Bielefeld
Bildungsregion

Regional Education Network Bielefeld
- Study Report 2012 – Strains on Education – Support Measures

The City of Bielefeld sees the education of human individuals as one of the most important factors for the future. Education contributes to providing individuals with the necessary competences to hold their own in occupational, societal and private contexts.

In order to achieve this aim, the Regional Education Network Bielefeld focuses in particular on improving the learning and living prospects of children and young people. Once it is established, the regional education network is to create the necessary preconditions to include all players involved in providing education in the City of Bielefeld in this process. Existing co-operation and networking structures as well as resources are to be exploited in optimal ways and extended systematically. The exchange of information, planning and co-ordination between the respective players in the field of education and the resulting assignments are to be intensified and thus improved.

The regional educational network, or 'Educational Region', is to be seen as a form of organisation transgressing institutions and bringing together school boards, schools, education authorities and further players in the field of education.

The co-operation contract between the State of North Rhine-Westphalia and the City of Bielefeld for developing an education network lays down various fields of action orientated on the needs of the educational region. These are, for instance, increasing the ratio of students achieving university entrance qualifications, reducing the number of students staying in the same grade for another year as well as 'down-schooling' (down-schooling means that students on a higher level school, for instance a grammar school, change to another type of school where they can only achieve a lower level school-leaving qualification. In Germany these would currently be 'Realschulen' (middle schools) or 'Hauptschulen' (lower secondary schools). In addition, the ratio of students leaving school without a school-leaving certificate, so-called 'drop-outs' is to be reduced as well.

In order to continue and advance the systematic networking structure and in view of the wide range of fields for action, the steering committees of the educational region specifically prioritised implementation of the following measures:

- Harmonising / Improving transition from primary to secondary school level
- Consistent individual support for students
- Partnership for shaping education between families and educational institutions
- Documenting education from year 0 - 18
- Advancement of media competence
- Advancement of science-related and technical interests and competences
- Cultural education

Given that education used to be primarily perceived in formal contexts, like, e.g. schools, up to a couple of years ago, the current discussion has opened up the notion of learning and education. The term education has now been extended to include non-formal and informal education sites and opportunities where children and young people, but also adults, can learn. With a view to successful education biographies, education and education processes

must therefore now be seen much more as networking assignments for all players in the field of education and their interaction should be more closely scrutinised.

The social, material and cultural living conditions of individuals are closely related to the opportunities they have to participate in education and can also influence the educational success of children living in the families concerned. In its Study Report 2012 the City of Bielefeld examined these correlations in order to find starting points for steering municipal education policy in a differentiated way depending on social area.

The Bielefeld Study Report 2012 made use of an index which was to depict the social strains within the urban area (primary school catchment districts) that are important for educational processes. The indicators making up the index to gather data on educationally relevant social strains are:

- Households with three or more children
- Households with at least one non-German parent
- Households with only one parent
- Households not living in one or two-family detached houses

Relevant social strain within a given area is here defined as the concentration of family households threatened by poverty among the resident population. This set-up of the index works on the basic rationale that children from families threatened by poverty are more often suffering from social, psychic and cognitive strains, which make good school performance and a successful school career more difficult to achieve or at least impede them.

For Bielefeld, researchers found urban areas with noticeably different educationally relevant strains for the catchment districts of primary schools (see figure 1).

Figure 1 ´City districts with low (light green), medium ((medium green) and high (dark green) educationally relevant strains`

The steering committees of the educational region decided that the prioritised measures to be carried out in the educational region as explained above are to be implemented in a first step in three pilot areas. Two of the pilot areas are to be positioned in the districts under high educational strain. For the sake of comparison the third pilot area is to be positioned in a district characterised by low, or rather medium educationally relevant strain.

Schools and other players in the educational field finding themselves outside the pilot areas selected but still interested in a co-operation within the educational region, are invited to assign themselves to one of the three pilot areas.

