



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

National Report Belgium- March 2018

1- The structure of the National education system

(Tables or graphs can also be used)

In Belgium, compulsory schooling applies to all minors of compulsory school age, domiciled or residing in Belgium, and this without distinction of status (see the law of 29 June 1983 on compulsory education).

The minor is subject to compulsory schooling for a period of twelve years beginning with the school year which begins in the year in which he reaches the age of six and ends at the end of the school year, in the year in which he reaches the age of eighteen.

The compulsory school period consists of two parts, a full-time period and a part-time period.

Compliance with school obligation is the responsibility of parents, person with parental authority or the person who takes care of the child.

They must to satisfy:

☐- Ensure that the minor is enrolled in an institution organized, subsidized or recognized by the French speaking community or meets the conditions for home schooling,

☐- Ensure that the minor regularly and assiduously attends the establishment in which he is registered.

The Belgian school curriculum is as follows:

- 1) Nursery education of 2 ½ years to 6 years (not compulsory)
- 2) Primary education from 6 years to 12 years (compulsory)
- 3) Secondary education from 12 to 18 years old (mandatory)
- 4) Higher Education (University, High Schools, etc ... not compulsory)

Organization of primary school

The primary school is organized in six years, there is the first primary, the second primary and so on. At the end of each year, exams are held to determine whether or not students are able to move on to the next year. At the end of the sixth year, all students pass a series of exams in different subjects, successful students will receive their Certificate of Basic Studies (CEB).

Organization of the secondary education

Secondary education is organized in six years which are called: first secondary, second secondary, etc. The sixth is often called the "Rheto" unofficially. Of course, access to secondary education is only possible for students in possession of their CEB. From the third year, education is subdivided into four "pathway": ☐

- General education: it is a so-called transition course, that is to say, it prepares for higher education (Universities, etc.). It includes general courses such as mathematics, science, languages, etc. In this path, students can take elective courses to develop more mathematical, scientific or other skills.
- Technical education: this course makes it possible to acquire specific technical skills. It is separated into two different types: Transitional Technical Education (which allows access to higher education and to acquire specific skills) and Qualification Education (which allows either access to higher education either directly to a profession).



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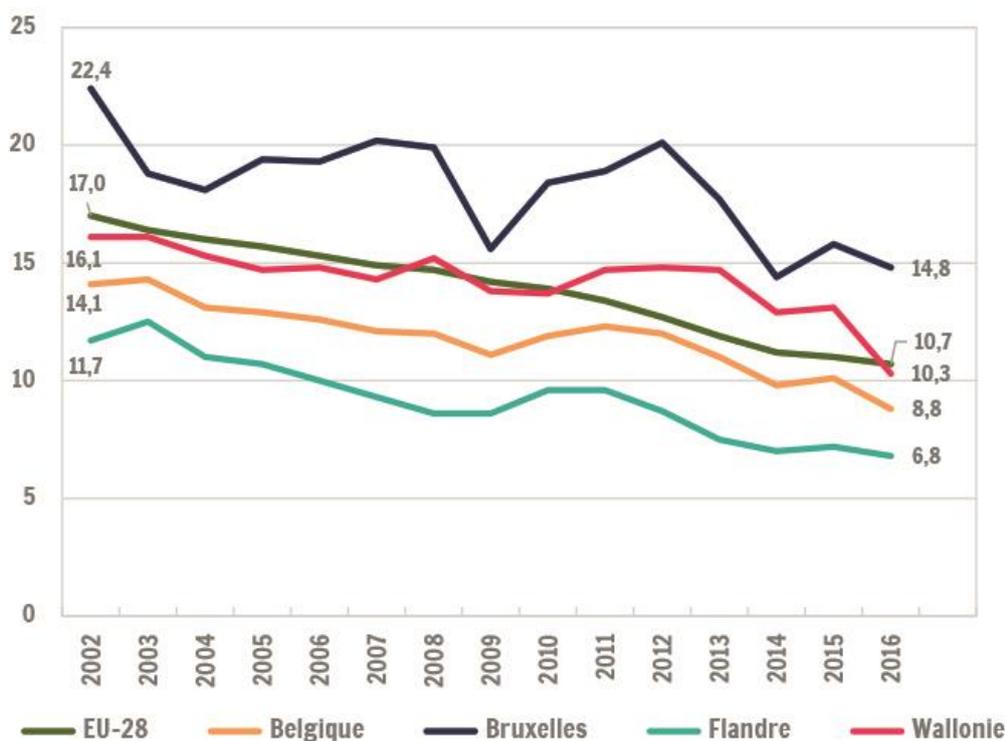
- Artistic education: it can be either of transition or of qualification.
- Vocational education: it is always qualifying that is to say that it is a vocational training that prepares for a job. For example: construction, hotels, mechanics, etc.

