

Cities and Education 2030: Research in France



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Overview

Cities play a leading role in the urgent need to implement the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and particularly SDG 4, which aims to ensure universal lifelong access to quality education. Committed to forming close relationships with their citizens, cities are privileged partners of ministries of education and develop education strategies that reflect the needs of their locality. Yet the role of cities in planning and managing education is still not well known.

The 'Cities and Education 2030' research programme, conducted by UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), specifically aims to identify the assets of cities and the major challenges they face in the implementation of education policies. This programme also aims to stimulate the sharing of experiences and strategies between cities and countries.

Between 2018 and 2019, an IIEP research team visited the French cities of Grigny (28,265 inhabitants), Ivry-sur-Seine (63,309), Orvault (26,924) and Saint-Quentin (53,856) to study the design, implementation and management of their education strategies. In each city, around thirty interviews were conducted with a diverse panel of actors from the local education community, including municipal staff, representatives of the Ministry of National Education (inspectors, school

principals and teaching staff), parents, pupils and representatives of civil society.

This policy brief presents the main lessons learned and recommendations drawn from IIEP's research in order to help cities achieve SDG 4 through relevant and optimal planning.

“ Mayors are willing to get involved in education. I don't think it's seen as an obligation, but rather as an obvious course of action; no community team can afford to overlook its pupils.

**Deputy head of a secondary school,
Orvault**

Context

In France, growing responsibilities have been given to cities with regard to education

Decentralization policies rolled out in France in the 1980s, 2000s, and then between 2013 and 2017 granted growing responsibilities to cities with regard to education. Thus, cities became responsible for the public schools in their municipal area at the pre-school and elementary levels. They are responsible for school buildings and their maintenance, the assignment of pupils to schools, and the organization of school services. They also develop complementary

educational activities, as well as the hiring of non-teaching staff for schools (ATSEM, specialized pre-school staff; reception, canteen and maintenance employees; and extra-curricular staff). Finally, they decide on the organization of the academic schedule (teaching hours and days) within the framework defined by the State.

A pivotal role in the education community

The sharing of responsibilities established by the decentralization framework involves the collaboration of the city and the Ministry for National Education, represented at the local level by the district education office (DEO). The city maintains daily relations with the schools via the school management and teaching teams, as well as with the parents and pupils. Its scope of collaboration is broad, extending as it does from institutional actors to the voluntary and private sectors. Those institutional actors include the *Caisse d'allocations familiales* (CAF), the family-oriented sector of the French social security system, which contributes to funding additional and extracurricular activities in the municipal area.

The city's education strategy: a roadmap and unifying document

The various waves of decentralization gradually gave cities the possibility to develop their own education strategy. This was formalized via various local educational projects and then in the *Projet éducatif territorial* (municipal educational project) from 2013 onwards. This document, signed by actors in the municipal area and the local representatives of the Ministry of Education (MoE), demonstrates the city's commitment to education and its ability to coordinate with the local education community.

Developing a meaningful education strategy for the municipal area

Providing access to learning beyond the classroom

The cities complement the MoE's actions with the development of complementary pre- and post-school educational activities. The offer proposed by the cities in this respect was strengthened with the reform of school timetables in 2013. This reform

aimed to reduce the daily teaching time and reorganize the school week. Cities tasked with implementing this reform were given autonomy on how they organized weekly teaching hours in their municipal area. This enabled the development of extracurricular activities in the freed-up teaching time.

In addition to providing cultural and sports facilities, the cities offer cultural education activities to children and young people in their municipal area.

“ Education doesn't stop at school. There are social and leisure centres... and all that is education too.

Head of human resources, Saint-Quentin

In Grigny and Saint-Quentin, DEMOS, a music and orchestra educational programme for young people, set up in partnership with the Paris Philharmonic, works with children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

In order to broaden the offer outside of school hours, several cities focused on training their extracurricular staff. In Ivry-sur-Seine, for example, Le Petit Robespierre centre is a place where municipal education staff can share experiences, and get involved in peer-to-peer training.

