

GAP ANALYSIS OF POLICIES AND PRACTICE IN STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOLS IN GEORGIA



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GAP ANALYSIS OF POLICIES AND PRACTICE IN STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOLS IN GEORGIA

2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Democratic participation in education is vital for students to develop competences to actively participate in the social, economic and political development of their countries. Democratic participation involves collaboration among various stakeholders, including state authorities, families and professionals to ensure that schools reflect societal needs and interests. Democratic participation is also crucial for strengthening education systems.

In Georgia, legal and policy education frameworks, including the Law on General Education, the National Curriculum, the Teacher's Professional Standard and other national regulatory documents support student participation in schools. The Law on General Education, for example, grants parents, students and teachers the right to be involved in decision-making processes, as well as in monitoring the implementation of those decisions. Public schools have self-governing bodies through which students, parents and teachers can participate in school management. However, according to the findings of various studies, a number of which are discussed in this gap analysis, the provisions defined by these legal frameworks are not always effectively implemented.

This study aims to 1) describe the practices of participation of different stakeholders in various areas of school life, and 2) to conduct an in-depth examination of the reasons behind low participation. Taking a whole-school approach, the study discusses three crucial aspects of democratic participation and democratic development in schools: teaching and learning, school governance and culture, and community engagement. The study concludes with a set of policy and practice recommendations on increasing participation and maximising the benefits of stakeholder engagement.

The study was conducted between May and September 2024 and used both qualitative and quantitative methods, including focus groups, interviews and questionnaires. Data was gathered from students, teachers, parents, and school administrators from 61 schools across Georgia which are supported by the Council of Europe project "Democracy Starts in Schools – Engaging Students in Decision Making Processes in Schools and Communities". Behavioural science approaches were applied to understand the gap between the intentions of key actors and their actual behaviour.

The main findings of the study are:

- ▶ The existing legislative and regulatory frameworks in Georgia provide for the active participation of students, parents, and teachers in various aspects of school life.
- ▶ In all three major areas tackled by the study — teaching and learning, school governance and community engagement, it was found that participation and engagement from all sides could be increased. While there are many examples of good practice, implementation is not systematic.
- ▶ Schools have incorporated the principles of the Council of Europe's Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education into school curricula (Council of Europe 2010).
- ▶ Schools have considerable freedom in planning and defining the teaching and learning process, but student participation in these processes is still low. Students are often unaware that they could be involved in shaping teaching and learning approaches and methods.

- ▶ Compared to aspects of formal teaching and learning, students and parents are more actively involved in defining extracurricular and non-formal education activities. This may include organising club activities, planning excursions, participating in extracurricular competitions and other related activities.
- ▶ School administrators and teachers show awareness about the importance of making school decisions with the active participation of the school community.
- ▶ In practice, the mechanisms for genuine participation in decision-making processes are not implemented systematically. Students rarely participate in defining rules not only at the school level but also at the classroom level. Collaboration with parents is yet to become an integral part of school governance.
- ▶ One of the key reasons for the low participation of students and parents is their limited awareness of their rights, responsibilities and obligations. Students and parents lack sufficient information on how they could participate in various school activities and decision-making processes. In many cases, they do not possess the necessary skills or motivation for full-fledged participation.
- ▶ The lack of participation opportunities also hinders meaningful engagement. For example, opportunities for stakeholders to get involved in defining the school's overarching approach and direction are limited.
- ▶ Structural factors within the school system form another barrier to meaningful participation. For instance, in small-size schools, the small school community and the limited financial resources result in the automatic allocation of resources to essential expenses, such as staff salaries or utility bills. Consequently, small-size schools tend to struggle to attract additional financial or other resources, since securing resources requires the involvement of the School Board and of other school community members.
- ▶ Teachers and principals highlight students' low motivation to engage in student self-government. The activities carried out by student self-government bodies are rarely focused on problem-solving or school-related decision-making and are more oriented towards organising clubs, cultural events and entertainment activities.
- ▶ The study shows that parents are involved in school life to some extent. They participate less in strategic and teaching-related matters and are more engaged in issues related to non-formal education and in conflict resolution (e.g. student violations of school or class rules, parental dissatisfaction with their children's grades, difficulties in communication between teachers and students, etc.).
- ▶ School administrators and teachers consider relationships with parents valuable. However, they also observe that parents need specific skills and motivation for effective collaboration.
- ▶ Regarding collaboration with the broader community outside the school, such practices are not actively set up in the schools. While cooperation with local authorities tends to be developed to some extent, there is limited experience in engaging with non-governmental organisations, local entrepreneurs, or representatives of the cultural sector. In most cases, such collaborations are initiated by external stakeholders rather than by the schools.

Key recommendations:

1. Teaching and Learning

- ▶ Strengthen participatory approaches in classroom decision-making by involving students in setting learning goals, choosing teaching methods and defining assessment criteria.
- ▶ Increase awareness among students and parents about their rights and opportunities to participate in the educational process.
- ▶ Encourage the institutionalisation of participatory teaching practices through professional development and school-level policies.
- ▶ Support teachers in using inclusive and democratic pedagogical methods, aligned with the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC).

2. School Governance and Culture

- ▶ Promote the meaningful participation of students, parents and teachers in school governance structures like School Boards and self-government bodies.
- ▶ Ensure that strategic documents (e.g. school plans, regulations) are developed through participatory and transparent processes.
- ▶ Address gaps between legal frameworks and actual practices by strengthening implementation and accountability mechanisms.
- ▶ Develop internal school cultures that reflect democratic values such as equity, justice, transparency and shared responsibility.

3. Community Engagement

- ▶ Enhance structured and routine parental involvement beyond disciplinary or crisis-related issues and provide parents with clearer roles and guidance.
- ▶ Strengthen partnerships with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local authorities, and private sector actors to enrich school life and offer students real-world civic engagement opportunities.
- ▶ Create sustainable models for community-school cooperation that are initiated by schools, not just external stakeholders.

Crosscutting

- ▶ Develop and disseminate clear guidelines and tools to support schools in adopting a whole-school approach to democratic governance, in line with Georgia's legislative provisions and relevant Council of Europe principles.

The study was carried out within the scope of the Council of Europe project "Democracy Starts in Schools – Engaging School Children in Decision Making Processes in Schools and Communities" (2024 – 2027). The project aims to improve democratic participation in schools in Georgia by creating more opportunities for students to engage in decision-making both within schools and local communities. The study is based on such concepts developed by the Council of Europe as Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) and Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC). These frameworks emphasise values,

attitudes, skills and knowledge and critical understanding necessary for students to both live in and contribute to democratic and diverse societies. The „Democracy Starts in Schools“ project is aligned with the Council of Europe Education Strategy 2030 [„Learners First – Education for Today’s and Tomorrow’s Democratic Societies“](#).

INTRODUCTION

Context

The development of a culture of democratic participation in the education system plays a significant role in raising citizens. The national goals of formal education in Georgia set out that learners should acquire competences that enable them to actively participate in the social, economic and political development of their country (Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia 2024).

Further, democratic participation is essential for strengthening the education system. The principles of democratic education involve collaboration among various interconnected groups, including the state as a representative of public interest, families and professionals (Gutmann 2001). Such cooperation allows for the identification of common interests among different stakeholders, the development of school programmes, and the transformation of schools into spaces that address societal needs and interests.

In Georgia, a number of legal frameworks for democratic participation in schools exist. The Law on General Education gives parents, students and teachers the right to participate in decision-making processes as well as in monitoring the implementation of these decisions. Public schools have School Boards, allowing teachers, parents and students to engage in School management processes through their representatives. According to the legislation, school Boards have the authority to elect school principals and to define financial and strategic matters. Additionally, schools have other types of structures responsible for reviewing disciplinary issues.

In addition, student self-government bodies are mandatory in schools. From seventh grade onwards, students elect representatives to work on school-related issues, ensuring alignment with students' needs and interests, improve school life, and address student problems.

Under the national curriculum, schools are free to develop assessment criteria in accordance with the principles of democratic participation. Schools have the right to determine which foreign languages they provide as elective subjects. Additionally, schools have the authority to offer elective courses at the secondary level. In recent years, under the state-implemented "New School Program", students have been given more opportunities to choose classroom projects of interest within the framework of so-called 'complex assignments'. Teachers and school administrations have a certain level of autonomy in developing school or subject curricula. Civic education programmes, as well as civic education clubs introduced in some schools, aim to develop the competences necessary for students to actively engage in civic life.

