

EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT PROJECT, LITHUANIA

2002 – 2005

INTRODUCTION

Lithuania has been engaged in a decade of educational reform as laid out in “The Concept of Education”, 1992. However, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), together with the representatives from the President Office and the Government, has prepared a new strategy for the next decade. The Ministry of Education and Science has reformed the Education Law and policy, “Guidelines of Education of Lithuania in 2002-2012” are being prepared, to reflect the reforms of the past decade and the planned changes. These documents set new strategic trends in the development of education in the light of national goals: democratization of society, strengthening of the market economy and joining the European Union. The Lithuanian education reform has entered into a new stage, whose main priority is ensuring the quality of education.

During the last decade the legal framework for the educational reform was established, a new content of a secondary school was formed, the system of state maturity examinations was reorganized, preparation for schools audit and monitoring of status of education has been started, school libraries were modernized, and a strategy for computerization of education was formulated.

However, many important works that are necessary to ensure quality of education remained not fulfilled through the lack of financial investments and human resources. Insufficient attention was devoted to the strengthening of basic schools: teachers of these schools were not afforded sufficient opportunities for building their professional competencies, equipment in the classrooms and the buildings themselves are outdated, provision with modern teaching aids is poor.

In order to improve quality of education in the basic schools of Lithuania the Ministry of Education and Science prepared the Education Improvement Project. The implementation of this project is expected to be funded from a World Bank loan. It will be co-financed by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and municipal funds. The strategic lines of the Project were approved by the Government on 4 October 2001 and included in the Action Plan of the Government Program for 2001-2004.

The Education Improvement Project aims at solving the following current problems of education:

1. Priority has been given to date to the structural reforms in upper secondary school. The Education Improvement Project now plans to focus upon basic education. The reform of the basic school is of a paramount importance as it at this level that learning skills of pupils are developed and the basis for literacy and life-long learning is laid down. The basic school implements compulsory education from first form through tenth up till the age of sixteen as declared in

the Law on Education. Hence the most important priority of the Education Improvement Project is the improvement of the basic school.

2. While the curricula and structure of general education has changed, insufficient investment has been made to improve the physical infrastructure. Most schools buildings do not comply with the modern requirements due to historically low levels of maintenance. The lack of adequate thermal insulation makes schools energy inefficient. A disproportionate amount of available funds is used for heating schools, funds that could be better used to improve the quality of education. The gap between the requirements of the curriculum and the provision of means necessary for teaching is widening. One of the basic objectives of the Education Improvement Project is to improve learning conditions at basic schools and to create a learning environment that meets contemporary standards.
3. In 1998 the Ministry of Education and Science declared the basic priority to be the improvement of the quality of education. Thus, one of the most immediate and urgent tasks is to create an efficient and effective management system for education so that decisions taken at all levels are based on reliable information. The works of the reform lacked monitoring; they were not consistently based on studies of education and societal change. The educational supervisory system is not enough attuned to the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning. There are too few incentives for schools to provide better quality educational services.
4. Democratization of the society and the transition to the market economy, together with accession to the European Union, imposes a need to review the principles, objectives, conditions and processes of education. Within the past decade the contents of general education were reorganized, education standards and general curricula were created and the system of student assessment was reorganized. However, teachers who need to develop the critical thinking, creativity, communication and co-operation skills of their pupils receive too little and inadequate professional training. The purpose of the Education Improvement Project is to “arm” the teachers of basic schools with the latest teaching/learning strategies and methodologies, to create enabling conditions where they will be able to use the best available methodologies, technologies, teaching materials and equipment.
5. One of the principal priorities of this period is rationalization of the school network. Currently the Ministry of Education and Science is preparing guidelines to rationalize the network of educational institutions. Local governments, the founders and managers of educational institutions, are also

very concerned about this issue. Irrational management of resources result in the fact that many vacant classrooms are being financed. This costs the State about 465 million litas yearly. Educational expenses per pupil vary among regions by as much as 100%. The Education Improvement Project aims to strengthen the capacities of local governments to rationally manage the school network so that the desired quality of educational services is achieved, access and retention is improved and that resources allocated to education are used as rationally as possible. Until there is an effective and efficient system of resource management the system will continue to be under resourced and quality will continue to suffer.

Goals, objectives and priorities of Education Improvement Project

Education Improvement Project is aiming to improve educational achievements of students attending grades 5-10 in basic schools.

The strategic **objectives** are:

2. to enhance the quality of teaching and learning at basic schools;
3. to optimize the utilization of education funds and resources.

