Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1501 (2001)[1]

Parents' and teachers' responsibilities in children's education

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly stresses that education is at the root of the development of every human being and of society. Because of its importance for the future of Europe, it should have priority in the Assembly's debates and the Committee of Ministers' action.

2. Education is, from birth to adulthood, a mixture of factors and influences. Two institutions, however, play a pre-eminent role and have formal educational responsibilities before the law and society: the family and the school.

3. Parents have always been and always will be the first educators of a child. They have the right and the duty to lay the intellectual and emotional bases for their children's lives, and to help develop their system of values and attitudes, particularly since a child's future is strongly conditioned during the pre-school period. They must also exercise their responsibilities as parents of schoolchildren. For its part, the state must run an educational system which trains young people to be good citizens and sound professionals, providing them with the bases for life-long learning and personal development.

4. For all the clarity of this general division of responsibilities, its practical implementation is becoming increasingly difficult in a contemporary society faced with far-reaching upheavals in both families and schools, and equally in the links between the two institutions. Changing family structures are modifying the traditional distribution of roles, tasks and responsibilities within the family unit. Furthermore, the advent of the information society is raising unprecedented challenges for the education system. Families and schools are also constantly exposed to outside factors, such as the media (especially television and the Internet), friends, the community at large, and so on.

5. In the current state of affairs, neither parents nor teachers can transmit in isolation all the knowledge, skills and values that young people need for proper integration into society. "Parenthood" is still the only "profession" that is not taught formally, whereas school, with its educational knowledge and experience, often lacks motivation and resources. When it comes to confronting such challenges as over-information and the alternative models supplied by the media, or serious social problems, such as social exclusion, marginalisation and violence, both the family and the school are beginning to lack reference points.

6. In this multitude of complex situations, there is growing confusion concerning the role which parents and schools should play in educating young people. There is thus a risk that they may start blaming each other, with each side disregarding and shirking responsibility for the really serious problems.

7. Without wishing to draw up an exhaustive list, but convinced of the need for increased awareness of the respective responsibilities of parents and schools, the Assembly nevertheless considers that instead of investigating what each of these two institutions can do on its own, we should consider how they might join forces and combine their responsibilities with a view to an effective concerted effort. To that extent, improving communication between children, parents and schools, with participation by voluntary associations and non-formal educational bodies, and forging a genuine partnership between them are proving absolutely necessary if we are to meet our society's educational needs.

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1. Assembly debate on 26 January 2001 (8th Sitting) (see Doc. 8915, report of the Committee on Culture and Education, rapporteur: Mr Varela i Serra). Text adopted by the Assembly on 26 January 2001 (8th Sitting).

8. Even though the public authorities have gradually realised this need over the past few years, the current extent of partnership between schools and parents must be deemed insufficient, although the situation varies considerably from country to country and between different lifestyles, cultures and religions within each country. Young people feel that they are not sufficiently involved in the taking of decisions which concern them. The community at large (political authorities, economic operators, public and private organisations and associations, and the media) should also be more actively involved.

9. Consequently, the Assembly requests that the Committee of Ministers:

9.1. consider the matter of the respective responsibilities of parents and teachers in children's education and the legislative, educational and practical measures that could be taken to improve communication and strengthen partnership between them, and report to the Assembly;

9.2. organise an international conference in 2002 on partnership between parents and schools, with the participation of the European Union and Unesco;

10. The Assembly also requests that the Committee of Ministers advise member states to adopt special measures, as appropriate:

10.1. to improve communication and interaction between parents and educational authorities at all educational levels (national, regional and local), and encourage the establishment of partnerships, while also ensuring the requisite legal, financial and organisational conditions for the practical implementation of these objectives;

10.2. to involve non-governmental organisations, and particularly associations providing non-formal education, more closely;

10.3. to promote and develop further training for parents, in order to help them play their educational role in a constantly changing world, make them more aware of their responsibilities, and also harmonise the messages received by children at home and at school;

10.4. to make teacher-parent relations a part, or a bigger part, of teacher training, and particularly further training;

10.5. to introduce policies to improve the status of the teaching profession;

10.6. to find ways of making it easier for parents to discharge their parental responsibilities in cases where reconciling family and working life is difficult, and children have to remain at home on their own;

10.7. to encourage educational authorities to give more consideration to young people's needs and concerns, especially by setting up or strengthening student councils and other local, regional and national forms of participation, involving students more closely in educational decision-making and in settling such problems as violence at school;

10.8. to pay very particular attention to education for children from underprivileged social and family backgrounds, and promote specific and, if necessary, out-of-school partnerships with parents from these backgrounds; to train teachers in intercultural relations and to provide the resources needed to overcome language and cultural barriers in relations with immigrant families;

10.9. to give the public a clearer picture of what schools are doing, in order to promote dialogue and so encourage parent participation and make timetables and procedures more flexible to facilitate this participation;

10.10. to foster co-operation between schools and local authorities, for example, by using schools to promote a community spirit and accommodate social, sports and cultural structures;

10.11. to increase the autonomy of schools so that each one can more easily adapt to its specific local realities.

11. The Assembly also recommends that the Committee of Ministers advise member states to promote wide-ranging public dialogue and an increased awareness of the need for co-operation between families and schools, for instance:

11.1. by developing participation by local authorities, employers and the relevant non-governmental organisations in discussion of school or educational issues;

11.2. by promoting televised debates on education, and emphasising the educational responsibilities of both parents, and of teachers;

11.3. by taking advantage of the new information technologies to develop dialogue between families and schools.