

Issues concerning Integration and De-segregation Educational Reform in the Municipality of Hódmezővásárhely



Background

Hódmezővásárhely is located in south-eastern Hungary, only 25 km from Szeged, where routes 44 and 47 meet.

Please visit us at: <http://www.hodmezovasarhely.hu/oldalak/kezdooldal-2>

Our town, having the second largest rural area in Hungary, has managed to conserve its rural character and it is still surrounded by an extensive farm system. Constructions that have been taking place since World War II, define the characteristics of Vásárhely.

The downtown area is surrounded by blocks of flats and family homes as well. An industrial area has been established at the outskirts of the town. Before 1989, large companies were involved in agricultural machinery and light industry as well as food processing.

After the fall of the former regime, Hódmezővásárhely began to show significant infrastructural improvement. Even though the scientific and educational heart of Eastern Hungary, Szeged is located nearby, our town is still a centre for education, economy, culture and arts within the Dél-Alföld Region. In 1997, the Council of Europe awarded Hódmezővásárhely the Europe Prize.

The population of Hódmezővásárhely is roughly 48,000. Approximately 22 per cent of the inhabitants are under the age of 18 and the number of inhabitants over 60 is

about the same. The size of the official territory of our town explains the relatively rare population density of 100 per km².

The public educational system of our town is a strategically important issue. Our task is to maintain a sustainable school system from kindergarten to college which fits the needs defined by current demographical figures and the local labour market best.

As the first step towards the total reform of the local educational system, the Municipality defined six principles of development:

1. Ensuring high quality and great efficiency of education in all public schools
2. Providing the most recent ICT technology available to help children live up to the standards of an information-based society
3. Making the best and most efficient use of available resources
4. Improving social cohesion through the integration of multiply disadvantaged children.
5. Improving foreign language communication skills
6. Using modern, up-to-date instruments and methods in education to fit the constantly changing needs of the labour market

After a detailed analysis of the situation, in November 2006 General Assembly of the Municipality accepted the Educational Concept of Hódmezővásárhely for the forthcoming years (2007-2013).

I. Pre-school education, kindergartens

Starting Position

Children between the ages of 3 and 6 attend pre-schools in Hungary. In Hódmezővásárhely, the number of children old enough to attend kindergartens schools was quite uneven in different districts of the town. Significantly more children were born to downtown families in a certain time period that is why pre-schools here easily became overpopulated, while in the suburbs pre-school facilities could hardly raise the numbers required to start a single class.

Performed Actions

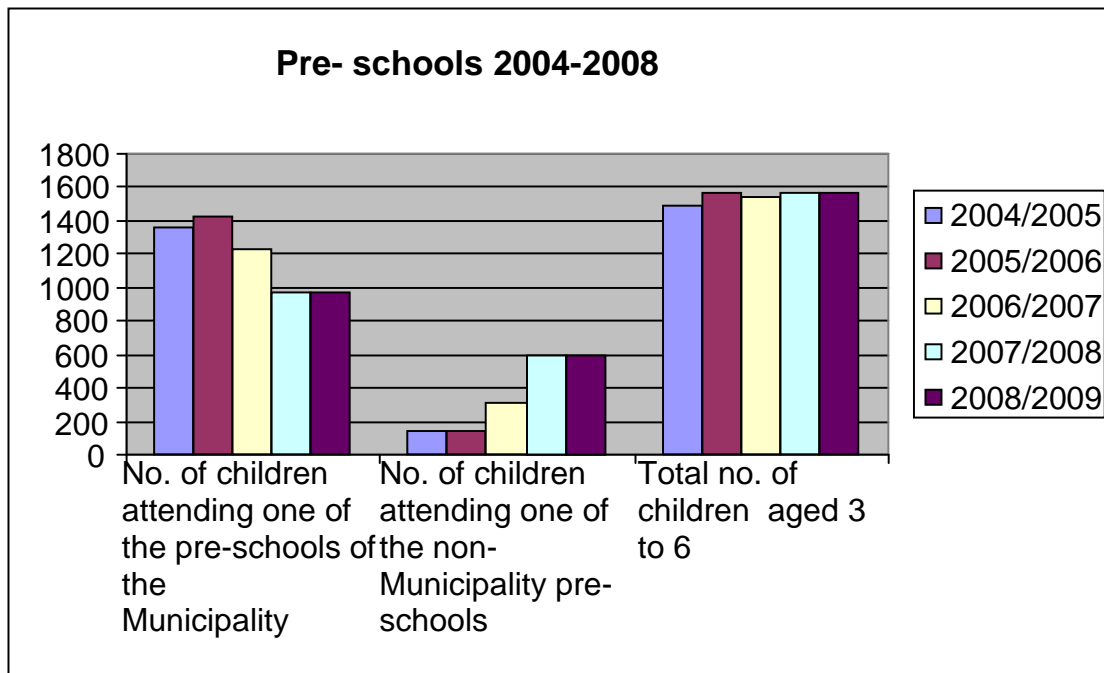
School districts were altered and contracted according to the guidelines laid down in the Concept, so that resources provided by the European Union would become available to help the Municipality end the age of overcrowded pre-school classrooms. In July 2007, some of the formerly separate under populated pre-schools became integrated parts of other kindergartens with significantly higher numbers of children, but their location did not change.