If you want more complete information about the structure of national education system:
<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Belgium-French-Community:Overview>

2- Main national trends about early school leaving

Below, a table showing early school leaving rates for 18-24 year olds (2016 figures) in Belgium¹.

Early school leaving was measured by the proportion of young people aged 18 to 24 who did not study in regular education or outside the regular education system, and whose level of education did not exceed lower secondary education.

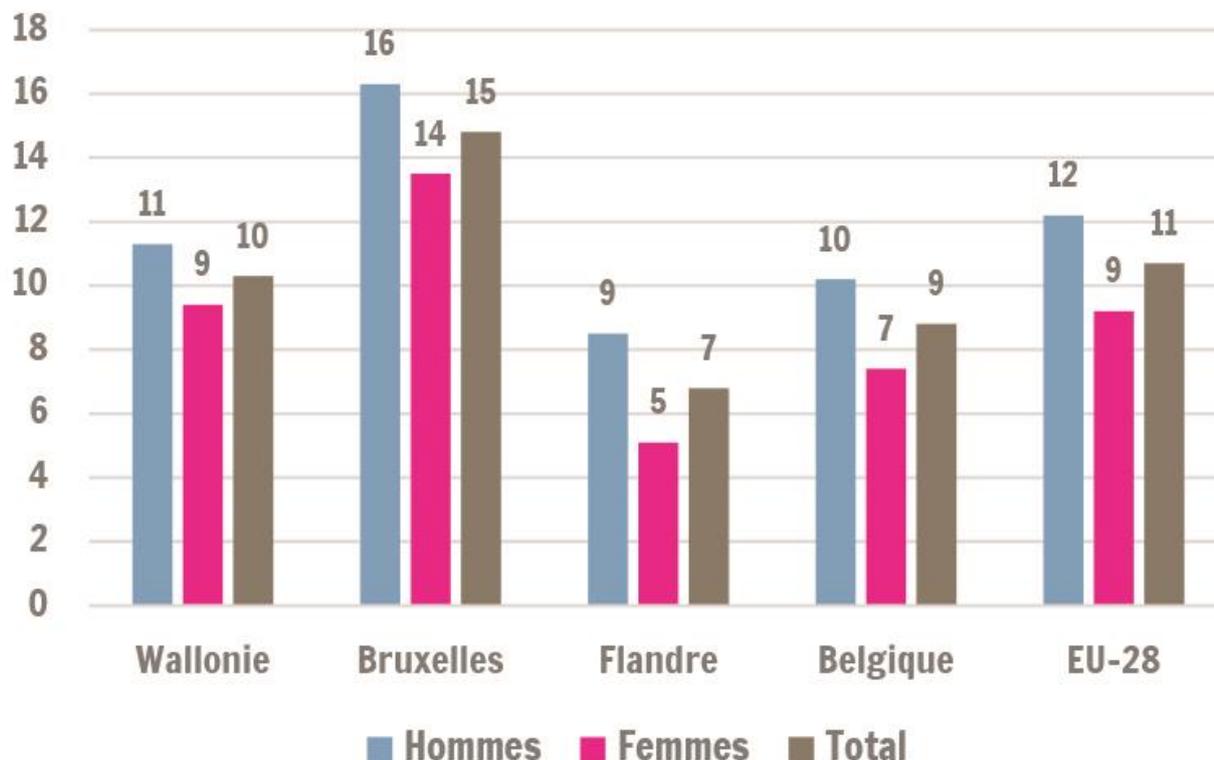


¹ Institut wallon de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la statistique (IWEPS), consulté le 14/03/18, <https://www.iweps.be/indicateur-statistique/abandon-scolaire-precoce-parmi-18-24-ans/>. Les trois tableaux suivants proviennent de la même source.