Education Improvement Project is an integrated program focused on the following **priorities**:

1. Improved access to general education that meets individual and national development needs;
2. Constant improvement and guarantee of the quality of education;
3. Increasing efficiency – effectiveness of the education system;
4. Enhanced involvement and participation of the school community and the wider society in the process of school improvement.

The Education Improvement Project consists of **four integrated components**:

1. Improvement of teaching and learning conditions at basic schools;
2. Creation of the system of quality management of education;
3. Reduction of energy expenses and improvement of learning conditions;
4. Optimization of the school network.

1. Improvement of teaching and learning conditions at basic schools

The purpose of this component is to develop teachers' professional competence and improve teaching/learning conditions by encouraging active learning of pupils and co-operation between teachers at school and between schools. We plan to achieve this goal by means of the following: 1) a long-term and integrated program of training for teachers, heads of schools and school teams involving municipality education sector officers; 2) the creation of a virtual learning environment at schools; 3) the

provision of schools with new teaching aids; 4) preparation and publication of learning materials, periodical publications and video programs; 5) co-ordination, support and management of the processes of school improvement.

The activities under this component are focused on strengthening of **basic schools**, since basic school forms a basis for the development of students' capabilities that they need both in life and professional activities.

Expected **outcomes** of the component

- Quality of education will improve in 70% of basic schools. Teachers will improve their professional competencies. Schools will be provided with IT and teaching aids that meet their needs and will be able to use them in the process of education.
- 6000 teachers from about 400 basic schools are prepared to use new methods of teaching/learning and student assessment, IT and new teaching aids.
- 250 teachers will become change catalysts: they will help their colleagues (both within their own and in other schools) to introduce innovations. Comprehensive training materials for teachers will be prepared and disseminated at regional teachers' education centers thus making the Program's training content available to all teachers in Lithuania.
- Approximately 400 basic schools in Lithuania will be provided with and trained in the use of modern teaching aids; the schools will be able to select them according to their needs. This will help improve quality of education and increase students' motivation for learning. An effective system of schools' provision with teaching aids will be established; manufacturers and suppliers will be encouraged to expand the market of teaching aids.
- School principals and school teams from about 400 schools are able to plan and work together in peer-assisted teams with a view to improving their schools.
- Most of teachers and students in basic schools will be able to actively learn and work in the virtual environment, which will enable them to more effectively share ideas and experience; information capabilities of students and teachers will be developed.
- A network of schools and teachers who are working and learning together is functioning. Schools share experience in the periodical publication "Changing School" and the web site of the project. "Teachers' Guide" and video programs have been produced on the basis of the experience gained by the schools. This will help disseminate the participating schools' experience among all Lithuanian schools and pedagogues.

2. Creation of the system of education quality management

The main objective of this component is to create a system of education quality management, which is understood as the timely use of relevant information about the consequences of prior decisions, in order to improve our ability to raise system efficiency and student achievement.

In creating a system of quality management in education, the following **objectives** are pursued:

- to create the education management information system (EMIS) embracing the organization of the timely collection of data, the creation of databases, the assurance of their accessibility, training of the providers and users of information;
- to create a system of continuous monitoring of the system of education and to strengthen capacities of different management levels to develop education policies;
- to create a national system to assess students' performance, providing reliable information about the achievements of the pupils of the 4th, 8th and 10th grades, as well as the contents and process of education;
- to create and implement a system of external and internal audit of schools by training school communities to carry out an internal audit, by creating the methodology for external audit and training auditors of local municipalities to apply it;

Expected **outcomes** of the component

- The education management information system (EMIS) will be in place and education managers of all levels will be using EMIS making decisions.
- The capacity for education policy analyses will be enhanced. The politicians and managers of the MES and regional municipalities are formulating, implementing and evaluating education policy using information and policy analyses in order to improve the quality of education.
- The national system to assess students' performance will be in place. The managers of all levels, curriculum developers and teachers are provided with reliable information on the achievements of students and they are using it for the improvement of education quality.
- The capacity to carry on internal and external audit of schools will be enhanced . The managers at municipalities and counties, school principles and teachers are capable to monitor and improve the quality of education.
- Considerably improved managerial competencies of MES, education divisions of municipalities and county administrations, and school managers; they will be afforded opportunities for development and their decisions will be based on reliable information.

3. Reduction of energy costs and improvement of learning conditions

By means of this component we seek to renew school buildings so that energy expenses may be reduced and learning conditions for pupils improved. A long-term objective of this component is to rationalize the application of the funds allocated to education by saving on heating expenses and using savings to improve the quality of education.

The project will cover all municipalities of Lithuania (one school from each municipality) and several county schools. 62 basic schools will be renovated during 4 years. Each municipality selected one school according to the criteria approved by MES. An energy audit funded by the Project will be conducted in these schools as a basis for renovation work. A renovated basic school should conform to a model of a modern basic school. The Project aims at ensuring at least one modern basic school in each municipality capable of disseminating the principles of modern education to other schools. Each municipality will have to invest 25% of the funds required.