Results

As a result of the educational structural reform, four out of five plus one pre-schools (five downtown and one suburban) still exist, because one of them was taken over thorough an educational agreement by the Roman Catholic Church, and the different onsite locations and buildings of the suburban one became

economically and institutionally integrated to one of the downtown kindergarten schools.

Number of Children in Pre-school education 2004-2008



II. Primary schools

Starting Position

In Hungary, primary schools cater for the children from the age of 6 to 14. The starting analysis pointed out that the number of pupils has shown a significant drop of 2004 in the last four years. In school year 2006-2007 there were eleven municipal primary schools, one private school and a church school in Hódmezővásárhely, which catered for children aged 6 to 14. When choosing their institutions, children from the peripheral parts of Hódmezővásárhely migrated to downtown schools in significant numbers, which caused the demise of peripheral primary schools despite of the large number of children born in these areas. Primary schools faced just the same population-related problems as pre-school kindergartens.

As a result of this process, children from different social groups started to become segregated. In order to avoid this kind of segregation in primary schools, the Municipality paid special attention to the integrated education of multiply disadvantaged children.

Performed Actions

At the end of school year 2006/2007, the Municipality abolished all public primary schools, founding five new ones on the base of the former ten to meet the actual needs.

Based on a new school district map, prepared by the Department of Education to eliminate segregation, the Municipality closed down a school where segregation was not only a threat but reality and the multiply disadvantaged children catered for in that institution were spread and continued to attend one of the five 'new' primary schools. It was necessary to redraw the above mentioned map, because the threat of segregation emerged in some other schools as well.

The basic requirements of a successful integration are openness and professional know-how on behalf of the receiving schools. In order to realize this in practice, the Municipality created a professional program that gained **financial support through the ESF HRD OP (HEFOP 2.1.5./B) tender** ('Integrated Education of Multiply Disadvantaged Schoolchildren').

Starting from September 1st 2007, the Municipality provides school buses with a supervising teacher on each of them to transport children from the outskirts.

Results

The nursery and primary school registration data of the school year following the year of the structural reform reflect the first results of the our program. The number of schoolchildren in the classes of the 'new' schools is close to the maximum number permitted by national regulations. The introduction of integrated public education of multiply disadvantaged children proved to be a success according to the feedbacks received from the local inhabitants on different discussion forums.

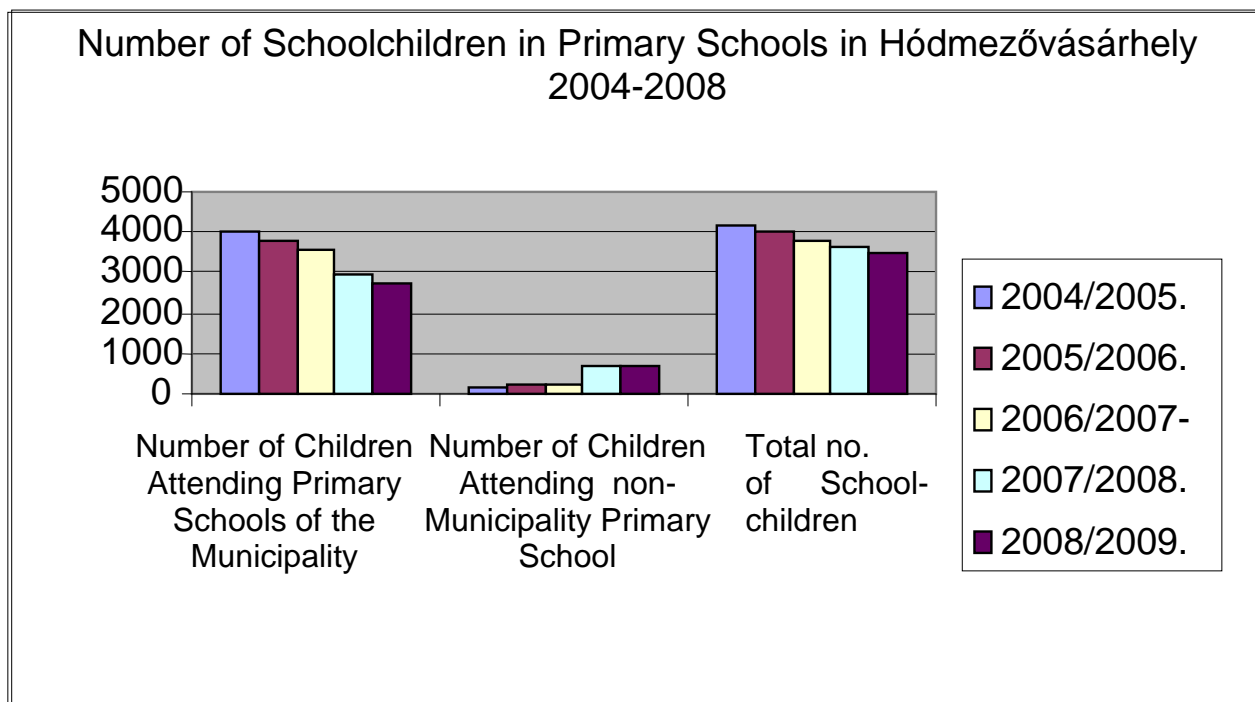
Prior to the execution of structural reforms surveys conducted by professional employees of the Municipality had shown that most of the local inhabitants support the educational reform and they also had the opportunity to widely express their opinion and affect the process of the reform itself.