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Below is another table showing the early school leaving rate by sex and region.

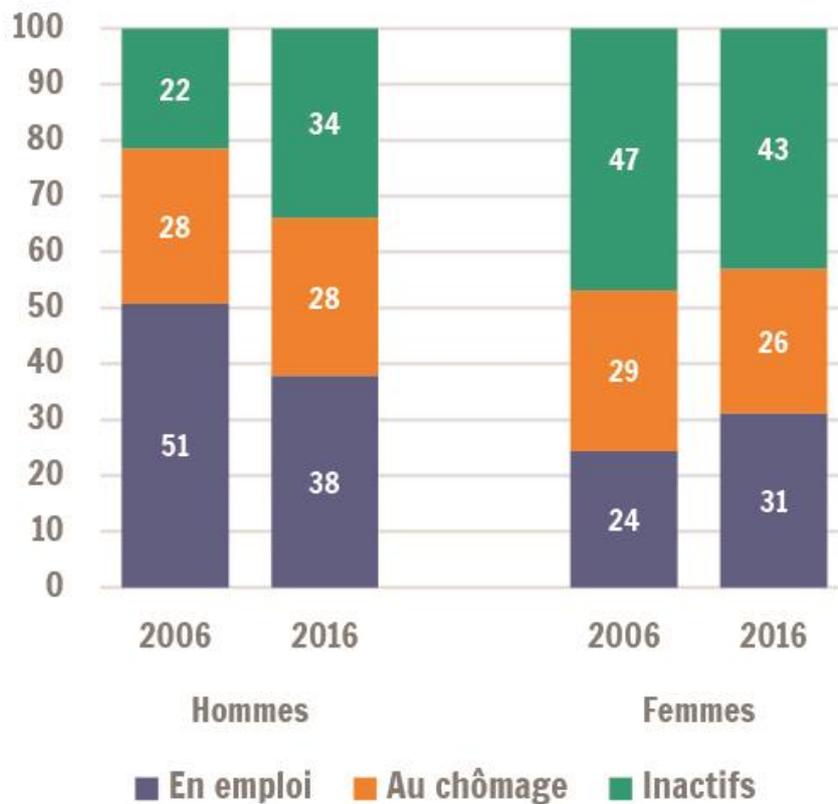


Note: Early school leaving is decreasing in all the regions of Belgium. For example, in Wallonia, the rate was 16.1% in 2002 and decreased to 10.3% in 2016. However, there is a large disparity of results by region, for instance Flanders being the region with the lowest early school leaving (6.8%).

Another piece of data that may be relevant to our project, although it is not specifically asked for this national report, is the percentage of people in early drop-out who have a job or do not work. The table below shows the status of people who left education without a higher secondary education diploma. We can see that the employment rate for these people is only 38% for men and 31% for women. The situation has therefore deteriorated since 2011 because for men in this situation, the employment rate was 51%.



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Regarding the question of age and the school year in which there is the earliest school leaving, this depends on the path of education followed. For example, in a 2013 report, it is mentioned that "students enrolled in the various path of our secondary education are not equal in terms of dropping out. Thus, if less than one in ten students entering the 3rd General will leave without certification of full-time teaching, this will be the case for almost 60% of students enrolled in the vocational path at the exit of the first stage of the program of 'secondary education'². Thus, we can notice that the rate of early school leaving depends on the type of education followed. Professional-type education has a much higher early school leaving rate than general secondary education.

3- Main reasons and causes for leaving education

Analysis; studies and experiences in the field

The factors that influence school dropout are multiple and affect several societal dimensions. In addition, models that analyse causes of school dropout are multiple and do not always illustrate the same characteristics. For example, for some, school drop-out is the result of an "interaction between socio-family

² CHENU F., BLONDIN C., « Décrochage et abandon scolaire précoce. Mise en perspective européenne de la situation en Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles », Bruxelles, Ministère de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, 2013, p7



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environment and school functioning / experience"³. Thus, the individual characteristics of young people (eg motivation, discipline, behaviour, delinquency, etc.) refer to broader characteristics such as social or more personal characteristics such as personal school experience (failure, absence, etc.)⁴.