Despite commendable legal provisions for democratic participation in schools, research and informal observations indicate that lived experiences of school community members as well as formal structures still fall short of reflecting the full implementation of these provisions (Huddleston and Araviashvili 2022; Gakheladze and Devnozashvili 2020; Georgian Institute for Debate and Education 2017). While school principals recognise the benefits of participatory decision-making, student self-government bodies and School Boards often exist only formally without meaningfully influencing school development.

Challenges also emerge in terms of teachers' involvement in the development of school curriculum and learning programmes. Teachers frequently express that they do not see a clear connection between the development of competences for democratic culture and their subject-specific goals. Nevertheless,

teachers do refer to some of these competences when involving students in the development of school and classroom behaviour rules (Huddleston and Araviashvili 2022; Gakheladze and Devnozashvili 2020; Georgian Institute for Debate and Education 2017).

Meanwhile, many parents invoke insufficient opportunities to participate in shaping their children's educational experiences. Parents tend not to be well-informed about how they could engage in decision-making processes. They also report a lack of time to participate in such activities (Gakheladze and Devnozashvili 2020).

A combination of school-level and broader systemic factors may influence the development of a democratic culture in schools. Some schools have had limited opportunities to engage with democratic practices in a systematic way, and there may be a need for clearer, more practical guidance from educational authorities on how to support this process. Some schools express uncertainty about which principles to follow and what steps to take to promote more democratic governance. While the school authorisation framework highlights the importance of participatory management, the practical implications are not always fully recorded. As a result, some requirements of the framework may be approached more as formal procedures rather than as tools for encouraging meaningful participation (Huddleston and Araviashvili 2022).

The Council of Europe project „Democracy Starts in Schools“

The Council of Europe is implementing the project "Democracy Starts in Schools – Engaging School Children in Decision Making Processes in Schools and Communities" (2024-2027) in Georgia with the core aim to improve democratic participation in schools across the country. More broadly, the project seeks to strengthen democratic processes in Georgia by increasing student participation in schools and communities. The project is being carried out as part of the Council of Europe – Georgia Action Plan 2024-2027. The project supports educational stakeholders through a series of measures intended to provide students with greater opportunities for participation and to motivate them to engage in decision-making processes within schools and communities.

As part of the project's first phase (2022 – 2023), several activities were undertaken: a [baseline study on student participation in schools](#) (Huddleston and Araviashvili 2022) was carried out, and [practical guidelines for student participation in democratic school governance](#) (Council of Europe 2023) were developed. 20 pilot schools were supported by the project - working meetings were held in the pilot schools to assess student participation needs and define action plans. 20 school action plans were created and implemented by the schools.

The following results of the first project phase were achieved in the 20 pilot schools:

- ▶ Student participation in local self-government decision-making processes increased from 21% to 61%;
- ▶ Student involvement in the work of decision-making bodies within schools increased from 45% to 91%;
- ▶ Student initiation of projects and activities increased from 21% to 38%;
- ▶ Student participation in community activities increased from 51% to 75%;
- ▶ School collaboration with non-governmental organisations and private businesses increased from 41% to 66%;
- ▶ Student involvement in school budget formation increased from 27% to 68%;
- ▶ Student participation in the development of school documents and regulations increased from 30% to 57%;
- ▶ Student involvement in selecting teaching methods and formats increased from 36% to 58%.

The baseline assessment and the results of activities carried out during the first phase of the project demonstrated the need for a more in-depth study of the challenges and opportunities related to student participation in schools and local communities. This study serves to provide this follow-up analysis, evaluating data collected in 61 schools across Georgia involved in the second phase of the Council of Europe project.

Research objectives and questions

Research rationale

In recent years, numerous studies have been conducted in Georgia to examine democratic governance in schools and various aspects of stakeholder participation. In this regard, particular attention is given to student participation in school life. In 2022, as part of the baseline assessment conducted by the Council of Europe, an in-depth study was carried out on student participation in decision-making processes in Georgian schools and ways to improve engagement (Huddleston and Araviashvili 2022).

Additionally, important findings on student participation can be found in a research project funded by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation - Democratic Citizenship in Georgian Schools: Challenges and Paths for Development (Malazonia et al. 2022). This study comprehensively examines aspects of school culture that influence the formation and development of students' civic competences (Malazonia et al. 2022).

In 2019, the Teacher Professional Development Centre conducted a study on competences for democratic culture in Georgian schools to assess how well teachers and principals understand these competences and to what extent they are integrated into teaching practices (Teacher Professional Development Center, 2019).

There are also studies analysing parental involvement in school life (Gakheladze and Devnozashvili 2020; Georgian Institute for Debate and Development 2017). In 2015, the Centre for Social Studies and Analysis conducted a study on school organisational culture (Institute for Social Research and Analysis 2015). The findings of these studies are presented in the following section.

The approach taken in this study differs from the above-mentioned research in several ways:

- ▶ Firstly, this study comprehensively examines various aspects of democratic participation and cultural development in schools, taking a whole-school approach rather than focusing on a single specific dimension;
- ▶ The target groups of the study include all key members of the school community: students, parents, teachers and school administration;
- ▶ This research is not only focused on describing the current situation and practices but also aims to delve deeper into the reasons behind the low participation of different school community members in various areas;
- ▶ The study employs both qualitative and quantitative methods. The principles of behavioural science were applied to obtain a realistic picture of participation levels, mitigating the risk of stakeholders submitting socially acceptable or indifferent responses, allowing for a better understanding of the barriers to participation.

More specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

- ▶ What is the level of participation in various components of school life (school governance and decision-making, teaching and learning, community engagement) among different members of the school community?

- School administration
 - Teachers
 - Students
 - Parents
- ▶ What are the attitudes of these groups towards democratic participation?
 - ▶ What are the main reasons for low or insufficient participation?
 - ▶ How can participation levels be increased, and in what ways might this benefit schools?

The Council of Europe's approach to democratic governance in schools

To better understand the forms of democratic participation in schools, it is useful to refer to several key concepts developed by the Council of Europe. The first concept is Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) (for more on this concept, see Council of Europe 2010). According to this concept, three fundamental principles must be considered in developing democratic citizenship in education: understanding rights and responsibilities, active participation and valuing diversity.

The principles of democratic school governance have been developed in alignment with EDC. A guide to democratic school governance includes recommendations in the following areas:

1. Governance, leadership, management and accountability to the public;
2. Values-based education;
3. Cooperation, communication and participation: competitiveness and school self-identification;
4. Student discipline (for more on this concept, see Beckmann and Trafford 2013).

The guide introduces the tools that can be used in schools to integrate democratic values and principles not only in teaching but also in governance and communication.

