

Models of organization and governance of pre-school education and issues of inter-agency coordination and cooperation



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Two heads in one pot

Research and practice suggest various models of organizing and governing pre-school educational institutions in small communities. For instance, some experts claim that it is more effective to join the organization and governance of pre-school and compulsory education under the umbrella of one educational institution, one legal entity: school. Specifically, some experts believe that such a model implies the maintenance of the school governance system through integrating the pre-school into the school system and its organizational culture, whereas some others insist that two diverse educational institutions, i.e. a pre-school and a compulsory school, should function individually within the administrative space of the school. In the latter case, the experts suggest that the resources available in small communities, such as the main school building with other adjacent ones, its space, inventory, infrastructures, library, administrative and technical support staff be used jointly, both by the pre-school and the compulsory school, as in many cases these resources are underutilized. They emphasize that such a model will allow increasing significantly the efficiency of both the community and state resources. In case of co-financing the above mentioned expenses, the state indicator for the organization of pre-school education will become more realistic, given the scarce resources of the small communities, since the resources that the community will save can be invested not only in the organization of pre-school education, but can also help address content issues. Experts think that such a model will strengthen the methodological cooperation between the two educational institutions in small communities, thus contributing to the enhancement of the continuity of education. In this case, the participation of the community in the governance of the school will increase, as well as there will be more support to the school. One should not forget that the maintenance of the underutilized resources is exclusively the responsibility of the school.

Artillery preparation

However, at the same time the experts caution against the numerous impediments on the way to implementing such a model. For instance, in their opinion, in practice the legislative regulations are not conducive for the models advocating joint governance. Specifically, the regulations are partially incomplete and sometimes even impeding. They particularly emphasize the importance of developing several typical models of joint governance of the two educational institutions in small communities in the Republic of Armenia. Within the framework of the model, such efforts will ensure and establish a clear distribution of the roles and responsibilities of all the actors involved, namely, the state agencies implementing educational policies, regional authorities and local administrations. Next, the procedures for coordinating the functions of each of these actors and their cooperation will be clarified.

It is necessary to define the principles of mixed co-financing of the activities of the two educational institutions within the same administrative space, including the state (perhaps by implementing the per student funding formula for both institutions), community, charity and private sources, as well as define the specifics of the accounting and reporting. It is necessary to define the standards of

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joint activities for the two public educational institutions functioning under one umbrella, taking into account the peculiarities of pre-school age child care, food distribution, medical care and hygiene issues, which have to be addressed at school. Thus, the initiative of establishing a pre-school, running it and ensuring its further sustainability will be significantly clarified and the whole process will be facilitated for the benefit of the family and the society in large. It is interesting to note that the advocates of this model insist that the policy of separating high school from the compulsory school will also contribute to the effective functioning of this model. They are certain, that the integration of these two institutions will allow the communities and families to participate more closely in the governance of these vital educational institutions, rather than feeling and being more alienated. They note however that the suggested model should not restrict in any way the choice of the founder of pre-school: the community.

Can one serve two masters?

Another group of experts is still skeptical though about integrating the pre-school and the compulsory school into one institution and believes that these institutions will be more effective if they address their own issues separately. The arguments differ. For instance, the following factors are noted as significant for supporting such division: the different issues and priorities of these two institutions, the education and care of pre-school age children in the environment of older children, the lack of classroom setting appropriate for younger children at school, absence of pre-school teachers in small communities, expenses in case of different administrations, the issue of employment in small communities, issues arising in case of a growing body of pre-school students, the complexities of co-financing of bills, accounting and reporting, the difficulty of complying with both the state and local governance regulations, the inflexibility of regional governance agencies, the lack of examples of implementing mixed models of responsibilities and governance, the inevitability of different governance principles and administrative interests, legislative obstacles, complex administration and transparency issues, the wide range of community specifics, the factor of personal relations, etc. Notwithstanding this huge list, all the experts insist that the pre-school needs a clear and effective curriculum which should be available to all the specialists in the community.

When the right hand knows what the left one is doing

A third group of experts believes that pre-school education can be organized exclusively with the resources available in the community and within the framework of the rights and the responsibilities of the local self-governance bodies, of course, given there is enough initiative and imagination. They share some practical examples, such as the organization of a pre-school in the culture center of the community solely with the help of the parents and volunteerism. They are unanimous in one thing though: there is no alternative to the cooperation between various community and state institutions with the goal of organizing pre-school education in small communities, to the joint utilization of resources and to the increase in the efficiency of teaching jobs. No matter how carefully typical models are developed, they are not always easily adapted everywhere. On one hand, it is necessary to offer some general solutions to the communities, which, on the other hand, will give the communities enough flexibility to choose the models and adapt according to their own contextual characteristics.

The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion "Models of Organizing Preliminary Education in Small Communities in Armenia", which took place on September 25, 2008. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations.

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