

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

For Reducing Early School Leaving

This policy recommendation package is based on the experiences gained during the implementation of the **RISE project**. The sources of these recommendations include a questionnaire survey conducted among participating students and teachers, the findings of the program's impact assessment, as well as the practical experiences of mentors, professional leaders, and development specialists.

Results from these various sources consistently show that early school leaving is primarily driven by family and social problems, learning difficulties, a lack of motivation, and the absence of adequate support services.

1. Institutionalizing Supportive Professional Services

Supporting students at risk of dropping out cannot be resolved solely through pedagogical means. According to the experiences of the RISE project, involving psychologists, social workers, remedial teachers, and mentors significantly increased the chances of student retention.

Recommendations

- Providing continuous psychological, social, and remedial professional services in every institution.
- The employment of specialists should be based on predictable state funding instead of grant resources.
- The presence of these specialists should be integrated into the daily operations of the institutions.
- Developing an early warning system to identify at-risk students.

Expected Impacts

- Early identification and faster management of problems.
- Prevention of dropout processes and a reduction in the likelihood of early school leaving.
- Sustained strengthening of institutional professional capacity.

2. Nationwide Extension of Independent Mentoring

Mentoring proved to be one of the strongest supportive elements. Students shared their problems much more openly with a professional who did not participate in their grading and was not part of the school hierarchy. Therefore, the mentor's independence is a key factor.

Proposed Measures

- Extending mentoring services nationwide for students at risk of dropping out.
- The role of the mentor must always be filled by an external specialist, independent of the institution.
- The mentor must not participate in the student's grading or assessment.

- Providing a regular, long-term mentoring process instead of occasional consultations.
- Establishing a unified professional training and supervision system for mentors.

By involving independent mentors, the following can be achieved: an increase in students' trust, earlier identification of problems, and the strengthening of the relationship between the school and the student.

3. Strengthening Cooperation with Families

The prevention of early school leaving is unimaginable without the active involvement of families. Families of students at risk of dropping out are often difficult to reach through traditional school channels. An effective partnership can only be established through two-way communication built on trust.

Proposed Measures

- More informal, personal forms of contact: family days, community events, workshops.
- Organizing parental workshops: learning support, career choices, digital tools, adolescent challenges.
- Flexible communication: phone calls, online communication, personal meetings, home visits.
- Involving "bridge-building" specialists: mentors, social assistants, family support workers.
- Trust-based communication focusing on strengths instead of emphasizing deficiencies.

4. Targeted Management of Learning Difficulties

Learning difficulties represent one of the defining risk factors for early school leaving. At the secondary school stage, fully eliminating basic skill deficits is not a realistic goal; however, significant results can be achieved by developing functional competencies.

Development Areas	Proposed Methods
• Regular tutoring opportunities • Time management and learning techniques	• Project-based learning • Cooperative learning organization
• Small-group remedial programs	• Digital learning tools
• Reading comprehension, communication, problem-solving	• Playful and experience-based formats
• Competencies usable in the labor market	• Tasks based on real-life situations

5. Community Experiences and Group Development

Teachers considered group sessions to be one of the most useful elements of the program. Methods based on active participation, cooperation, and collective creation strengthen self-confidence, the sense of belonging to a community, and school attachment.

Proposed Measures

- Organizing regular group development sessions.
- Project-based community tasks: events, exhibitions, media content, school projects.
- Community-building programs, camps, and experiential pedagogy sessions.
- Creative tools: drama pedagogy, photo and video projects, digital storytelling.
- Involving peer support programs and authentic role models.

At-risk youth often reconnect with the world of school not through learning situations, but through shared experiences, creative processes, and authentic human relationships. Therefore, community and creative elements must be treated as a central tool for dropout prevention.

6. Labor Market and Career Guidance Support

Teachers highlighted labor market training and career guidance activities among the most useful elements of the program. Young people need to see a tangible connection between school studies and future employment.

Proposed Measures

- Interactive labor market training using experiential pedagogy methods in all grades.
- Workplace visits, professional demonstrations, and the involvement of employers.
- Resume and portfolio writing workshops, mock job interviews.
- Analysis of real job advertisements, practicing job-hunting techniques.
- Basic labor law and financial literacy: employment contracts, remuneration, employee rights.
- Providing information on the risks and necessary steps regarding employment abroad.

7. Development of Social and Financial Support Systems

Nearly two-thirds of teachers identified the need to earn money as a defining reason for dropping out. Financial incentives alone are not enough—they can only be truly effective as part of a complex support system.

Immediate Measures

- Ensuring better accessibility to available scholarships.
- Providing simple, easily understandable information about support opportunities.
- Flexible solutions to balance studies and employment.

System-level Development

- Incentive systems that recognize participation and individual progress.

- Cooperation with local municipalities and civil organizations (NGOs).
- Linking financial support with mentoring and career guidance.

Summary and Priorities

The experiences of the RISE project clearly show that early school leaving can only be effectively managed through interventions affecting multiple areas simultaneously. Preventing dropout is not exclusively an educational task; schools on their own have limited capacity to address underlying family, social, mental, and motivational problems.

Based on the program, interventions that meet the following criteria are particularly effective:

- Provide personalized, long-term support by involving external, independent mentors.
- Build on community experiences, group development, and joint projects.
- Develop students' competencies through experiential and practice-oriented methods.
- Help young people see a realistic connection between school learning and their future career paths.
- Take into account the role of families and local communities in supporting students.

For youth at risk of dropping out, traditional pedagogical and communication forms are often insufficient. The common characteristics of successful programs are flexibility, operations built on relationships of trust, an experience-centered methodology, and treating young people as active partners in their own development process.