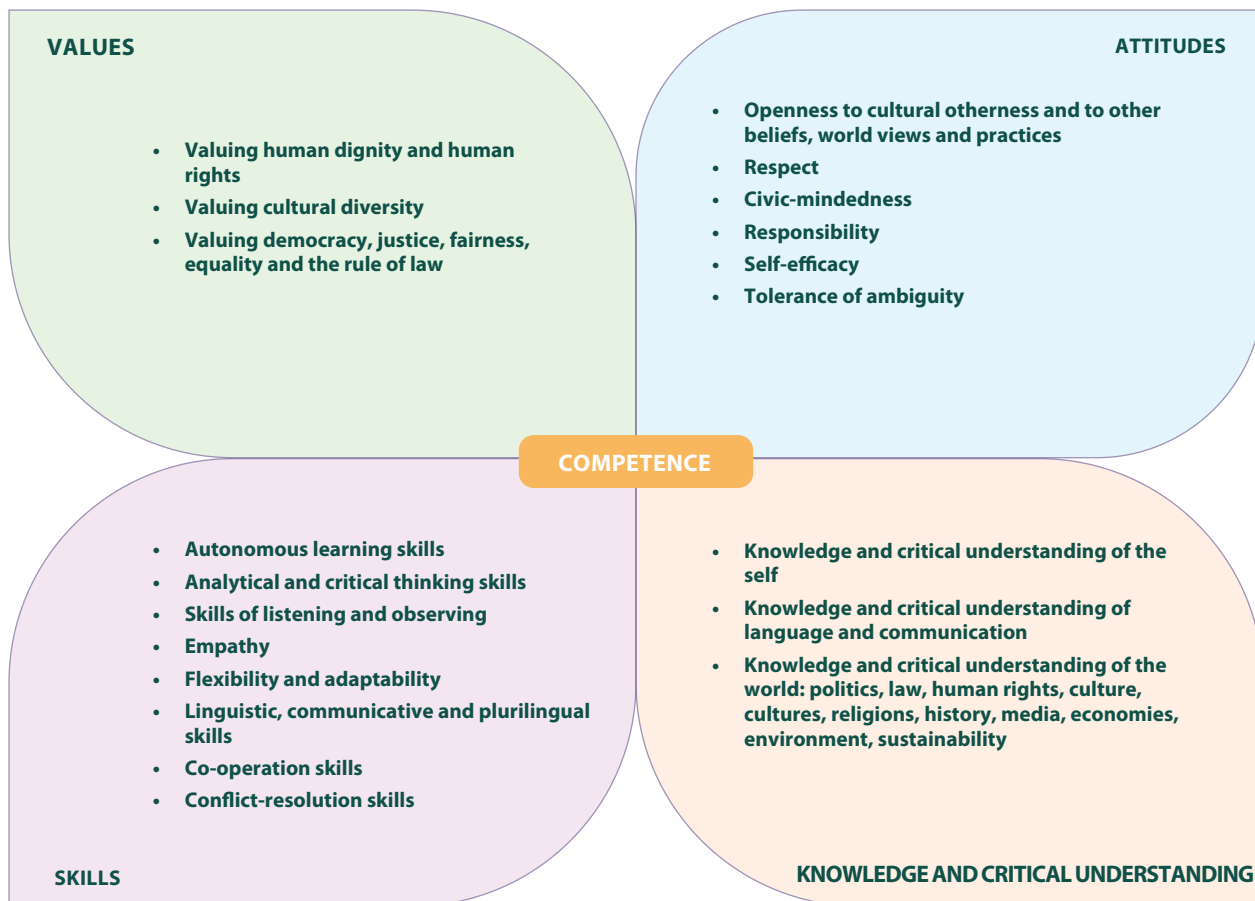
Another important framework developed by the Council of Europe is the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC), which includes 20 competences, divided into four categories: values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding (Council of Europe 2018a). Additionally, the Council of Europe has developed guidelines aimed at helping policy and decision makers, educators and other members of the school community to develop these competences. The RFCDC strongly supports a whole-school approach for implementing democratic culture in schools and developing students' competences rather than limiting initiatives to specific subjects or aspects of school life (Council of Europe 2018b).

The practical application of the whole-school approach has been outlined in the "Student Participation in Democratic School Governance" guidelines, developed during the first phase of the Council of Europe's project "Democracy Starts in Schools". These guidelines emphasise the three key areas mentioned in the previous section, teaching and learning, school governance and school culture and community engagement (Council of Europe 2023).

The Council of Europe's RFCDC defines the competences that students need to acquire in order to participate effectively in democratic, culturally diverse societies and to live peacefully with others (see Figure 1). These competences are particularly important in the context of Georgia, as they currently are being integrated into each mandatory subject of the national curriculum. As a result, the competences fall under the responsibility of all subject teachers in Georgia's public schools. For this reason, the RFCDC model encompasses all three dimensions of culture - material, social and subjective components, as

well as 101 existing and internationally recognised frameworks on democratic culture and intercultural relations. The RFCDC provides detailed descriptors of the 20 competences. The document groups these competences into the four categories of the RFCDC “butterfly”.

Figure 1. The Council of Europe’s Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (Council of Europe 2018a).



Whole-school approach

As noted above, this study examines the attitudes and participation practices of all key members of the school community, not only in a specific area, such as school governance, but across all aspects of school life. Therefore, the study’s structure is based on the whole-school approach outlined in the RFCDC (Huddleston and Araviashvili 2022) and in the "Student Participation in Democratic School Governance" guidelines, developed during the first phase of the project "Democracy Starts in Schools" (Council of Europe 2023). According to the whole-school approach, the development of democratic culture and competences is important not only for students, but also for the school as an institution and for all members of the school community. For democracy and human rights protection to be experienced as a lived reality by all members of the school community, it is not enough to teach about these principles in the classroom, but they must be integral to a school’s ethos.

School life consists of many different aspects and dimensions, but in order to systematically assess the implementation of the whole-school approach and the development of democratic culture and competences in schools, it is worth zooming into the three areas outlined above - **teaching and learning, school governance and culture, and community engagement**. There is significant overlap among these three areas, but this categorisation was employed to conceptualise the study and organise the findings.

The school curriculum, classroom activities, teaching methods and approaches as well as extracurricular activities provide excellent opportunities for students to learn about democracy and human rights. On the one hand, democratic principles can be effectively integrated into the curriculum, the teaching of various subjects and extracurricular activities. On the other hand, method is key – it is important to consider the way in which such integration is planned how teaching approaches are conceptualised and implemented and to what extent different stakeholders are involved. This study focuses specifically on these aspects of teaching and learning.

School governance based on democratic principles offers many advantages for all stakeholders. As described in the Council of Europe's guidelines "Student Participation in Democratic School Governance", establishing democratic governance in schools can lead to improvements in discipline, educational outcomes, conflict resolution, school competitiveness, and, more broadly, the long-term development of sustainable democracy in the country (Beckmann and Trafford 2007). The school governance and culture component of this study draws particular attention to topics such as school documentation, school governance bodies, and decision-making processes.

Community engagement should be an inseparable part of a school's democratic culture. A school is not an isolated institutional unit but rather an integral part of the social fabric. Students should be empowered to understand this interconnection between the school and wider society. In the community engagement component, parental involvement plays a crucial role. Additionally, partnerships and collaboration between schools and various organisations and groups contribute to the development of democratic culture within the school and have positive effects on other aspects, such as the school environment, infrastructure and student educational outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

School selection criteria

The Council of Europe and the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia jointly selected the 61 Georgian schools to be supported by the Council of Europe project based on the following criteria:

- ▶ **Type of school:** Public schools (30 schools that have undergone authorisation and 31 schools that have not yet been authorised). The project, involving the selected 61 schools, started in September 2024.
- ▶ **Target group:** Students aged 12-18, from grade VII to grade XII.
- ▶ **School size:** School sizes vary, but the standard distribution of schools is maintained for representativeness.
- ▶ **Regions:** Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti, Imereti, Guria, Kakheti, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Adjara, Shida Kartli, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Tbilisi. Each region is represented by at least one school.
- ▶ **Proportions:** Six schools from mountainous regions; four schools from regions densely populated by ethnic minorities; two schools with internally displaced persons (IDP) populations.
- ▶ The opportunity for school community members to participate in the project, along with the motivation and interest of school administrations to be involved in the project.
- ▶ Equal representation of women in school leadership within the selected schools.
- ▶ Priority was given to schools that had not previously had the opportunity to participate in other donor-funded or similar projects related to civic education, democratic school governance, etc.
- ▶ Schools whose principals have contracts valid at least until 2026.

As demonstrated by the selection criteria, schools were chosen in a way that ensured maximum representation based on various factors. However, while the data collected across the 61 schools provides some insight into the situation of schools in Georgia, the dataset is not representative of the entire country's school system.

Analytical framework – ideal types of participation and identifying gaps

When attempting to understand the forms of democratic participation in schools, it is useful to develop a model that describes the ideal types of democratic participation in schools. Comparing and analysing the existing situation against these ideal types allows us to assess the achievements and challenges that schools may face in this area. To develop this model, we considered the intersections between the principles of EDC, the implementation of competences for democratic culture, democratic school governance, and the whole-school approach (teaching and learning, governance and culture, and community engagement).

Using this approach, we developed the following analytical framework, which enables the examination of three key areas of school life - teaching and learning, governance and culture, and community engagement, through three interconnected lenses - rules and policies, practices and values. Relevant definitions to the study are listed below which may also be useful for schools in conducting self-assessments. As described in the previous section, the research was designed and built around the three key thematic areas identified in the Council of Europe guidelines on the whole school approach to competences for democratic culture (Council of Europe 2018). These thematic areas were also in line with the key issues identified by the group of experts working on this report based on a literature review and previous experiences. Schools and researchers can use these definitions to formulate questions that might be beneficial for evaluating democratic participation in schools.