The principals and parents were asked to take part in a questionnaire on the work of the teachers. Based on the completed survey, selected teachers attended competency based educational trainings. Because of the significant drop in the number of schoolchildren, it was a sad but necessary step for the Municipality to dismiss some of the teachers. In 2007 a layoff counting 100 employees was carried out regarding public primary schools of Hódmezővásárhely.

We have to notice that one of the ten former public primary schools was taken over by the Roman Catholic Church, while two schools were merged and then handed over to the Multifunctional Association of the Hódmezővásárhely Microregion.

The registration for school year 2008-2009 took place in April 2008. The number of children and the rate of multiply disadvantaged children within a class or within a school meet the requirements defined in national regulations, so we

can state that Hódmezővásárhely successfully started its six-year project aiming total integration and long-term sustainment of desegregation in its public primary educational system.



III. Secondary Schools:

Starting position:

Because of 2008's regulatory changes and educational structural changes in vocational training, it was necessary to reconsider the basis of our town's vocational educational system. According to European Union tenders and the initiatives of the Ministries it became quite clear to the Municipality that it is necessary to establish a regional cooperation in the field of vocational education.

To avoid an expected significant drop in the numbers of students in the Municipality's secondary educational system that was foretold by decreasing birth rates, we have to provide labour market-oriented technical and vocational educational structure that may attract students from neighbouring towns, or even counties.

Our Municipality shows great interest to introduce and establish really practice-oriented education, that is the reason why we had already created teaching kitchens, teaching restaurant, and vocational training centres in our institutions.

Performed actions:

The municipality of Hódmezővásárhely and its technical and vocational educational institutions, along with other local governments of Csongrád and Békés counties, established a Regional Integrated Vocational Educational Centre in the form of a non-profit LLC, which involves approximately 22.000 students. The goal of this Centre is to provide high quality vocational and technical education to all of its students.

Integration is also a priority to the Municipality of Hódmezővásárhely regarding secondary level of public education.

Before taking any actions, the Municipality ordered a comprehensive study and analysis on the current state of the vocational and technical educational system of Hódmezővásárhely. The analysis survey investigated the composition and professional structure of the Municipality's secondary schools providing vocational training and education.