According to another model, the causes that may explain school dropout could be divided into two categories:

1. the internal determinants of school system that include organizational and structural factors and factors related to teacher-student interactions.
2. the determinants external to the school system, including family and social factors and factors internal to dropouts⁵. Whatever the choice of the model for analyzing the causes of dropping out of school, we can observe that the characteristics causing school dropout may vary. However, we can highlight that the variables "concern four major systems: the student himself, the class (the teacher), the school and the parents"⁶.

Regarding the socio-economic dimension, according to a 2015 PISA survey, it noted that "favoured students tend to significantly outpace disadvantaged students and these differences in scores can be further exacerbated by other factors. However, the relationship between students' performance and their socio-economic status is far from determinant: some disadvantaged students achieve high levels of performance on the assessment and some students from privileged families only reach low levels"⁷.

Among other internal characteristics we can mention the student and his behavior: Some students have behavioral problems, they are punished repeatedly and are built in opposition to the school. These are the present-visible ones, those that disturb the smooth running of the class. Others are average students, uninterested in class and uncomfortable in class. They are bored and stay on the margins. These are the present-invisible. They come to school, but their learning difficulties and delays are such that they drop out without making noise. Teachers are often unaware of their presence, as these students do not pose any behavioral problems and are not anchored in the spiral of absenteeism. Some dropouts also experience family or relationship difficulties, school phobia or depression. Depressive youth would represent one out of five young dropouts.

Another example of a criterion that can have an impact on school dropout is pressure. In fact, parents sometimes put too much pressure. The race for success can lead to a break with school if the child is already anxious by nature. School will become synonymous with suffering. We then return to the field of pathology: the child develops a school phobia.

³ Ibid, p8.

⁴ Idem.

⁵ THIBERT R., « Le décrochage scolaire : diversité des approches, diversité des dispositifs », dossier d'actualité Veille & Analyses IFÉ, n°84, p6.

⁶ Idem.

⁷ Lafontaine, D., Crépin, F., & Quittre, V. (2017), *Les compétences des jeunes de 15 ans en Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles en sciences, en mathématiques et en lecture. Résultats de l'enquête PISA 2015*, p100.



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Cannabis use and computer addiction, especially in video games, can make school dropouts worse. The teenager who smokes joints becomes apathetic, he has even less desire to go to class. In addition, the young person surrounded by "dropouts" may feel some security to be like other members of the group. In conclusion, the causes of school dropout are not deterministic but are variables that can influence school dropout. Variables with more or less influence depending on the young person's personal, school or socio-economic situation.

4- Education/Social policies and measures regarding ESL

National bodies in charge of the prevention of the problem: national levels, local levels, coordination

There are no national level policies in Belgium as school it is a community matter. In Belgium, the communities are in charge of education. There are two main communities: The Flemish one and the French speaking one. As Brussels and Wallonia depend of the French speaking community, I am going to develop only what is happening in the French speaking community.

However, it is important to notice that there is a huge difference between education in the Flemish and the French speaking community. For instance, in the last PISA test, Flanders's scores are above the French speaking community and above the OECD average⁸. However, even though the Flemish community is above the average, it has known "a constant erosion of its performance"⁹ these last 15 years.

To come back to the French speaking community there several bodies that are in charge of ESL (early school leaving). First of all, you have the minister that implement the main political trend for education including ESL, next to these political trends you have municipality measure, administrative initiatives, different projects, etc.

An initiative that the administration organized are the 'school support services' (services d'aide aux établissements scolaire). These services depend of the General Direction of the Mandatory Education and they help ground actors in the implementation of strategies against ESL. All their interventions are free. These services are composed of **school mediation services** and **mobile team service**.

Thus we have the '**school mediation**' services. Their aim is to prevent ESL and violence in school environment. In Brussel, the school mediation services are composed of persons working inside schools. They are present in school throughout the year. In Wallonia, the staff is external to schools. They cover a determined geographic zone and take action either individually or in groups without being attached to one school. These services have the mission to take care of relational problems between students, student's parents and members of school's staff. This school mediation services intervene at direction, teachers, student, families, external services or social workers 's request¹⁰.