Table 1: Analytical framework.

DIRECTION	RULES AND POLICIES	PRACTICE
1. Teaching and learning	The school curriculum incorporates the principles of EDC through the following means: compulsory and elective subjects, cross-disciplinary themes, school and subject-based projects.	<p>Curricula and study plans are developed through participatory processes. Pedagogical approaches are based on democratic methods (e.g. discussions). Students have opportunities to work together, choose learning objectives, and assess their own and their peers' achievements. Teachers collaborate with colleagues and make teaching and learning decisions together with the administration. The school implements extracurricular learning formats that consider students' interests and needs.</p> <p>The teaching and learning processes, both subject-based and interdisciplinary, as well as extracurricular activities, integrate the values of EDC and human rights. Pedagogical approaches are inclusive and sensitive to students with special needs, gender and minority groups.</p>
2. School governance and culture	<p>School policies, norms and regulations integrate the principles of democratic citizenship and human rights. Power and responsibilities in school governance are shared among stakeholders.</p> <p>Internal school policy documents, the physical environment, school ceremonies and prevalent narratives reflect the diversity of ideas, cultures and democratic values such as responsibility, self-efficacy, critical and analytical thinking, justice and transparency.</p>	<p>Representatives of the administration, teachers, students and parents are regularly involved in decision-making processes. School leaders actively consult stakeholders when making decisions. The school community is informed about governance processes. Governance structures and collegial decision-making bodies ensure fair representation of school community members and their effective participation in real decision-making. Those who are not directly involved in decision-making are still informed about decision-making processes.</p> <p>School culture incorporates democratic values.</p>
3. Community engagement	School policies, rules and regulations as well as governance structures (e.g. councils, mission, budget), strengthen the relationship between the school and the community. School policy enables and encourages the involvement of non-school community representatives in school activities and the participation of school community members in external community development.	<p>The school actively involves community representatives in decision-making processes. Parents are an active part of school governance. The school fosters collaboration with local and international organisations, other schools, local authorities, community leaders and the private sector, engaging them in school life to enrich it.</p> <p>The school includes members of different minority groups and adopts a gender-sensitive approach. The school considers various forms of collaboration (e.g. ceremonies, symbols etc.).</p>

Based on this analytical framework, Table 2 summarises the structure of the present study and the specific key areas highlighted above. We have selected specific issues that, on the one hand, were

considered particularly important based on the analysis of pre-existing data and documents, and, on the other hand, reflect the topics and their descriptors that served as the foundation for developing the detailed research plan and research instruments.

While the overarching areas of teaching and learning, school governance and culture and community engagement provide a broad conceptual framework, this study does not aim to comprehensively cover every aspect within these domains. Instead, the specific topics explored were carefully selected through a series of collaborative discussions within the research team. Prioritisation was informed by findings from previous studies and guided by a shared understanding of the relevance and urgency of these issues in the current educational context.

It is also important to note that, at points, there is considerable overlap between the three thematic areas and the topics examined within each area. For instance, parental involvement is addressed both under school governance and culture, where the focus is on participation in governance bodies, and under community engagement, which looks at broader forms of involvement in school life. Similarly, certain elements categorised under teaching and learning may intersect with school governance and culture, particularly when related to classroom rules and organisational structures. Despite these overlaps, the structure presented in Table 2 was adopted intentionally, following the Council of Europe’s whole school approach, and was shaped by team discussions and considerations of clarity and practicality.

Table 2: Research framework for key areas.

DIRECTION, TOPIC		DESCRIPTORS
Teaching and learning	School curriculum	Developed with the involvement of the broader school community.
		The school curriculum reflects the school’s philosophy, values, and plans.
		All stakeholders are informed about the school curriculum.
	Student participation in the teaching and learning process	Students feel safe and confident in expressing their opinions in the classroom.
		Students can participate in selecting teaching methods and topics.
		Students have opportunities to assess each other and themselves.
	Classroom rules	Classroom rules are established with student participation.
		Students are clear on behavioural rules in the classroom and at school.
	Extracurricular activities	Everyone (including students and parents) can propose initiatives for extracurricular activities.
		Extracurricular activities are diverse and promote democratic values.

DIRECTION, TOPIC		DESCRIPTORS
School governance and culture	School documentation	Documentation is developed with the involvement of the broader school community.
		Strategic and action plans reflect the school's strategy and activities and are practically implemented.
		All stakeholders are informed about strategic and action plans.
	Decision-making bodies	The School Board is an active body with meaningful decision-making power within its scope of authority.
		The school community has the willingness and ability to participate in the School Board.
		The student self-government body is an active entity with meaningful decision-making power and capacity to carry out activities within its authority.
		Students have the willingness and ability to participate in student self-government.
	Decision-making	The decision-making process at the school is participatory and inclusive, involving all stakeholders.
		Responsibility is delegated through consultation and involvement of other parties.
Community engagement	Parental involvement	Parents have real opportunities to engage in all aspects of school life.
		Parents are willing to actively participate in various aspects of school life.
		Parents are well-informed about different aspects of school life, as well as their rights and responsibilities and those of their children.
	Partnerships and cooperation	The school collaborates with local self-government authorities, including through its own initiatives.
		The school cooperates with various community organisations.
		The school works with the local community to address different issues.

Research methods

To answer the research questions, several different methods were used in the research process:

- ▶ **Review of existing documentation:** The study analysed Georgia's national education legislation, strategic documents developed by the government and the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia as well as general education institution authorisation standards. Additionally, existing research on school governance, democratic participation within schools and student participation was reviewed.
- ▶ **Focus groups:** Focus groups were conducted with students, their parents, teachers and principals from the target schools.

Table 3: Composition of focus groups.

TARGET GROUP	NUMBER OF FOCUS GROUPS	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	FORMAT
Students	2 - One with members of the student self-government body and one with non-members.	16	Online
Parents	2 - One with parents who are members of the School Board and one with non-member parents.	18	Online
Teachers	2 - One focus group with civic education teachers, and another with teachers of other subjects.	18	In-person
School principals / deputy principals	1	11	In-person

- ▶ Interviews: Three in-depth interviews were conducted with school principals and three with teachers. Additionally, interviews were conducted with five experts in the field.
- ▶ Questionnaires: Online questionnaires were sent to all target groups - teachers, students, parents and school principals—for completion. The questionnaire was sent to all members of the target groups without selection (the target group consisted of school students from grades VII to XII, their parents, and teachers).

Behavioural science approaches

It is important to note that in the development of the study's methodology, behavioural science approaches were applied both in the design of the quantitative research and in the qualitative component.

Behavioural science, a branch of social sciences, studies human judgment and decision-making processes, specifically examining the social, structural and cultural barriers and motivators that influence certain behaviours. The private sector has long relied on behavioural science findings to enhance business practices and improve services. Its application is also growing in the public sector. The effectiveness of behavioural science and its role in improving public programmes and policies have already been confirmed. As a result, behavioural insights are increasingly used in the design and implementation of various programmes and policies.

The methodology of behavioural science and behavioural insights allows for the identification of whether an Intention-Action Gap (Hassan et al. 2016) exists within the study's target groups—where there is a certain level of awareness (e.g. participation is important for improving school life), an enabling infrastructure (e.g. participation mechanisms are in place in schools), and a positive attitude (e.g. participation promotes shared responsibility), yet these factors do not translate into actual action. The gap between intention and action manifests in different ways depending on the challenge, but it can generally be explained by the paradigm that human judgment and decision-making often rely on an irrational system. The reasons can range from simple factors such as forgetfulness, laziness, competing priorities, process complexity, uncertainty, or irrational fear, to more profound factors such as social unacceptability, deeply ingrained myths, or the absence of a social norm.

By integrating this approach into the traditional research methodology, we aimed to determine the mechanisms behind the decision-making processes of principals, teachers, parents and students, including the extent to which the irrational system influences their decisions regarding participation in school life. For this purpose, in the qualitative component of the study, in-depth interviews were conducted, and specially designed questions were developed to uncover behavioural aspects—using user survey methodology, which is particularly effective for observing consumption models (usability testing) and identifying barriers and motivational factors. These interviews were conducted exclusively in-person, enabling direct observation and facilitating the collection of high-quality insights. The main focus of these interviews was to identify teacher and principal behaviours and experiences related to participation, particularly by examining their current or past experiences, which serve as a more reliable indicator of actual behaviour.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

This chapter discusses the legislative and regulatory environment in Georgia concerning the three key areas defined in the research framework - teaching and learning, school governance, and community engagement. Additionally, it briefly presents the findings of existing studies related to these areas. Due to the complexity of these topics, rather than providing a comprehensive review, the focus is placed on issues directly related to the research questions and the fieldwork conducted within this study.

