

**Involving stakeholders in the preparation of a recommendation on a possible reorganization of the school year in Flanders**

Marleen Colpin

Staff member at the Flemish Education Council

# Context: Belgian education systems

- 3 education systems for 3 language communities (Dutch, French and German)
- Education under authority of regional governments
- Specific situation in Brussels:
  - Dutch speaking schools under authority of Flemish government
  - French speaking schools under authority of French community

# Context: reorganization of school year in French community

- In 2021: Minister of Education in French community decided to reorganize the school year ('Pacte pour un enseignement d'excellence')
  - For primary and secondary education
  - Wallonia and French speaking schools in Brussels

- Shorten the summer holidays with two weeks, in order to reduce summer learning loss (for vulnerable children).
- Compensation: 2 one-week-holidays during the school year, were lengthened to 2 weeks.
- The 4 two-week-holidays during the school year were planned in such a way that each time seven weeks of school alternate with two weeks of holiday, in order to obtain a more logical rhythm throughout the school year, which is then followed by a 7-week summer holiday.

# Context: reorganization of school year in French community

- Reorganization in Wallonia raised following questions:
  - 1) Two different systems in a small country → difficulties (especially in Brussels where there are French and Dutch speaking schools)
  - 2) Scientific evidence confirming learning loss during long summer holidays (for vulnerable children)

# Advice on request of Flemish Minister of Education

- Flemish Minister of Education asked for 2 advices (announced in June 2021, shortly before the beginning of the summer holidays):
  - 1) By Flemish Education Council (Vlor)
  - 2) By Social-Economic Council of Flanders (SERV)

# Advice on request of Flemish Minister of Education

- Members of Vlor:
  - representatives of all the different stakeholder organizations in education and training in Flanders: representatives of the *organizers* of education, of educational staff (trade unions), of parents, of pupils and students, ...
- Board of directors of Vlor wanted a clear understanding of the viewpoints of these member organisations
  - → Each member organisation organised a survey to arrange a broader and more direct consultation of stakeholders than is regular for the Vlor

# Experiences and lessons learned

- Diversity

- Bad timing of request by minister: the request was asked before summer holiday, working group could only come together after...
- Member organisations therefore had started their own process  
(some more participatory process, others asked one-sided questions,...)
- Different approaches of surveys → results not completely comparable
- Some clear tendencies that led to an unanimous recommendation in the end

**→ Stronger coordination by secretariat was needed**

# Experiences and lessons learned

- Reporting and communication:
    - Agreement to not share results before the recommendation was finished
    - Not everyone followed this agreement
    - Thereby the debate was held in public
    - Weakened the impact of the recommendation
- ➔ **Better and formal confidentiality agreements**

# Experiences and lessons learned

- Data from surveys and scientific research was used selectively by the member organisations to match their viewpoints
  - Analysis and research was published with disclaimer
- Think in advance how to present the results to the public**

# Result: a recommendation

- no general support field among the educational partners for a reorganization of the school year in Flemish education at the time
- 3 recommendations:
  - 1) Do not rush → monitor closely what happens in the French community.
  - 2) Develop a global policy for the approach of unequal educational opportunities, to guarantee optimal chances for learning and development for all pupils, during the school year and during the holidays.
  - 3) Give priority to the debate on wellbeing in education.