

Absenteeism as the most important early distress signal – why is it that so indicative?

Absenteeism especially its unjustified form is seen as the most indicative early distress signal of a later dropout all over Europe. It is so important partly because it is easy to be followed up and measured by each student while well-targeted interventions can be built on it as well. For this reason its follow up, punishment and documentation are clearly regulated by the law, its sometimes financial consequences are as well legally controlled. Another reason behind its importance is the fact that the higher the rate of absenteeism the higher the chance for a dropout as well, which was proved by researches too. Estimation from the USA gave exact numbers for this correlation. According to the experts it is already clear at the very beginning of high school who is a potential dropout: if a student misses more than a week time during the first semester, he or she won't attain a high school degree, with a very high probability.

Further literature in English:

Judit Juhasz (2015): *Final report on Crocoos – Cross-sectoral cooperation focused solutions for the prevention of early school leaving project background research*. Tempus Public Foundation, Budapest. Ch. V. [LINK](#)

Heppen, J. B., Bowles Therriault, S., (2008): *Developing Early Warning Systems to Identify Potential High School Dropouts*. American Institutes for Research. http://www.betterhighschools.org/pubs/ews_guide.asp p. 3.

How it is documented?

Absenteeism statistics is one of the major school level indicators in many countries. Follow up happens everywhere however there is a difference in the responsible authority that put all information together. In the Hungarian system for instance class teachers and school leaders have a crucial role, as well as the notary bureau or the family and child welfare centres and guardianship authorities. They are in a remarkable position in spreading information on the case too. Another example is the well-designed Dutch one, where they use an online platform to follow up missed classes which information is directly available by the municipality's responsible professional that visits the family above a certain limit of absence.

In Ireland and the UK there is a separate system for the prevention and follow up of school dropout. As part of this system there is an institute dedicated to follow up absenteeism in each school and it collects yearly reports of the institutes.

Further literature in English:

Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving November 2013

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/esl-group-report_en.pdf

Judit Juhasz (2015): *Final report on Crocoos – Cross-sectoral cooperation focused solutions for the prevention of early school leaving project background research*. Tempus Public Foundation, Budapest. Ch. V.

http://oktataskepzes.tka.hu/content/documents/CroCooS/Final%20research%20report_Early%20school%20leaving%20policies_Crocoos.pdf

What are the main reasons behind the high volume of absenteeism?

Absenteeism alone is not the reason itself but an important symptom of something in the deep. In most cases there is a crisis behind derived either from the family circumstances or social situation, like from the fact that the student has to work besides school. In certain regions students see no perspective so that they lost motivation on learning.

Another important reason is the lack of success in school or exclusion and unsafe environment.

Students need support instead of the punishing or regulatory sanctions only, as these methods can hardly help the deep and real reason behind this behaviour. For an effective help the cooperation of different sectors is a precondition.

Groups that are especially at risk

According to research and experiences students between 15-18 years old with a lower parental control are the most endangered in a high rate of unjustified absence.

Students differ from the mainstream facing often many difficulties. Young people with an ethnic minorities or migrant background are more at risk of poverty and discrimination which both mean an obstacle in their learning path. Students with special needs and disabled are especially at risk as their life circumstances harden their well quality participation in education. For the outcast students social security is provided many times by outside school activities which can lead to their alienation.

Further literature in English:

Judit Juhasz (2015): *Final report on Crocoos – Cross-sectoral cooperation focused solutions for the prevention of early school leaving project background research*. Tempus Public Foundation, Budapest. Ch. V.

http://oktataskepzes.tka.hu/content/documents/CroCooS/Final%20research%20report_Early%20school%20leaving%20policies_Crocoos.pdf

A good example. The Netherland.

The Netherland is an outstanding example of a systematic policy and practice level prevention and intervention that tackles early school leaving. In 2003 a political decision has been made that contributed to a steep fall in dropout and consequently ELET rates. This whole system is based on the

strict administration and follow up of dropout with a supportive mechanism. After unjustified absence, teachers contact parents immediately. Since 2009 they operate an online system that documents absence with its reason behind directly after it happened. Every teacher has a role in this documentation. If more than 16 missed classes are collected throughout 4 weeks' time, the data goes to the municipality professional who visits families and supports them. The purpose of the family visit and other actions is firstly to support the family and the students in a complex form instead of a punitive action.

Further literature in English:

Jelena Joksimovic, Juhász Judit, Mihályi Krisztina, Tomcsik Dóra (2014): *Early warning systems in six European countries*. Desk research report on study visit countries in the framework of CROCOOS– Cross-sectoral cooperation focused solutions for the prevention of early school leaving project. Interim report. Tempus Public Foundation, Budapest. http://oktataskepzes.tka.hu/content/documents/CroCooS/Early%20warning%20systems%20in%20six%20European%20countries_interim%20report.pdf

Strand, M. A-S., Granlund, M. (2013): *The School Situation for Students with a High Level of Absenteeism in Compulsory School: Is There a Pattern in Documented Support?* Jönköping University. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00313831.2013.773561>

brochure about the Dutch approach:
http://www.aanvalopschooluitval.nl/userfiles/file/2012/2012026_OCW_VSV_UK-versie_VSV_beleid_LR_internet.pdf

tags: distress signals, absenteeism, data collection, reasons behind dropout

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