Teaching and learning

National and school curricula, teaching and learning processes, classroom activities, teaching methods and approaches, as well as extracurricular activities, provide excellent opportunities for students to learn about democracy and human rights. On the one hand, democratic principles can be effectively integrated into curricula, the teaching of various relevant subjects, and extracurricular activities. On the other hand, it is equally important how these processes are organised - how teaching processes are planned and implemented, and to what extent different stakeholders are involved.

Legislative and regulatory framework

►► *National Curriculum*

The National Curriculum (NC) (Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia 2018) inherently promotes democratic development and lays the foundation for a democratic society in two ways:

- a) By developing competences through subject curricula that are essential for democratic citizenship (such as knowledge and understanding of human rights, active citizenship, responsibility, reasoning, critical thinking, etc.);
- b) By structuring the school environment in a way that provides the school community with real-life experience of democratic living.

Based on the national goals of general education, the NC defines eight priority topics:

1. Protection of cultural heritage;
2. Environmental protection;
3. Healthy living;
4. Civil security;
5. Conflict management;
6. Financial literacy;
7. Cultural diversity;
8. Human rights.

In addition to defining priorities, the subject curricula integrate principles that support civic education. The primary example is „Civic Education“, which is a mandatory subject for grades VII-XII, as well as elementary-level subjects such as "Me and Society" (grades III-IV) and "Our Georgia" (grades V-VI). Civic education and competences are also embedded in the educational goals of the Georgian language and literature curriculum. Additionally, at both the lower and upper secondary levels, democratic values are reinforced through history education. According to the NC, „the primary goal of the Social Sciences subject group is to foster informed, active and responsible citizens; provide students with knowledge about their native environment; help them understand their country’s place in global historical and geographical processes; and develop them into patriotic and humane individuals. Furthermore, the teaching of subjects within the Social Sciences group plays a crucial role in shaping students’ civic values“ (Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia 2018).

Although the National Curriculum does not explicitly require schools to establish an environment that fosters democratic participation, it sets regulations that allow for the presence of democratic processes in teaching and learning. These regulations pertain to school curricula, organisation of the teaching process, student assessment and elective subjects.

►► **School curriculum**

According to the National Curriculum, every school must develop its own school curriculum, which, on the one hand, includes goals and intentions (school philosophy and curricula) and, on the other hand, defines processes that support school development—how the strategic plan is formulated, resources are managed, and students are nurtured and supported.

In accordance with the requirements of the National Curriculum, all schools in Georgia do indeed create their own school curricula. However, no studies have been conducted (or are publicly available) on how these curricula are developed and what content they include.

►► **Organisation of the learning process**

The basic principles of organising the learning process are defined by the NC, but schools have some autonomy in making decisions about specific aspects of the process. For example, the NC stipulates that public schools must operate five days a week, but it allows schools to negotiate an alternative schedule with the government.

A similar principle applies to lesson duration. The state sets the standard lesson lengths: 35 minutes for Grade 1, 40 minutes for Grade 2, 45 minutes for higher grades. However, schools may negotiate alternative lesson durations with the government.

The same system applies to the maximum number of students per class. The standard maximum class size is 25 students, but, with government approval, schools may increase the number to 29 students. Within certain regulated limits, the NC allows schools to divide classes based on their needs and interests, primarily to enhance the intensity of instruction (e.g. organising smaller groups for foreign language lessons).

Additionally, the National Curriculum requires schools to develop special education plans or additional educational programmes for students with special educational needs.

►► **Assessment**

Schools have broad authority in defining student assessment methods. They are free to independently determine assessment components. The previous edition of the NC required a standard three-component assessment system: classroom performance, homework and final evaluations.

In the new edition, schools can define any assessment component they choose. Schools may also deviate from the government's standard 10-point grading scale and develop an alternative grading system. However, the state mandates that students must receive at least five points to be considered as having passed a grade level. Schools with enhanced status are allowed to set higher passing thresholds.

►► **Language and elective subjects**

According to the NC, in non-Georgian-language schools or sectors, schools may modify the recommended number of instructional hours. They may choose to teach a native language instead of a foreign language to ensure adequate instruction in their mother tongue.

Schools are required to offer English as the first foreign language. The second foreign language is determined by student choice. The NC mandates that schools offer at least two options for the second foreign language.

For grades X-XII, schools have the right to offer additional elective subjects. The NC provides a list of approved elective subjects, but schools are also permitted to create their own curricula for new subjects, which they can propose for implementation.

►► **Areas with limited regulatory guidance**

It is notable that the latest revision of the NC no longer requires schools to have subject-specific committees, which previously played a key role in curriculum development, textbook selection etc. The current version neither mentions the process of textbook selection. However, there is a separate regulation that governs textbook use and approval of alternative textbooks. Additionally, under the new regulation, schools are not required to involve subject committees in the textbook selection process. A new rule states that when choosing an alternative (non-standardised) textbook, a school must submit a psychologist's evaluation confirming that the textbook is appropriate for school use.

►► **Student participation in the learning process**

The Law of Georgia on General Education emphasises the importance of a "student-centered" approach in teaching and learning. It states that the learning process should take place in a "positive and orderly environment", where "positive relationships are the most important factor" and where students are "valued, recognised, and responsible for their own learning and development." The law also highlights the importance of helping students understand the purpose of the tasks they engage in and recognise the connection between school activities and the real world (Ministry of Education Science, and Youth of Georgia 2005: Article 35).

The law further emphasises that students should have the right to be active participants not only in their own educational process but also in the learning process of their peers. Collaborative group work is recommended in activities such as project participation, planning, and presentations, encouraging students to help one another in learning and development (Ministry of Education Science, and Youth of Georgia 2005: Article 35).

The Teacher Professional Standard Indicators expand upon these key regulations, requiring all teachers to promote civic thinking among students, foster responsibility for the natural and social environment and apply strategies aimed at developing competences for democratic culture (Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia 2011: Chapter II, Article 6).

Review of existing research

A number of studies analyse both the integration of civic education into teaching resources and practices as well as the implementation of democratic principles in the teaching and learning process. A 2022 monograph published by a group of authors, which examines civic education in Georgian schools, analyses textbooks across different grade levels and subjects. Based on a comprehensive analysis, the authors conclude that school textbooks do not support civic education to a full extent. Overall, the analysis of school textbooks revealed that among the key components necessary for civic education - knowledge, skills values and attitudes, teaching materials primarily focus on knowledge acquisition. However, even in this area, further refinement of textbooks would be beneficial. Regarding teaching materials and activities that promote skills and attitudes, the authors strongly recommend diversification and enrichment of content (Malazonia et al. 2022).

A 2022 study conducted by the Council of Europe highlights significant progress in the teaching of civic education. Specifically, in recent years, more professionals with specialised knowledge have been teaching the subject. However, the study also notes that, in many cases, civic education is still taught by teachers from other disciplines. According to the study, another challenge is that some civic education teachers, particularly older educators, do not always fully embrace the core principles of civic education. As a result, "despite the fact that national curriculum regulations strongly promote student-centred civic education, in practice, this is not always reflected in classroom teaching" (Huddleston and Araviashvili 2022).

There is limited information regarding the participation of various stakeholders in the teaching and learning process. However, some insights can be found in the previously mentioned monograph on democratic citizenship (Malazonia et al. 2022). According to a non-representative student survey included in that study, teachers rarely or never consider student opinion when designing class schedules, selecting teaching methods or choosing educational resources. However, students reported that they are more involved in planning extracurricular activities. Notably, many teachers felt that their opinions were only partially considered when developing class schedules or selecting teaching materials. The study concludes that key decisions in teaching and learning are usually made by the school administration rather than by teachers (Malazonia et al. 2022).