⁸ Lafontaine, D., Crépin, F., & Quittre, V. (2017), *Les compétences des jeunes de 15 ans en Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles en sciences, en mathématiques et en lecture. Résultats de l'enquête PISA 2015*, p133.

⁹ Idem.

¹⁰ <http://www.enseignement.be/index.php?page=4264>



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Another body in charge of ESL is the **'mobile team services'**¹¹ (service des équipes mobiles). This services are composed of external actors to school and has as a mission to intervene:

- In case of ESL;
- In case of absenteeism (only in primary school);
- In case of crisis situation in school i.e. when a situation affects the school following a particular event.
- To help and encourage the revival of dialog within the school after a crisis;
- In an anticipative way, to support the educative team of the school when they want to be prepared to react in case of a crisis situation

This type of service intervenes at the director's or organizing authority's request or at the government's request.

At the municipality level, actions or bodies in charge of the prevention of ESL do exist. At this level, each municipality decides what actions need to be implemented on basis on the local's need. In conclusion, a multiplicity of actions exists depending of the situation of the municipality.

At school level, in each school it exists specific health-psycho centers (CPMS) that help students with all psychologic, health or social services. These centers are a place of dialogue and listening. These services can guide family or student in needs to other helpful organizations. For instance, if they need a financial assistance they guide to services that can cope with that kind of problems, etc.

To conclude, in Belgium we also have a particular type of services, the **'school drop-in services'** (services d'accrochage scolaire). This was the type of service in the core of concern of the previous ATOMS project. These services are particular because they are on the education 'side' but also on the youth support 'side' so they fall under the jurisdiction of two different administrations and ministers (education and youth support). They give support to young minor's people who've dropped school. These type of services have for mission to give a social, educative and pedagogic support by hosting young people during school-hours. This accompanying is made in relation with the family and the environment of the young. The bigger goal of these services is the reintegration of this students in the school environments with the best conditions possible and a smooth transition between the two systems. Another particular and interesting feature of these services is that children complete their compulsory school by attending these services. However, young people cannot stay more than a period of 3 months' renewable only once.

5- The local context: characteristics, problems and specificity of ESL and focused programs to reduce school dropout

For local context and its characteristics see point 2 of this report.

¹¹ Décret portant diverses mesures de lutte contre le décrochage scolaire, l'exclusion et la violence à l'école, MB 21-06-04.



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It exists several politics and measures in Belgium aiming at reducing school dropout. Among the prevention measures we can mention¹²:

- the reform of the first stage of secondary education (common core of two or three years for all students having their CEB - differentiated degree to get the CEB for those who do not have it);
- the decree organizing the differentiated framework (which follows positive discrimination i.e. foster the group of people who usually suffers from racial or socio-economical discrimination);
- the decree on different school environment, depending on the socio-economic situation (progressive redeployment, relevant and not competitive supply of education);
- the registration decree aimed at greater social diversity within the institutions secondary (by regulation of inscriptions);
- the DASPA decree aimed at setting up a reception and schooling system for newcomers students (stage of intermediate schooling adapted to the difficulties related to the language schooling and school culture).
- Measures relating to class size in basic and secondary education. The decree makes it possible to optimize the means of supervision assigned to schools with objective of defining a maximum number of pupils per class.
- the pilot device called 'cell well-being': the objective of this device is to allow establishments concerned to mobilize a recognized and institutionalized team to develop a comprehensive and sustainable prevention policy.
- The "Décolâge community": aims to mobilize all the adults around children and to inspire in each one a deep reflection on the implementation of credible alternatives against underperforming at school and the repetition of year for 2.5 to 12 years.

All of this measures aim to prevent school dropout by creating condition to avoid dropping out school.

For students who've dropped out school it exists some formation, some way to obtain a diploma by following a different type of education. Both at the level of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (through social promotion i.e. schools that give a particular type of formation that may be a technical formation) at the level of regional actors in Wallonia and in Brussels and the socio-professional insertion system, there are several possibilities for young people who have left school to take qualifying training in order to obtain a diploma, either for access to quality employment (regional actors in vocational training).

These type of formation are not a way to prevent school-dropping but rather a way to include young people that have left school in the professional world. So, we could say it is a "post-dropping out school" measure.