Promoting inclusion

Inclusion, based on the specific needs of the municipal area, is a strategic priority in each of the cities studied. This is achieved through various initiatives in the field of education, carried out in collaboration with the MoE (the DEO, school principals, and teaching staff), the CAF and civil society organizations.

A range of actions have been undertaken to support children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds. The relationship between the city education staff and the parents is treated as a priority in each of the cities studied. Events are organized to welcome parents to the school, to build trust, and to develop a framework for informal exchanges. Assistance with homework and, more specifically, help in learning to read and write are provided by municipal social centres and voluntary organizations,

as in the case of Saint-Quentin where the illiteracy rate is high. The cities have adopted a positive discrimination approach by reducing the prices of school meals for the most disadvantaged pupils in Ivry-sur-Seine, or by providing access to extracurricular activities in Grigny. Saint-Quentin has taken over the funding of day care centres for very young children, which were formerly run by voluntary organizations, in order to help their parents access jobs in a context of high unemployment.

“ An education policy must be based on the context of its municipal area and respond to the needs of a particular population and local specificities.

President of ANDEV, the National Association of Directors and Managers of Education in Cities and Local Authorities

Ivry-sur-Seine has made space available in its municipal area for a CHUM, an emergency accommodation centre for migrants that is managed by the city of Paris. Ivry-sur-Seine, which sees large migratory flows, also looks after migrant children in holiday care centres in the summer. The city's drop-in day care centres also offer respite care for families accommodated in the CHUM.

The education strategy of these cities is also micro-local, meaning that it targets neighbourhoods characterized by socio-economic deprivation and troubling educational indicators. This is the case in Grigny where the city has deployed a multidimensional strategy in partnership with the MoE, and public and voluntary partners in the Grande Borne and Grigny 2 neighbourhoods. The aim is to promote both access to and retention of children and young people in the school system, as well as the overall development of neighbourhoods.

Finally, the cities work closely with the MoE and specialized institutions to promote access to education for children with disabilities, and to offer support to their families. They also help with screening, adapting school buildings and training their non-teaching staff. In Orvault and Ivry-sur-

Seine, a family liaison role has been created to promote ties with the families.

Focus on an educational continuum

Beyond their formal responsibilities in the field of education, cities collaborate with local education partners to develop educational pathways for young people aged 0-25.

The cities of Ivry-sur-Seine and Grigny support the MoE's initiative, which aims to build bridges between early childhood and pre-primary school, with the creation of early childhood classes for children aged two to three from disadvantaged families. The cities help with the transition to lower secondary education for which the département (upper political and administrative authority) is responsible. They also maintain links with the parents and make spaces available to teenagers, as well as offering activities. In Grigny, all these initiatives aim to reduce the school drop-out rate – which is a problem in the municipal area – in addition to the measures already put in place by the MoE.

The establishment of higher education structures is a way for cities to promote their attractiveness and economic influence in the municipal area. Mechanisms for the professional integration of young people have also been developed, such as a coaching scheme in Grigny.

Co-designing the education strategy with the local education community

Designing together

Each of the four cities studied designed their education strategy in an inclusive manner. A large number of stakeholders were consulted, including institutional actors (DEO, the CAF and the département), the municipal departments in charge of culture, sport and community life, as well as school managers and parents.

“ Co-construction is a process based on open participation involving a wide range of actors in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies.

RTES (the network of local authorities for a solidarity economy), 2019

In Orvault, the consultation process was broad and open to all residents and age groups, as well as the private sector and civil society. Formal discussions were organized, and consultation workshops and mechanisms were put in place.

The institutional partners are signatories to the education strategy in each city and form the steering committee.

Daily co-construction

The co-construction of the education strategy encompasses its design and implementation. Sharing information about the education strategy is essential to ensure that it is accepted by all the stakeholders. The cities use a vocabulary that is understood by all the actors in the local education community, avoiding the use of highly institutional, abstract and theoretical terms. Different communication channels are put in place to reach the various actors, ranging from traditional media, such as the city's newsletter, to online and direct communication with the parents as in the case of Orvault.