According to the 2022 Council of Europe study mentioned above, student participation in the teaching and learning process is gradually becoming an accepted practice, although it is still absent in many schools (Huddleston and Araviashvili 2022). The main reasons cited for this include that teachers are unaware of the potential benefits of student participation in the teaching and learning process, teachers lack the necessary strategies to effectively facilitate student involvement, and that teachers do not know how to implement these strategies in practice. Therefore, the study concludes that it is crucial for educators not only to recognise the importance of student participation but also to enhance their skills in order to integrate student participation strategies into daily teaching practices across different subject areas.

Finally, a 2015 study conducted by the Social Research and Analysis Institute on behalf of the National Teacher Professional Development Centre found that teachers perceived high levels of participation and collaboration in the development of teaching materials. However, the findings also indicate that this collaboration was mostly informal and unstructured. The study further reveals that teachers often

lack autonomy to make independent decisions regarding the teaching process without administrative approval (Institute for Social Research and Analysis 2015).

School governance

The school is one of the first institutional environments in which an individual operates. Schools can play a key role in fostering democratic values in children and adolescents, not only through curricula, various subjects, and extracurricular activities but also by integrating these values into the school governance process itself.

Legislative and regulatory framework

According to Georgian legislation, all stakeholders within the school community have the right to participate in decision-making regarding various aspects of school life as well as to be involved in the implementation of these decisions. At the legislative level, the state ensures democratic processes within the school environment. However, as indicated by both previous research and the present needs assessment, this right is often not exercised in practice due to various reasons.

The primary principles of general education institution governance in Georgia are regulated by the Law on General Education (Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia 2005). This law defines which bodies are part of the school governance structure, how these bodies are formed and what rights and responsibilities they hold.

The structure of a general education institution includes:

- School Board (Supervisory Council);
- School Administration (Directorate);
- Pedagogical Council;
- Student Self-Government Body;
- Disciplinary Committee (this body is not a primary subject of this study and will not be examined in detail).

►► **School Board**

The role of the School Board is more strategic than operational. In general, it is not involved in the daily management of the school. Its purpose is to support the effective and efficient governance of the school so that students receive the best possible education. To achieve this, the School Board is responsible for:

- Planning the strategic direction of the school;
- Overseeing the financial situation of the school;
- Holding the school director and administration accountable;
- Facilitating school improvements.

The School Board is an elected body composed of an equal number of parent and teacher representatives, elected for three years, with no fewer than six and no more than 12 members. Additionally, the student self-government body elects one representative from the secondary level, and the local self-government authority has the right to appoint one member.

The School Board's main functions include:

- Selecting the school director from the nominated candidates;
- Approving the school budget;

- Monitoring the school administration's financial expenditures and asset management;
- Approving the school's internal regulations;
- Expressing approval regarding school curricula and the list of textbooks;
- Establishing a disciplinary committee to review disciplinary violations.

►► **School Administration**

The responsibility for school leadership and management lies with the school principal and deputy principal(s). This includes:

- Developing the staffing schedule;
- Submitting the internal regulations and school budget to the School Board for approval;
- Drafting the school's charter and submitting it to the School Board for approval, and then presenting the approved charter to the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia for final approval;
- Participating in the development of the school curriculum in collaboration with the Pedagogical Council;
- Signing and terminating employment contracts with teachers and other staff members;
- Presenting annual reports to the School Board;
- Entering into economic agreements;
- Supervising the teaching and learning process;
- Drafting the school's charter for submission to the School Board.

►► **Pedagogical Council**

The Pedagogical Council consists of all teachers in the school and has a chairperson elected for a three-year term. The Pedagogical Council:

- Develops school curricula with the participation of the principal and approves them in agreement with the School Board;
- Approves teaching materials, including state-approved textbooks selected by teachers for use during the academic year, in agreement with the School Board;
- Elects Pedagogical Council representatives to the School Board.

►► **Student Self-Government**

The Student Self-Government is an elected body. Students from the basic (lower secondary) and secondary levels elect their own self-government representatives. The Student Self-Government Body is led by a chairperson elected by members. The functions of Student Self-Government include:

- Developing recommendations regarding school regulations;
- Submitting proposals to the School Board on all important school-related matters;
- Electing a representative to the School Board;
- Participating in the management of acquired grants;
- Creating school clubs upon the initiative of one-fifth of the members.

Review of existing research

Findings from various studies, as well as from publicly available information and data, provide some insight into the ways in which school governance bodies function in practice.

According to the 2022 Council of Europe study, members of the school community generally perceive the School Board as a formal body that with limited power to meaningfully fulfil its assigned functions and improve the school environment (Huddleston and Araviashvili 2022). The main reasons cited for this include the lack of a tradition of self-government in Georgian schools, limited awareness and information among stakeholders and low student motivation and engagement.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that the structural limitations of the School Board may also hinder the effective functioning of the Board. For example, one of the Board's key functions is to select school directors. According to the law, the School Board elects the school director from a list of candidates nominated by the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia based on a majority vote of its total membership through a secret ballot under free and equal election principles (Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia 2005).

Despite these legal provisions, school director elections are conducted in only a small percentage of Georgian schools. For instance, in the 2023 director elections only 18% of schools had more than one candidate presented to the School Board for selection. 10% of urban schools had no candidates at all, and, in 50% of schools, there was only one candidate. In 40% of rural schools, no candidates applied. Competition was particularly low in schools where an acting director had already served one term, likely because they had the opportunity to be re-elected for a second term, discouraging new candidates from entering the race (Center for Civil Integration and Inter-Ethnic Relations 2023). This situation significantly limits the ability of School Boards to exercise one of their key governance functions—the selection of school directors.

Similarly, budget planning is the second major function of the School Board. However, in many cases, schools do not have the ability to plan their budgets independently, as after covering essential expenses, most schools do not have discretionary funds available for allocation (Center for Civil Integration and Inter-Ethnic Relations 2014).

Regarding student self-government, existing studies indicate that „students do not perceive their self-government body as an advocate for their needs or as an institution they can turn to for help with problems or requests“ (Malazonia et al. 2022). Moreover, research findings suggest that, in many cases, students see the student self-government body as an auxiliary structure of the school administration, and its role is often attributed to maintaining a good relationship with the school leadership. Researchers identify a lack of awareness and an inadequate understanding of the student self-government's role as the primary challenges for the functioning of this body (Malazonia et al. 2022).

According to the Council of Europe 2022 study, various challenges were identified in the functioning of student self-government bodies. First, despite being legally required, some schools still do not have an active student self-government body. In schools where student self-government is considered successful, there is support from school administration and teachers. The fact that this support is not consistently provided across all schools is seen as a major challenge (Huddleston and Araviashvili 2022). Additionally, successful student self-government activities are mostly associated with extracurricular education and club-based activities, while there is little experience of students actively participating in decision-making processes on broader school issues (Huddleston and Araviashvili 2022).

Community engagement

In this section, we identify two key themes based on the research framework: 1) parental involvement and 2) partnerships and collaboration.

Although numerous researchers have explored and confirmed the positive correlation between parental involvement and students' academic performance, in Georgia, there are very few studies examining how and in what forms parents could be engaged in school life.

Parental involvement can take various forms (Epstein et al. 2018), one of which is participation in decision-making. This means that parents are involved in school governance and decision-making processes. In the context of parental participation in their children's school education, many researchers still distinguish between parental participation in school life and parental engagement in learning (Maria Castro et al. 2015).

Legislative and regulatory framework

In Georgia, there is a legal framework and policy that supports parental involvement in schools. According to the Constitution of Georgia and the Law on General Education, parents are guaranteed rights that cover a broad spectrum of school life. Under the current legislation, parents have the right to participate in school governance processes as well as in the adoption, implementation and monitoring of regulatory acts. A parent may be elected as a representative in the School Board (Supervisory Council), the Pedagogical Council, and the Disciplinary Committee. A parent representative can participate in key personnel-related decisions, including:

- The selection and dismissal of the school director;
- The termination of a teacher's employment;
- The review and resolution of disciplinary violations;
- Parents also have the right to access financial documents and are authorised to participate in the approval of the school budget.

Additionally, a parent representative must provide mandatory approval for the school's internal regulations and school curriculum. Furthermore, in 2018, an amendment to the Law on General Education introduced a requirement for schools to sign agreements with students' parents or legal guardians, further formalising parental involvement in school affairs.