The implementation of the measures and aims of the educational region in three socio-spatial pilot districts supports and facilitates the co-operation and the exchange of information between the players in the educational field and the local schools:

- The different levels of the educational system can co-operate and network in a vertical structure. In this way the single educational levels have – apart from their respective separate assignments – the chance to create the preconditions for a better transition of learners to further learning processes, be they in an institutional or also in an open, informal form.

- Horizontal networking with other social and government institutions like businesses, labour administration, youth welfare services, cultural institutions etc. may be achieved more easily.

- Already existing co-operation and networking structures are extended systematically on a municipal level in co-operation with all players active in the educational field in order to intensify and thus improve the exchange of information, planning and co-ordinating between the various areas of education and the resulting assignments.

In order to further support the schools in the three pilot districts and to meet the networking requirements of these schools 29 social workers started to work in accordance with the Education and Participation Act[1] at 29 schools (21 primary schools, seven vocational colleges and one junior common room) in 2012.

The four prioritised measures in the educational region:

Measure 1:
Harmonising transition between primary school and secondary school

Statistical surveys found that the ratio of secondary-school recommendations leading to higher level school qualifications – Realschule (middle schools) and Gymansium (grammar school) – varies a lot within the 10 Bielefeld city districts. There are indicators that, apart from numerous other factors, the recommendation criteria, which would need to be better co-ordinated, contribute to this discrepancy.

Standards agreed consensually (-> e.g. a competence-oriented assessment sheet) are to provide a sound basis for continuing the learning process at secondary school.

The secondary schools are to build on the competences of the students they have admitted and to develop a harmonious transition.

---

[1] Education and Participation Act: Since 2011 recipients of social security benefits have been given the chance to apply for benefits allowing their children to take part in education and other activities. This includes, e.g. subsidies for lunch in day-care institutions and schools; costs for individual tutoring; costs for class outing in schools and day-care centres; personal school supplies at the beginning of the term; funds to enable participation in social and cultural activities of the community; transport costs, unless they have already been taken care of under different regulations.

Measure 2:
Consistent individual support

Individual support means that the potentials of all students are exploited to the full so as to ensure the individual success of all learners with respect to learning and education. To identify the skill levels of learners and their learning requirements is a central objective.

Aims of the measure:
-> Individual support in the transition from primary to secondary schools
-> Encourage and challenge in a concept co-ordinated between the different level schools
-> Introduction of standards into the school programmes

The frame of reference is supplied by the Schools Act North Rhine-Westphalia: "The Schools Act is aimed at creating a school system in which each child and each adolescent can optimally use and develop his or her potentials and talents independent of his or her origin. Consequently individual support becomes the focal point of school work and is directed at all students. "

Measure 3:
Partnership for shaping education between families and educational institutions

Parents and teachers create a school for all: Concepts developed at primary schools regarding a successful dialogue between parents and school are to be documented and evaluated. Recommendations to act and binding principles for parent participation are to be developed and implemented in the respective pilot district / neighbourhood. These may take the shape of offers for individual counselling, parent cafes and group offers but also schemes to improve parent participation at schools.

Measure 4:
Developing and implementing an education-related documentation from year 0 to 18

Institutionalised education is a process where each part builds on the other. Yet, as a rule educational institutions predominantly work each in its own system. A consistent documentation recording each consecutive part, which puts the child at the centre of attention, breaks through the logic of this system. It allows early identification of competences, resources and special educational needs.
The players in the field of education responsible for the drawing up of individualised educational documentations co-operate with each other, agree common goals, responsibilities, framework conditions and standards. In addition the players come to an understanding about the indicators to be surveyed and documented which are then to be used in the individual educational documentation and lay down the specific responsibilities of each party regarding the realisation of the documentation.

The successful implementation and evaluation of these four medium-term measures in the pilot districts will be followed by a transfer of experiences and concepts into the whole educational network. This approach facilitates the creation of a social and political environment that supports people in their educational processes and provides adequate resources.

Text written by: Bildungsbüro der Stadt Bielefeld, www.bildungsbuero-bielefeld.de