



**TO REFORM EDUCATION,
WE RECOMMEND FINDING
COMMON GROUND FIRST**

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As long as education is used as a stage for political conflict, its promise to build our common future cannot be fulfilled. We need a radical change in our approach to education following the elections coming up for the president and the members of the 27th Parliament. It is only a matter of years before the window of opportunity created by the high percentage of youth in the population expires. It is now critically important for Turkey that political parties come together at the table and provide political consensus for common goals in education.

In the campaigning for elections, what we need to hear from the candidates is a firm promise that they are willing to develop reasonable solutions with other leaders, in a patient manner, to challenging problems for all of us, regardless of individual, societal or geographical differences, instead of proposals of radical changes to education. As an increasingly polarized society, and as an educational community that is tired of constant reforms, we need to hear promises of an environment where all stakeholders are included and heard while making decisions.

The educational dream built around the idea of “Republic 100+” should be realized and as a first step to this, the Turkish National Educational Strategy 2020-2030 should be developed. Plans should not be implemented before all the challenges are thoroughly understood and their effects evaluated beforehand. Data should be prioritized in governmental decision making.

The fate of school children should not be a state of unpreparedness for the world awaiting them. Teachers who demonstrate strong self-confidence in trying to change the fate of children by doing everything within their power should be supported and empowering them should be a priority. In education, we need to focus on strengthening schools. Candidates should promise to work to narrow the gap between our country and the world, and also between our own schools.

By working together around commonly shared educational goals that we determine as a country under the guidance of the goals set by the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, we can create a success story. We would first, however, need to create a structure that is based on the founding principles of the Republic of Turkey, that feeds off of its gains, that uses its strengths to its advantage, and that has foresight about the future and acts accordingly. To achieve all this, we do not first need educational reform, but rather, to put common mind into action. This is the biggest opportunity awaiting the new government to be.

As Education Reform Initiative (ERG), before each election, including the one that will be held on June 24, 2018 and which will determine the president and the members of the 27th parliament, we share with each candidate our suggestions with regards to education based on our comprehensive studies.

WHAT DO WE BASE OUR SUGGESTIONS ON?

- The suggestions and evaluations found in the document prepared for the 2018 elections are based on an accumulation of institutional knowledge. This accumulation consists of 122 publications made in collaboration with certain stakeholders, constant dialogue with stakeholders, evaluation of publications from other institutions in education, and the syntheses made to create a wholesome framework in educational policy. At the end of this document, you can find some of the recent studies we conducted that create the basis of our suggestions.
- In making our suggestions, our approach was to acknowledge our defects but also our achievements. This was especially the case with suggestions made with regards to closing the learning gap, where the aims were to render the efficient implementation of current legislation and the preparations already made for it, and thereby get fast results.
- With the fulfillment of the many goals set in the Ministry of National Education's 2015-2019 Strategic Plan, in terms of access to education, quality of education and institutional capacity, as well as the consideration of our suggestions, the sustainability of these goals seems possible. The steps taken towards quality of education would help achieve the remaining objectives with regards to access to education, and improve educational outputs, and therefore have a multifold effect.
- ERG's evaluations and suggestions assume that the challenges in education can only be solved through patience, reason and by developing mutual solutions. It is necessary that we try to understand the background to many challenges, and to discuss their reasons and solutions with various stakeholders. A two-year period reserved for developing strategy would be a reasonable and important investment in time to come up with applicable, effective and sustainable solutions and to test them out.



GOAL 1: BUILDING AN ENVIRONMENT OF TRUST IN EDUCATION

REASON:

Education, an area that harbors high expectations and high levels of anxiety, is negatively affected by political polarization. The alienation and lack of trust between stakeholders make it difficult for them to be able to sit down and discuss things with regards to education, a critical component of our future. In addition, the instability of educational policies, (i.e. having changed 10 ministers of education, and having tried five different methods in transitioning to high school during the last 20 years) creates what can be called reform fatigue. Therefore, it is essential that when the candidates come to power, they first try to create an inclusive environment based on trust.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Create a political and bureaucratic will that ensures education is governed by the principles of transparency, accountability, efficiency, adherence to law and consistency;
- Shape the relationship between the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and non-governmental organizations so that the Ministry is impartial to all organizations;
- Value all schools and students the same, not deeming some school types superior to others;
- Ensure freedom of thought, conscience and religion for all children in all learning environments.



GOAL 2: CREATING POLITICAL CONSENSUS FOR FULFILLING COMMON EDUCATIONAL GOALS

REASON:

Education, similar to the constitution, needs the consensus of society as a whole. Subjects like the purpose and content of education, central versus local decision making in educational governance, and the distribution of funds need to be agreed on as a nation. This consensus has to be participatory, inclusive and rights-based.