Review of existing research

The realisation of most parental rights defined by Georgian legislation depends on individual schools and their decisions. As previous research in this area (discussed in more detail below) has shown, these rights are often not effectively exercised. The reasons for this may include low levels of parental awareness, lack of knowledge about collaboration strategies and engagement opportunities with schools, and socio-economic conditions or socio-cultural factors, which are especially evident in small and rural schools.

According to the 2015 PISA study (National Assessment and Examinations Center, 2017), 90% of school principals stated that schools utilise all available opportunities to engage parents. However, 36% of parents cited lack of time as the main reason for low engagement, 33% mentioned inconvenient meeting times at school and 17% indicated a lack of information about engagement opportunities. The study also revealed that in Georgia, the parental involvement index is negatively correlated with student achievement, meaning that parents tend to be more involved in schools where student discipline or academic performance is lower.

A 2020 study on parental involvement, conducted by the NGO "Parents for Education" with the support of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, along with the qualitative component of the needs assessment conducted within this project, similarly found that parents are more engaged when their child has disciplinary difficulties or other problems at school. The study also confirms that "in Georgia, the parental involvement index is negatively correlated with student achievement". However, it also shows that students who are victims of bullying are more likely to report that they have no parental support in resolving problems (LEPL Parents for Education 2020).

A 2017 qualitative study conducted by the "Education for All—Georgia" Coalition on parental involvement in school life found that parental participation is largely unstructured and spontaneous, often depending on individual initiatives rather than systematic engagement. Despite both parents and teachers recognising the need for greater involvement, the study concludes that "there are no clear patterns defining how this engagement should take place" (Georgian Institute for Debate and Education, 2017).

According to the findings of the 2020 study supported by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the majority of legal relationships between schools and parents and legal representatives are not institutionalised in public schools. Most surveyed parents lack comprehensive knowledge of their rights and responsibilities or of the ways they could actively participate in school life. In line with the previous studies, this research shows that communication between schools and parents is focused predominantly on students' academic performance and behaviour (LEPL Parents for Education 2020).

The most common form of parental participation in school governance, according to surveyed parents, is the possibility to meet with the headteacher. However, only a very small percentage of parents reported to ever share their views with the school administration.

During the focus groups conducted with parents and school administrators, parents struggled to recall instances of taking initiative or engaging in volunteer activities. Only a few isolated cases were identified, mostly related to organising school events. Similar results were observed among school directors. The parental survey revealed that only 17% of respondents had ever initiated any form of school-related activity.

School directors cited low parental motivation as the primary reason for low engagement, stating that parents are mainly interested in academic performance and that only a small number show interest in extracurricular activities. According to them, parents do not actively seek out information about their rights and opportunities in school governance. However, school administrators also acknowledge that schools do not actively inform parents on these matters.

Through group consultations with parents conducted by the NGO "Parents for Education", a list of challenges was compiled, highlighting that there is no established, organised practice of parental involvement in schools (LEPL Parents for Education 2020).

According to parents, participation in their children's school life is challenging due to the following factors: schools lack a strategic vision or action plan for collaboration with parents, parental involvement is mostly formal and sporadic rather than systematic, schools do not take steps to educate parents on pedagogical matters, parents are not provided with sufficient information about the school curriculum, schools lack effective mechanisms for collecting parental feedback, schools are not receptive to critical opinions and do not recognise the benefits of working with parents.

FIELD RESEARCH RESULTS

The research findings in this section are presented under three broad categories, which are further divided into narrower subtopics, as described in Table 1. These three categories are:

- Teaching and learning
- School governance and culture
- Community engagement

For each category and subtopic, the following elements are provided:

- Findings from the current study – both quantitative and qualitative
- Key insights
- Identification of needs

Descriptive statistics

An analysis of various characteristics of the research participants based on statistical data is provided below.

Table 4. Number of questionnaire respondents.

TARGET GROUP	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
Students	2755
Teachers	514
Parents	3227
School principals	49

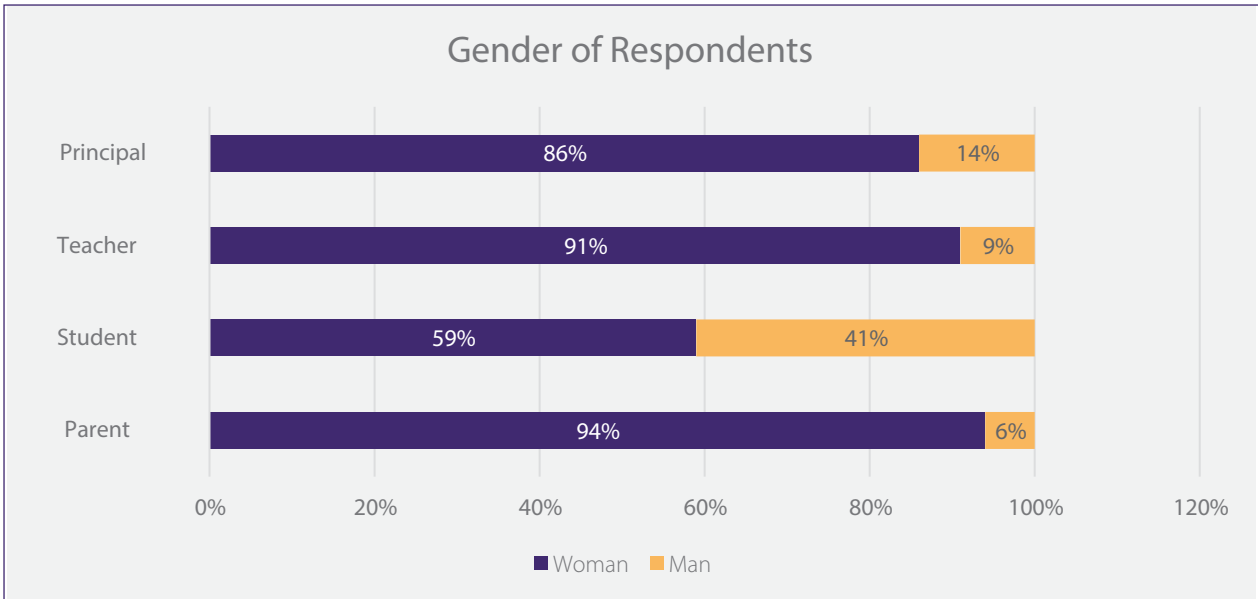
Although the online questionnaire was sent to all students in the target group (grades VII-XII), not all of them completed it. Hence, the analysis of respondent characteristics is not fully representative of each school's entire student body. For example, 59% of student respondents were female even though Georgia's student population is approximately equally divided between boys and girls. This suggests that more girls than boys filled out the questionnaire. It is also likely that students, parents and teachers with greater access to communication technology were more likely to participate.

63% of surveyed parents hold higher education degrees, indicating that a majority of responses may have been submitted by more socioeconomically privileged students and parents.

As a result, the quantitative findings of this study cannot be considered representative of all Georgian schools.

Among the surveyed respondents, women formed the majority across other target groups as well, as shown in Diagram 1. The gender distribution of teachers and school principals roughly corresponds to the overall national trend.

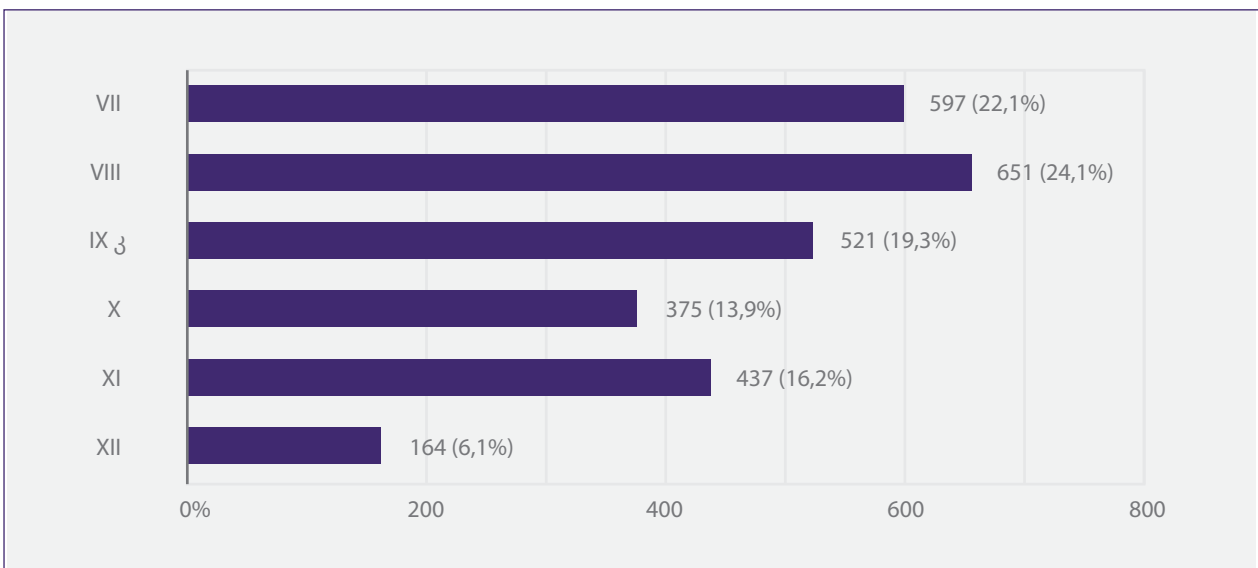
Diagram 1: Gender of questionnaire respondents.