Another key element of co-construction involves carrying out joint projects that bring

together diverse actors. In Ivry-sur-Seine, the Ecole élémentaire d'application Albert Einstein and the CLAE, a school-based after school and holiday care centre, is a prime example of teaching and non-teaching staff collaborating during classroom time.

In Grigny, cross-cutting training is organized at the pre-primary level for both teaching staff and the specialized municipal pre-school staff (ATSEM) who support teachers on a daily basis in the classroom, and even extracurricular staff.

Meeting the challenges of co-construction

The cities have identified several challenges with regard to co-constructing their education strategy. Although they took a participatory approach, the consultation process excluded certain local actors from the process, and in some cases teachers and non-teaching staff were not involved.

The time required for the consultation and the complexity of the process also posed a challenge. However, using the perspectives of these actors is essential to ensuring ownership of the education strategy and its effective implementation by all.



“The community must take ownership of the project. We have to provide plenty of communication and enable everyone to participate. It takes time and you have to give people enough time to take ownership of the project and feel part of it.

DEO Head, Grigny

Similarly, the communication campaigns did not always reach the parents. In certain cases, field officers working in the schools had limited knowledge of the city’s education strategy. In Grigny, several education strategy documents were not well understood by the actors. Clarifying the process, simplifying the language used, and designing a broader communication strategy targeted to a specific audience are essential.

Putting education at the heart of intersectoral approaches

Promoting education as a pillar of sustainable development in the city

The cities studied place education at the heart of their local development strategy. Synergies between education and the other development sectors in cities, such as culture, urban planning, health, and social action, are considered essential in contributing to the sustainable development of the municipal area (UNESCO, 2016; UNESCO-GEM Report, 2019). In collaboration with schools, the cities are implementing educational sustainable development projects through waste recycling initiatives and tackling food waste in school canteens.

In the framework of the construction and renovation of school buildings, the cities are

Figure 1. Orvault’s comprehensive education project



aligning themselves with new environmental standards and starting to think about greening school playgrounds to combat heat waves.

The collaboration between education and culture departments is particularly well developed in the four cities studied. In Saint-Quentin, the city provides schools and social centres with a wide range of cultural activities in line with the MoE curriculum. In cities facing demographic expansion and urban renewal, such as Grigny and Ivry-sur-Seine, the education and urban planning departments work together to anticipate needs in terms of revising the school map, and building schools.

In Orvault, the city's education strategy is designed and implemented in a way that encourages intersectoral collaboration. Starting from the assumption that the development of children and young people is not solely reliant on time spent in the classroom, the city has designed a comprehensive educational project that calls on the expertise and involvement of the various municipal sector departments (see *Figure 1*).

Coordinating education with other sectors in times of crisis

Intersectoral collaboration is critical in crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The municipal education staff offer support to sectors in need. During lockdown, the cities and the MoE arranged care for the children of key workers, who were essential to the management of the health crisis, before, during and after school. In several cities, school canteen and maintenance staff helped out in residential homes for the elderly and in hospitals.

The municipal education departments coordinated with other sectoral departments in the city, such as culture, social action, youth, and sport, to continue to offer non-school education to children and young people living in their municipal area, targeting the most disadvantaged among them. Cultural programmes and multimedia libraries provided online access to documentary resources and events. The cities and the MoE set up a communication

channel to identify problems encountered by families, provide food and material and psychological assistance, and to organize the care of those children in the greatest difficulty. The pre-existence and quality of coordination mechanisms influenced the effectiveness of the local educational response to the crisis.

“ We are fortunate in that we have created a partnership culture, which means that we are constantly adjusting when we are confronted with a crisis.

**Deputy director general,
Education Childhood and Youth, Orvault**

Developing new approaches to working

The municipal staff we met in the course of our research highlighted the challenges associated with strengthening intersectoral collaboration at the city level. Recurring obstacles include working ‘in silos’, meaning different municipal departments each have their own professional culture, a limited knowledge and understanding of the work of other departments, and a lack of time to engage in collaborative work.