Expected **outcomes** of the component

- The implementation of the Project will result in the improvement of learning conditions for the students of 62 basic schools including warmer classrooms; energy resources will be saved; the funds saved will be used for the improvement of quality of education.
- It is expected that the renovation of buildings will help save heat energy and electric power and improve learning conditions for students by increasing the level of comfort in the premises. At present, interior temperature in schools varies from 10° to 15° C; it is expected that after renovation the temperature will be around 18° C.
- Savings of heat energy of about 30-40 % are expected. If no rise in energy prices will occur in the nearest future, **LTL 5, 6 million** will be saved.
- Condition of interior partitions will be improved as a result of school renovation. Life of renovation measures is different (15 years for pipelines, 30 years for roofs) but it is expected that the buildings' service life will be prolonged by 23 years on average.

4. Optimization of the school network

By means of this component we seek to strengthen the economic capacity and skills of local governments to rationalize the school network in order to ensure accessibility to high quality pre-school and general education to children and adults. Rational management of the school network will help save budgetary funds allocated to education and guarantee the diversity of educational services taking into account social, economic, cultural and demographic changes. It will help reduce the number of vacant classrooms, especially in rural areas, as well as modernize the system of students' transportation.

The main goal of the component 4 is to optimize the network of schools within the municipalities so that the following should be ensured:

- the quality of teaching and learning;
- access to education;
- effectiveness of schools;
- efficiency of the network of schools;
- secure and healthy environment of study;
- safe transportation of rural pupils, including pupils with special educational needs.

The component has **three parts**:

1. the development of guidelines for restructuring of the network of schools and the implementation of these guidelines within municipalities;
2. the development of a safe and efficient system of pupils' transportation;
3. an effective utilization of the saved funds.

Reforming of the school network is a complex process related to social tensions. The component provides for a system of incentives that will help municipalities cope with social problems.

Expected **outcomes** of the component:

- Elaborated methodical recommendations for the school network reform within municipalities. Municipalities are trained to draft plans for the optimization of school network minimizing social tensions.
- Analysis and assessment of students' transport alternatives and their cost effectiveness. More effective and safer organization of transport by municipalities. 136 Yellow Buses acquired and handed over to municipalities.
- Accounting for funds saved as a result of renovation and network optimization and their investment in the quality of education.

The following **targets** are expected to be achieved on implementation of the school network restructuring:

1. The number of drop-outs from the schools of general education is down by 30%.
2. No second shift in schools.
3. 52 000 new places for gymnasium students established.
4. 10 000 new places for adults established at the schools of general education.
5. Sufficient number of places for all children willing to attend the pre-school education groups established.
6. The qualification of teachers in rural schools equals that one of urban school teachers.
7. The number of vacant places financed at schools is down by 50 %.
8. The average number of pupils in the classroom is up from 23.6 to 26 in the cities and from 13.8 to 16 in rural schools.

Expected outcomes of the Education Improvement Project

The Education Improvement Project is aimed at improving educational achievements of students at basic schools. It has been foreseen in the project to carry out the assessment of achievements among students of IV, VI, VIII and X grades every second year in order to identify the percentage of students that meet the standard requirements in the Lithuanian language as their mother tongue, mathematics, natural and social sciences. Throughout the project implementation period, the number of students that meet the standard requirements in the whole of Lithuania will annually increase by approximately 2-3%, while by the end of the project the said number of students will amount to 8-10%.

The Project is also aimed at decreasing the number of dropouts and increasing the number of students who will graduate from the basic school. It is expected that at the end of the Project the coefficient of basic school graduates will reach 0,9 (0,77 - year 2000)¹.

Implementation of the Education Improvement Project

The Education Improvement project will be implemented by MES and the education institutions affiliated with it: the Education Development Center, the Education Provision Center, the IT Center, the Center for Professional Development of Pedagogues. Education divisions of county and municipal administrations, regional teachers' education centers, higher schools, non-governmental education organizations and other partners will be involved in the implementation. Many of the planned activities are completely new and Lithuania has no sufficient specialists for their execution, therefore foreign experts' assistance will be required. Development of an effective communication strategy of the program is of particular importance since it will help acquaint all partners and the public at large with the objectives and expected outcomes of the Project, which, on its turn, should ensure their assistance and support for its implementation. Assistance of foreign partners in this area is also required.

¹ This coefficient shows, which part of the students who enter the first grade manage to get basic education. "Education in Lithuania – 2000", page.54.