages collective decision-making and initiative.

13. **Drop-Out Crisis**: The issue of students leaving school prematurely, which can be caused by a combination of individual, social, and educational factors, leading to various consequences for individuals and society.

14. **Early Intervention:** The proactive process of identifying and addressing issues, such as those that put students at risk of dropping out or leaving school, at an early stage to prevent further complications and improve outcomes.

15. **Educational System Weaknesses**: Flaws or deficiencies within the education system that contribute to the dropout crisis.

16. **EU Acquis**: The European Union's body of laws and regulations, which may serve as a reference point for standardization in addressing early school leaving.

17. **Hands-On Learning:** Apprentices learn by actively participating in real work tasks, projects, and activities. They gain practical experience and develop their skills by working alongside experienced professionals in the field.

18. **Intergenerational Learning:** Learning activities that involve different generations of a family working on their learning outcomes and fostering a culture of learning within the family.

19. **Internships:** Internships are short-term work experiences provided by organizations, typically to students or individuals seeking practical exposure to a particular industry or field. During an internship, participants (interns) work in a professional setting, gaining hands-on experience and applying their academic knowledge to real-world situations. Internships can be paid or unpaid and offer an opportunity to learn, develop skills, and make connections in the industry.

20. **Language Support Programs:** Educational initiatives that help students, particularly those with language barriers, improve their language skills and integrate better into the school community.

21. **Mentorship Programs:** Mentorship programs involve a structured relationship between an experienced and knowledgeable individual (mentor) and a less experienced person (mentee). The mentor provides guidance, support, and advice to the mentee, helping them navigate their personal and professional development. Mentorship programs are designed to facilitate learning, skill development, and personal growth in the mentee. They can be formal or informal and are common in educational and professional settings.

22. **Multi-Level Examination**: A comprehensive analysis that investigates the causes and consequences of the dropout phenomenon at multiple levels, including individual, social, and educational factors.

23. **Peer Coaches:** Students or individuals who provide support, guidance, and mentorship to their peers, often in an educational setting.

24. **Peer Observation:** The practice of teachers observing and providing feedback to their colleagues, promoting professional growth and knowledge sharing.

25. **Prevention and Intervention Strategies**: Approaches and methods aimed at reducing dropout rates and providing support to individuals at risk of leaving school.

26. **Question Allowances**: Financial support for individuals who are engaged in further education or job-seeking activities.

27. **Real-World Applications:** Educational approaches that emphasize the practical use of knowledge in real-life situations to enhance learning and understanding.

28. **Risk Assessment:** The process of identifying potential financial or operational risks that a school may face and developing strategies to mitigate these risks.

29. **School Communities:** dynamic groups within a school environment, including students, teachers, administrators, staff members, parents, and various external organizations and entities. They work together to create an inclusive and supportive educational environment that promotes learning, personal development, and well-being.

30. **School Culture:** The shared values, beliefs, and behaviors that shape the environment and atmosphere within a school, influencing the relationships among staff, students, and the broader community.

31. **School-to-Parent Communication:** The flow of information between schools and parents, keeping parents informed about school activities, student progress, and other relevant information.

32. **STEM Education:** An interdisciplinary approach to education that focuses on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, emphasizing hands-on, problem-based learning and real-world applications.

33. **Unrelated Jobs**: Positions that do not align with an individual's potential, capabilities, or interests.

34. **Urban, Semi-Urban and Rural Location:** Categories used to classify the level of urbanization in specific locations where schools are located which can affect access to resources, student diversity, and infrastructure.

35. **Well-Rounded Education:** An approach to education that goes beyond academic subjects and aims to provide students with a comprehensive set of knowledge, skills, and personal development opportunities.

36. **Whole School Approach:** A strategic approach that promotes a unified effort among the school community to fulfil the unique potential of all learners consistently and systematically across all aspects of school life, including ethos, curriculum, teaching, and community connections.

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This publication aims to promote a comprehensive approach to addressing early school leaving by emphasizing that schools alone cannot tackle this issue. It underscores the importance of a 'whole school approach,' involving school leaders, teachers, students, parents, and external stakeholders, working collaboratively to enhance student engagement and success. The handbook provides valuable insights and best practices for educators to support students' participation and prevent early school leaving by addressing their psychological needs, such as security, identity, belonging, purpose, and competence. Furthermore, it offers a contextual adaptation of best practices from partner countries, aiming to strike a balance between various strategies, tools, and competencies to combat dropout rates effectively.

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Educational Agreement as a Response to School Dropout