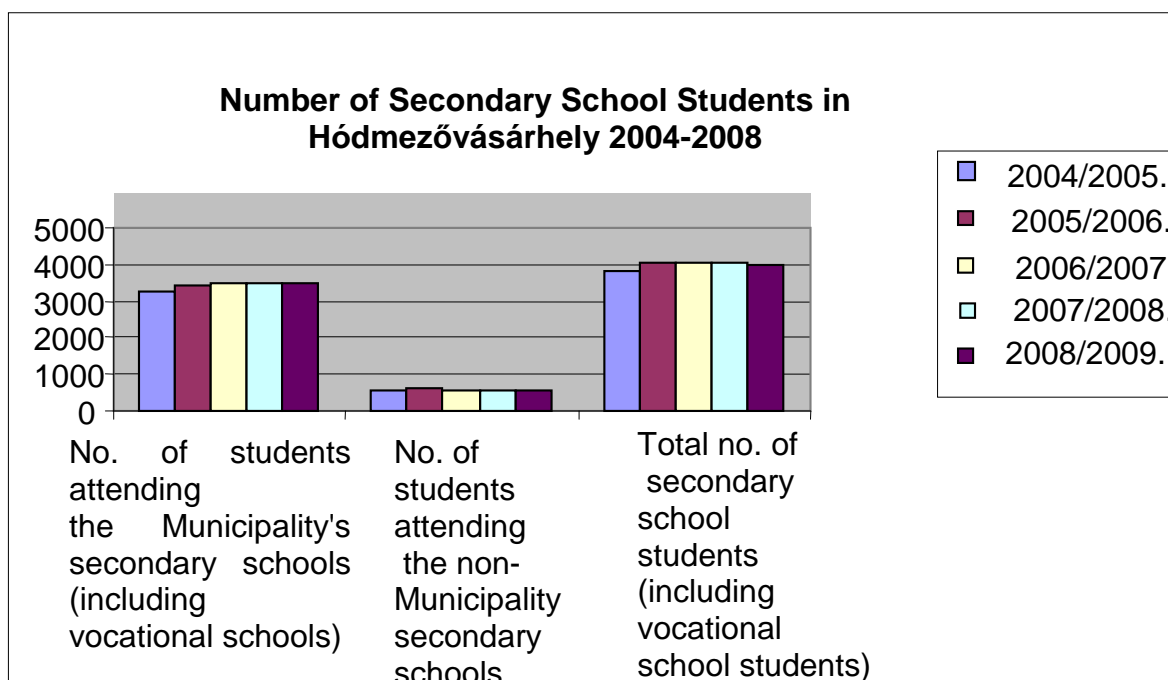
The experts working on the analysis have also taken other measures into account, such as the needs of the labour market, the advantages provided in favour of regional vocational educational centres by legal regulations and the opportunities that help creating and financing a whole new structure. This wide scale analysis survey resulted in the creation of the Action Plan for Vocational Education of the Municipality of Hódmezővásárhely.

Results:

According to the Action Plan, school year 2008/2009 has become the initial year of a major educational structural reform, **financed by ESF**, Social Renewal OP (TAMOP 2.2.3), Social Infrastructural OP (TIOP 3.1.1). The Municipality merged the four vocational schools of Hódmezővásárhely into one integrated vocational and technical institute. This structural change created a school that provides secondary vocational education to more than 3,000 students and therefore is a significant agent in the region's secondary education and also a major school within the new Regional Integrated Vocational Educational Centre. More information:

<http://tamop.1000mestertiszk.hu/>

These actions sustain and provide a long-term future for varied vocational education in Hódmezővásárhely and also help the integration of multiply disadvantaged students.



Summary

We have been carrying out a wide scale educational structural reform in Hódmezővásárhely in the past three years involving the Municipality's whole educational structure. **The most important achievement of our reform is the fact that the rate of multiply disadvantaged children does not reach 20 per cent in any of the schools or classes in Hódmezővásárhely.** Although this has only been the first step in a long process, and our goal is to sustain these rates and achieve total integration in our educational system.

The issue of our Educational Conception and the execution of structural changes is just a part of our efforts towards integration. We have been continually setting up different programmes in the last five years to help multiply disadvantaged children in closing up. Our most significant projects entirely funded by the Municipality of Hódmezővásárhely to support multiply disadvantaged people are the following:

- series of consultations and discussions involving teachers and members of the Local Government of the Gypsy Minority (2003-2004)

- different postgraduate courses for pedagogues to create a solid ground for the quality education of multiply disadvantaged children
- since 2004 we put an emphasis on the results of educational competency assessments carried out every year, and besides the analysis of these results, our schools also create action plans to develop skills and improve efficiency.
- As a unique achievement among all municipalities in Hungary, each and every school of Hódmezővásárhely elaborated integration guidelines,
- We take part in the Arany János Talent Care Programme for the Multiply Disadvantaged Children
- We introduced everyday physical education in our schools, which involves a swimming training every week, so that multiply disadvantaged students can have the chance to learn how to swim
- From 2003 on, we introduced arts education in every school, which is free of charge for multiply disadvantaged children
- In 2005 we founded our service of travelling special education teachers and since 2008 we employ school psychologists in every school
- Our schools competed successfully in different tenders for the improvement and benefit of children with special needs, in these cases the general assembly of our Municipality always voted in favour for providing the necessary own resources

Our aim is to build a new educational structure that is going to withstand the test of time, and become the basis of an effective educational system that is accepted and appreciated by both the children and their parents that meets the normative orders of the legal system **concerning public education and the social integration of the Roma people.**