For ERG, it is crucial that the educational legislation be based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, be focused on the well-being of the child, be inclusive and recognizes differences in sexual identity and orientation, language, religion, disability status, and immigration status etc., and emphasizes that all individuals have the same rights as citizens.

To reach this goal, it would be highly beneficial for the Grand National Assembly of Turkey to consolidate the scattered educational legislation (which was greatly changed by the Primary Education and Education Code of 1961 and the National Education Code of 1973) into an integrated code. This new educational code would have the power to respond to the shared expectations of society and to shape educational policies in such a way that they are in line with the modern world.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Prepare a civil, integrated and pluralist educational code that prioritizes the well-being of all children in Turkey and acts as a basis for implementing modern educational policies;

Children from minority groups, working children, refugee and asylum-seeking children and incarcerated children, etc. need to be included in the new education code with reference to “equal opportunity”.

- In the constitution, add a new goal to education that is based on international conventions, and place emphasis on goals that help create a child-focused approach, prioritize children’s personal growth, raise active participants in a democratic society and ensure the application of human rights in every situation.



GOAL 3:

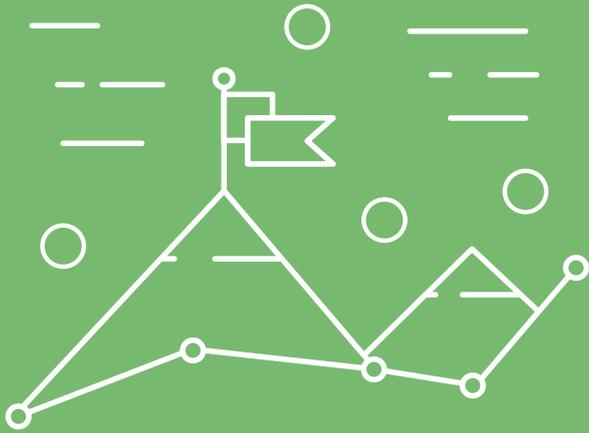
CREATING DATA-BASED DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

REASON:

We are facing strong challenges in education, including the need to improve learning outputs, overcome teacher shortages, structure the skill learning process to facilitate the transition from secondary education to workforce, reinstitute students who had dropped out of school and fight against inequalities. Therefore, it is important that we thoroughly understand the reasons behind such challenges, measure the effects of interventions that have been made to date, discuss the results with stakeholders and develop practical solutions. Currently, we do not have a long-term “educational strategy” that is in line with UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, that is developed with an integrative approach and that is open to improvement.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Prepare the Turkey’s National Educational Strategy 2020-2030;
 - Conduct research to study the reasons behind the current challenges in education; measure the effects of current policies;
 - Prepare a strategy draft based on the research, and open up the draft to public discussion before finalizing it;
- Strengthen the research and development capacity of the MoNE;
- Create a framework that allows sharing of the MoNE’s educational data with researchers and that is in line with legislation with regards to copyrights of personal data;
- Create an independent support mechanism in partnership with non-governmental organizations aiming to create innovative solutions to education and develop a fund for it; prepare a legal framework that facilitates collaborations between universities, non-governmental organizations, private sector organizations and schools.



GOAL 4: CLOSING THE LEARNING GAP

REASON:

Data show that one of the main objectives of education, “learning”, is not fully achieved in our country. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data, among Turkish students, 51% lack basic skills in mathematics, 45% in science and 40% in reading. These rates are twice the OECD average. Over the last ten years, a bigger budget has been allocated for education, the number of students per classroom and per teacher has decreased, schooling rates have increased -even for pre-primary education- and much strategy and legislation have been developed. Despite all these developments, the inability to improve learning outputs and to narrow the success gaps between schools point to a serious defect in the implementation stage. Therefore, in order to secure successful implementation, political and bureaucratic will, provision of necessary financial resources to help children become health, happy and ready to learn, empowerment of the schools and the teachers, and improvement of content of education and learning environments are needed.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Action suggestions with regards to improving the well-being of the students;
 - Make pre-primary education **mandatory and free of charge for one year** to help improve all children’s cognitive, social and emotional development; allocate the funds necessary for this in the Medium-Term Program 2019-2021, as well as in the 2019 MoNE budget;

As of 2016-17, net enrollment rates for pre-primary education was 35.5% for 3-5 year-olds, 45.7% for 4-5 year-olds and 58.8% for 5 year-olds. It is necessary to bring back to the agenda the discussion about making pre-primary school mandatory, and to shift the focus from 5 year-olds to 3-4 year-olds.