Furthermore, in 2014, an "inter sectorial" decree was published. This decree has for purpose to encourage and foster the well-being of students, to create measure promoting school attendance, to prevent school violence and to promote the accompanying in educational path orientation¹³. This decree is particular as it

¹² CHENU F., BLONDIN C., « Décrochage et abandon scolaire précoce. Mise en perspective européenne de la situation en Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles », Bruxelles, Ministère de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, 2013, p15 et 16.

¹³ Décret organisant divers dispositifs scolaires favorisant le bien-être des jeunes à l'école, l'accrochage scolaire, la prévention de la violence à l'école et l'accompagnement des démarches d'orientation scolaire, MB 03-04-2014.



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is an inter-sectorial decree signed by ministers from different sector. In consequences, we could they that it is a recognition of the multi-dimensional approach in reducing dropout.

This decree insists on the collaboration between all the actors that surround children: the school's director, the educative team, school mediation, mobile team services, etc. i.e. all stakeholders that can be in contact in students. In this decree an entire chapter is dedicated to reducing dropout.

To notice also that this decree allows schools to implement an 'internal device for school dropout' (DIAS= dispositif interne d'accrochage scolaire)¹⁴. This device allows the student to have a personalized plan of action. The latter is construct in concertation with a multidisciplinary team inside the school.

6- Parent involvement at the middle school and secondary levels

Individual and collective rights of parents

Parental participation: history and recent developments

Institutional or non-institutional good practices of training or support for parents

In Belgium, parents are represented by the 'association of parents'¹⁵. This association aim to facilitate relationship between student's parents and all the educative community (i.e. students, teachers, direction, etc.). These association may be created in each schools, it is a parental right formalized in an official decree published in 2009 ¹⁶. This type of association exists before 2009 but they had no legal frame. These associations allow parents to express their feelings, to participate to collective live of the school, to be active in the educative project of students and to construct a partnership between parents and the school. Another aim of this association is to inform parents. It is composed of a General Assembly and a Comity. The Comity is composed of at least three persons elected by and within the General Assembly. They are elected for two years' renewable.

These associations are represented, in the French community, by two different federations the UFAPEC (confessional and catholic education) and FAPEO (non-confessional schools). These federations help the parent's association to be created, give support, to be organized and representative.

Another legal, and this time compulsory body on schools is the 'Participation Council'. This council is mandatory since 1997 and an official decree¹⁷. It is composed of representative of direction, parents, teacher, etc. In short all stakeholders active inside the educative community. This council participates and debates about the educative project of schools. It is a place of dialog, thinking, and consultation. It is also a place where new project (about environment, well-being, health, etc.) can be discussed and constructed. In addition, the association of parents must be represented in the 'Participation Council'.

¹⁴ Décret organisant divers dispositifs scolaires favorisant le bien-être des jeunes à l'école, l'accrochage scolaire, la prévention de la violence à l'école et l'accompagnement des démarches d'orientation scolaire, MB 03-04-2014, art28, 29,30.

¹⁵ "Guide pratique Parent-école: comment mieux connaître l'école et s'y impliquer?", Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, 2017.

¹⁶ Décret portant sur les Associations de parents d'élèves et les Organisations représentatives d'Associations de parents d'élèves en Communauté française, MB 06-08-2009.

¹⁷ Décret définissant les missions prioritaires de l'enseignement fondamental et de l'enseignement secondaire et organisant les structures propres à les atteindre, MB 23-09-1997.



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It is interesting to notice that the official inclusion of parents inside the educative system dates back 1970, that was the first meeting where parents were invited in having the possibility to express themselves¹⁸.

In 2011, a ministerial circular was published. This circular had for purpose to inform schools about this importance of having a relations between schools and parents¹⁹. In the latter, it is specified that the parental participation is an important factor of the success of children and in reducing dropout. Moreover, it precise that an 'educative alliance' between educative team, parents and student is necessary to construct a better understanding between stakeholders with the aim of fostering a better learning and well-being of students.

In addition to these official bodies several meeting with parents are organized throughout the year: the meeting for the beginning of the year, during the year and by appointment at the teacher, direction, parent's (or else) request depending on the need of the pupil.

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¹⁸ <http://www.fapeo.be/historique/>

¹⁹ Circulaire relative au décret « Association de parents », 28/09/11.



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