

NATIONAL REPORT OF ITALY

Structure of the education system and parental participation

The Italian education system has had an interesting historic evolution which can be observed by comparing the national illiteracy rates: 78% in 1861 and 1.2% in 2001. Approximately 9 million students were registered for the 2009/2010 school year by the Ministry of Education, of which 5.6 million were in compulsory schooling, 63% of the total school population¹. By law², compulsory schooling ends with the achievement of a qualification, and lasts at least ten years. The three pillars of the education system are: "free and compulsory schooling", the concept of the "right to education" and the "participation of all educational actors in the educational process of children", established by a network of laws. From this normative base, parental participation is established at a school level (Class Council and School Board), at a provincial level (Province and District Councils) and at a national level (Board of Public Education). The parents who participate in participatory bodies are elected by all the parents of the school. Their aim is to inform other parents, listen to them and help them.

The Bassanini law and the Decree of the President of the Republic of the 8th March 1999, established the autonomy of the school at all levels. They aim to reform part of public administration through forms of decentralisation. They also aim to reform the Italian school system on the basis of a network of schools that are autonomous in terms of economy, management, organisation and training.

The law on equality in education³ allows families who choose non-State schools to take advantage of public funds in the form of aid. Moreover, training and information services for parents can be provided and the school staff, parents and students participate in the development of autonomy by fulfilling their responsibilities.

Elected parents participate in school bodies to build the Educational Proposal Plan ("Piano dell'Offerta Formativa" -POF), which establishes the general programme of services offered for each school. It is a document within which national authorities, school resources and the local social reality converge. It is put together every year by the *Teachers College* with the help of parents and updated when necessary. Parents also have the right/duty to suggest programmes; they are involved with teachers and

¹. Nursery, primary school and first and second level degree students. Source: Ministry of Education, Data on the school system – national data, http://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/dg_studioprogrammazione/index_new.shtml

². See Ministerial Decree of the 22nd of August 2007, no. 139 and the Law of 6th of August 2008, no. 133, art. 64.

³. Law of 10th of March 2000, no. 62.

the head of the school in the formulation and use of the budget. Parents therefore have a good presence in this school system and the role of the family is fulfilled through associations recognised by the Ministry, such as the *Forum Nazionale delle Associazioni dei Genitori della Scuola* (FoNAGS), which is a body with the aim of providing permanent consultation for families on problems relating to school.

In 1999⁴, participatory bodies at a central, regional and local level were reorganised. Councils at a provincial or district level were removed, the Superior Board of Public Education (at a national level) was reformed, as were the Regional Educational Councils and the local Councils, which now have an exclusively administrative function.

Results

Regarding the indicators relative to international and regional instruments in the field at hand, Italy has ratified:

- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child
- The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
- The Convention against Discrimination in Education
- The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
- The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.
- Protocol n°1 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom

However, it has not ratified:

- The United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers

On the basis of our research the value of the indicators for Italy are as follows:

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|--------------------------|-----------|
| Right to information | 75 |
| Right to choose | 60 |
| Right of appeal | 100 |
| Right of participation | 30 |
| Overall indicator | 66 |

⁴. Legislative Decree of 30th of June 1999, no. 233, "Riforma des organes collégiaux".

Right to information

In Italy the right to information is guaranteed by the 1999 law. The formulation of the "Educational Proposal Plan" dictates not only that schools must publish information, but also transmit it directly to students and parents. Each school's POF contains the organisation of the school system, the curriculum, the organisation of the school and admission criteria. However, no information is provided on scholarships or aid, as these are managed by the municipalities, who also deal with information for families in difficulty.

As for external assessment, Italian schools are assessed each year by the *Istituto Nazionale per la Valutazione del Sistema Educativo di Istruzione e di Formazione* (INVALSI). INVALSI results are regularly published, but results on schools are not disclosed. In terms of internal assessment, although the idea of quality and school self-assessment was introduced in 1999, it has hardly been expanded on.

Right to choose

Generally speaking, according to the data we collected, the curriculum is extremely varied because the school can freely respond to local demand through collaboration with the POF. The connection with the local area is reinforced by the fact that teachers, parents and the municipality participate in drawing it up.

Overall, parents who choose a school other than those established by public authorities must pay the school fees. Only certain regions such as Lombardy have set up school grants which allow families access to this type of school.

Right of appeal

In general, mechanisms of appeal are effective but unknown, due to their lack of visibility in information given to parents.

Right of participation

Today, parental participation is almost exclusively concentrated at a school level where parents enjoy full autonomy. The POF, when well-managed in terms of school/family cooperation, remains the preferred instrument for parental involvement.

Following the "Reform of collegial bodies in autonomous schools" in 1999, parents are no longer represented on the Superior Board of Public Education (national), or in the regional Council. The Ministry of Education has recorded a considerable decrease in parental participation, both in election of representatives and school life. It wishes to promote a review of participatory bodies adapted to the new situation.



Conclusions

The Italian system has strong points, especially where individual rights are concerned, but weaknesses remain with regard to collective rights. As far as individual rights are concerned, and particularly the right to information, progress must still be made, especially with regard to the assessment of schools. A significant advance in this area would be the publication of each school's INVALSI on the ministry website. A section could also be added to the POF regarding self-assessment of schools, carried out with parental contribution.

The effectiveness of the right of participation in collective bodies should combine past good practices and new trends that lean towards federalisation of the system, as indicated by the Constitutional Reform act (18th October 2001, no. 2, art. 4) amending article 118 of the Constitution. This reform introduced the principle of subsidiarity of power and "the independent initiative of citizens, individuals and associated for the development of activities of general interest". Consequently, in the field of education, this principle could give parents and associations the ability to create and manage schools.