- Functionalize the **Regulations for Special Education Services** and remove the current obstacles, especially those related to implementing inclusive education in schools;

According to the MoNE data, the number of students enrolled in formal education is 109,456 in primary school, and 137,751 in middle school, but it drops to 56,262 in secondary education, which shows a major loss of students in education. According to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, for students that report to have a disability, the rate of early school leaving is over 60% in 18-24 year-olds in Turkey. This rate is the highest among the 25 countries compared in Europe.

- Provide free **drinking water** at schools;
- Actionable suggestions for empowering schools;
 - Functionalize the **School-Based Budgeting** legislation; expand the financial system, which currently allows schools to use their resources directly for their own needs, to also include extracurricular activities; and help schools enhance their capacity to use this system efficiently;
 - **Revise the voucher program, which grants money to private schools on per student basis, from the perspective of equality**, continuing the incentives for those students who had already acquired the rights to funds, but not adding any new students to this system;
- Actionable suggestions for improving curricula and educational materials;
 - Revise the curricula;

Curricula should

- Emphasize abilities and competence to think, work and live with others in the digital age and in the new economy;
- Focus on not being an overt or covert propaganda tool for any type of faith, identity, political thought or ideology;
- Statements such as “national culture”, “national moral code” or “national goal” should be defined in a rights-based and universal way, considering all factions of society;
- Stereotyped concepts with regards to roles of men and women should be removed from each type and level of education.

- Allow the decision making regarding textbooks and other educational materials to be made by schools, sending the funds for these materials directly to schools, and also creating fair and qualified competition for the educational press industry;

- Suggestions for empowering teachers;
 - Functionalize the ***School-Based Occupational Development*** model to increase the capacity of schools to determine their problems, find solutions and implement these solutions;
 - Begin the implementation of actions stated in the ***Teacher Strategy Document 2017-2023***, and lay a groundwork based on participation and consensus before implementing the controversial performance evaluation system;
- Suggestions for improving learning environments;
 - Continue the work for achieving the goal of ***ending double-shift schooling*** by accelerating the construction of new classrooms, and provide single-shift schooling at all schools;

According to the MoNE data, to end double-shift education by the end of 2019, 58 thousand 762 additional classrooms need to be built throughout Turkey. Of these classrooms, 57,132 are needed in the basic education level and 1,630 in the secondary education. A total of 45,306 classrooms are currently being built with the investments made in certain cities to end double-shifting. During the 2017-18 educational year, rates of double-shifting stand at 43.04% in primary education and at 7.36% in secondary education.

- Provide sufficient funds and personnel to ensure ***clean schools***; strengthen collaboration with the municipalities for this purpose;

In the study conducted collaboratively by ERG and TEGV (*The Educational Volunteers Foundation of Turkey*) in 2014 titled “Life at School from Children’s Perspective” where 1,991 children in the TEGV units in 25 cities participated, 6 out of 10 students reported that the bathrooms were not clean enough.

- Implement the related legislation to ***prevent all types of violence at schools***;
- Increase school-family partnerships to create an environment of trust and respect for differences at schools; provide sufficient and effective psychological guidance and counseling; and revise the legislation about these services with the stakeholders.

According to the MoNE, the current number of school counselors is 30,650, and the need is for 8,064 more. Current number of students per school counselor is 578.

OUR RECENT STUDIES

1. Education Monitoring Report 2016-17
2. Education Monitoring Report 2016-17: Background Report on Curricula
3. Gender Gaps in Student Achievement: Evidence from PISA 2015
4. Gender Gaps in Student Achievement: Evidence from TIMSS 2015
5. Gender Gaps in Student Achievement Using Evidence from PISA 2015 and TIMSS 2015
6. Analysis of and Suggestions on the Representation of Disability in Textbooks
7. Community Building Through Inclusive Education
8. Road Map for the New System in Transition to High Schools and a Quality Secondary Education
9. Enrollment in Early Childhood Care and Pre-Primary Education in Turkey
10. Educational Reform Initiative's Analysis and Evaluation of the Draft Curriculum for Religious Culture and Ethics Lesson
11. Resources Allocated for Education in Turkey
12. UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report and Analysis of Turkey
13. Analysis and Evaluation of the Ministry of National Education's Curricula Drafts by Education Reform Initiative
14. PISA 2015: General Findings and Trends
15. Life at School from Children's Perspective: Research Report and Policy Suggestions

WHO IS EDUCATION REFORM INITIATIVE (ERG)?

Education Reform Initiative (ERG) is an independent not-for-profit think-and-do-tank that contributes to the systemic transformation of education for the greater benefit of the child and the society as a whole, using sound evidence, constructive dialogue and opinions gathered from various stakeholders. The key elements of systemic transformation include evidence-based decision-making processes, stakeholder engagement and ensuring the access of all children to quality education.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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