The cities have developed several initiatives to strengthen links between the municipal education department and other departments. In Ivry-sur-Seine and Orvault, project manager roles have been created to coordinate the municipal education project. Endowed with strong interpersonal skills, these employees play a key role in coordinating and promoting relations between the various municipal departments, schools, partners and families.

The actors interviewed in the four cities studied spoke of the benefits of having discussions devoted to better understanding the work of other municipal departments, and recognizing the expertise and legitimacy of each. Ivry-sur-Seine initiated an organizational transformation process involving all municipal employees to revise the city administration organization chart, de-compartmentalize the various departments, and streamline their collaboration.

Cités éducatives : towards a new local governance of education

Cités éducatives is an initiative aimed at bringing together local actors (DEO, school management, and teaching staff; government departments; local authorities; voluntary organizations; and families) to improve the educational care of children from the age of three and young people up to the age of 25 before, during, and after school. In 2019, 80 territories with over 5,000 inhabitants, presenting major urban failings and challenges in terms of school diversity, were awarded the 'Cités éducatives' label.

In Grigny, the steering committee focuses on reviewing certain key aspects of the education strategy, which enables it to evaluate progress made towards attaining the objectives and allows it to re-adjust its strategy as necessary.

Source (in French): <https://www.education.gouv.fr/les-cites-educatives-un-label-d-excellence-5093>

“ Municipal staff must learn to work in an intersectoral manner. Today, they have spaces where they can come together, rather than each staying in their own departments.

Deputy director general
for resources, Grigny

Monitoring and evaluating the city's education strategy

Defining shared governance structures

The co-construction of a local education strategy requires effective steering and evaluation tools to inform and adjust its implementation, and to ensure transparent reporting for the multiple actors involved. The cities studied face common challenges in designing then implementing the evaluation framework of their education. It has proved complex to identify a common frame of reference for steering and evaluating all the stakeholders, as each actor, particularly the city, the MoE, and the CAF has its own vocabulary, schedule and evaluation tools. Maintaining the active and ongoing commitment of all the partners in the steering committees is challenging. Municipal staff in the education departments speak of the difficulty of finding enough time to step back from and reflect on the implementation of the education strategy.

The Cités éducatives initiative piloted in Grigny provides solutions to these challenges through the institutionalization of a shared monitoring system for the educational strategy between the city and the MoE.

Co-designing meaningful evaluation tools

The identification of meaningful indicators to facilitate the steering and evaluation of the education strategy is a challenge shared by all the cities studied. The current indicators are mainly quantitative (for example the number of children in after-school care) and do not allow for an exhaustive evaluation of the objectives of local authority educational strategies, which take a holistic view of child and youth development.

The actors interviewed as part of the research emphasised the need to take the time to define indicators that are shared by the entire local education community, as Grigny did by organizing a 'hackathon' (an event during which a community comes together to work on a collaborative project over several days). It is also necessary to strengthen the culture of evaluation, which is still tentative, in a way that grants the right to make mistakes and encourages experimentation. However, this approach can be considered risky in contexts marked by electoral issues.

Recommendations

On the basis of the research carried out in France, a number of avenues have been identified to guide cities in conducting a planning process that is adapted to the needs of their territory, and to promote access to quality education for all:

- identifying and empowering actors in the local education community;
- creating spaces for dialogue with regard to designing, implementing and monitoring the education strategy;
- developing a shared stakeholder culture around the strategy;
- analysing and identifying specific educational needs in the territory;
- encouraging different perspectives with a view to having a shared diagnosis of education opportunities and challenges;
- identifying possible collaborations between actors and sectors to define meaningful strategies;
- creating cross-cutting roles to coordinate the municipal education strategy;
- designing a strategy that can adapt to changing needs in the territory;
- integrating the steering and evaluation of the educational strategy from the outset, thanks to relevant indicators and tools.

Information

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