Approximately 20% of the surveyed students were members of the student self-government bodies, while 6% of the surveyed parents were members of School Boards (Supervisory Councils).

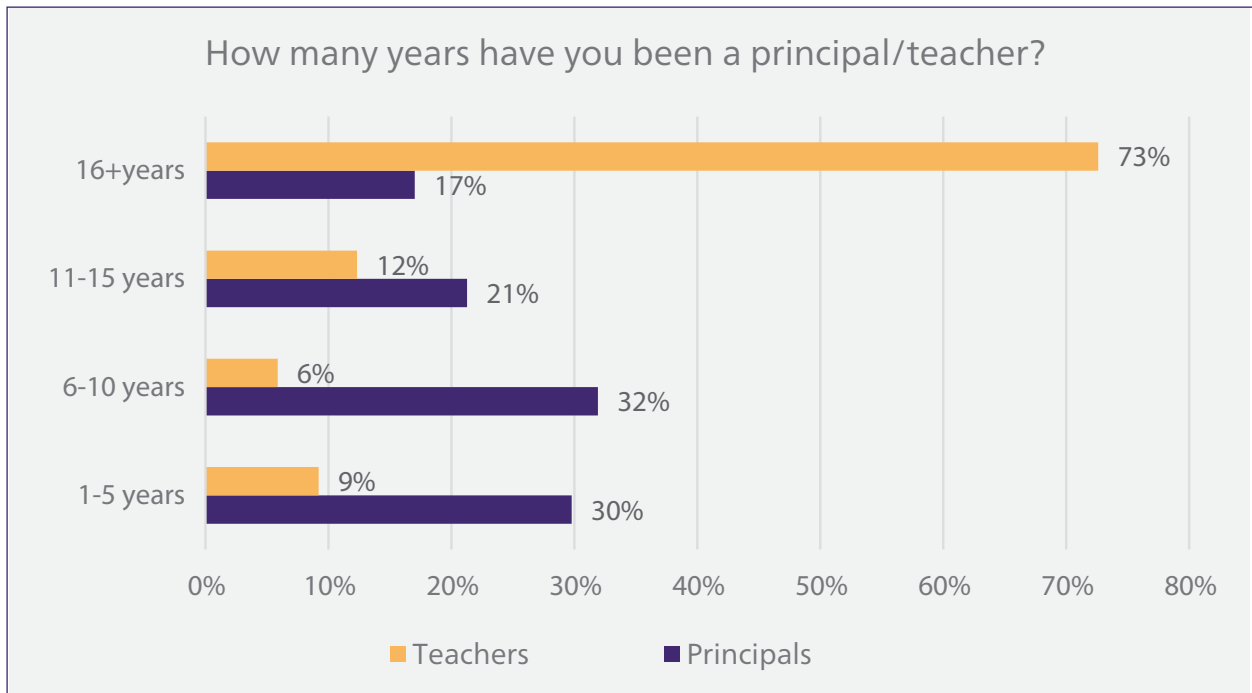
The target group for this study consisted of students in grades VII-XII. As shown in Diagram 2, lower-grade students were more represented among respondents. However, this can be partly due to the fact that there are generally more students in lower grades, as many students do not continue their education after completing basic school (grade IX). The proportion of XII-grade students among respondents was very low, which can be explained by the fact that many graduating students were preoccupied with preparations for the Unified National Exams - it is important to note that this fieldwork was conducted near the end of the academic year.

Diagram 2: Student distribution by grade level.



Surveyed teachers have significantly longer work experience compared to principals, as shown in Diagram 3.

Diagram 3: Work experience of teachers and principals.



Teaching and learning

In the area of teaching and learning, the research focused on several key topics - development and implementation of the school curriculum, student participation in the teaching and learning process and planning and execution of non-formal educational activities.

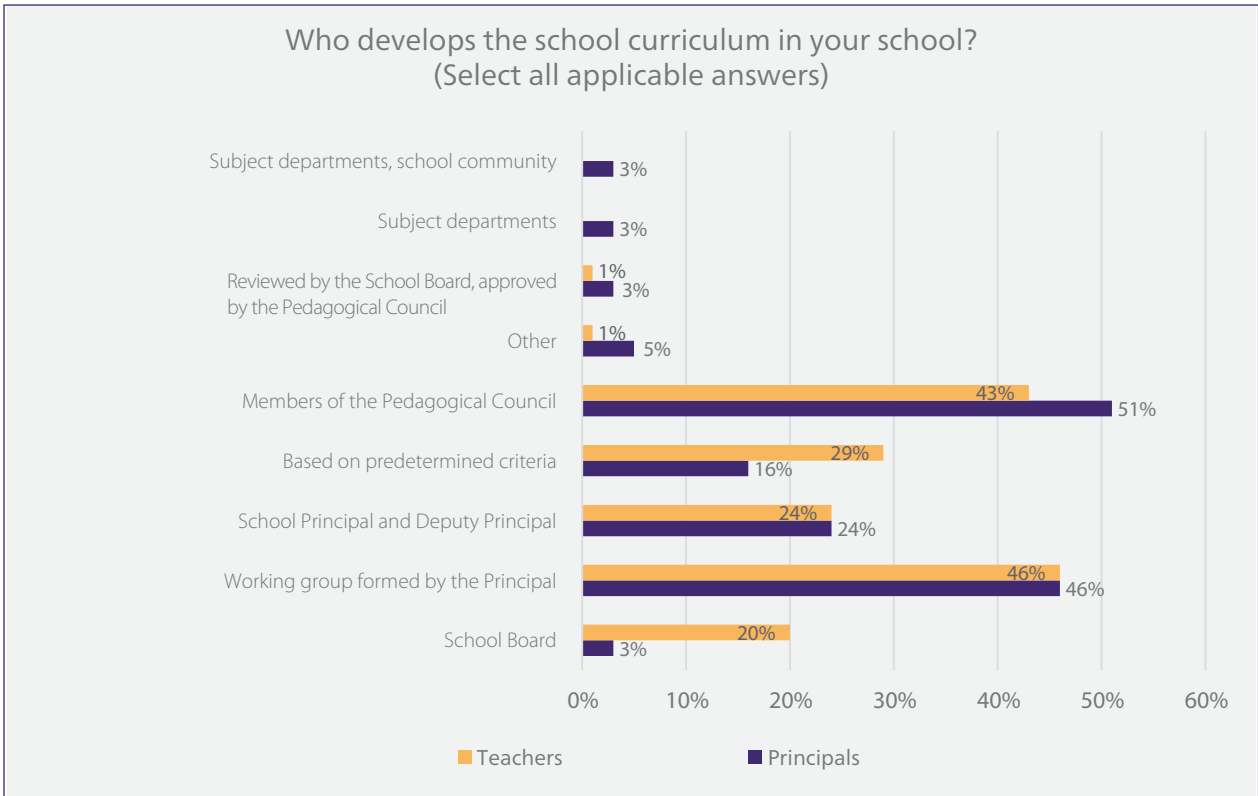
School curriculum

In this area, particular attention was given to the following aspects: the process of developing the school curriculum, the level of awareness among school stakeholders and the factors that motivate teachers to participate in curriculum development.

According to legislation, as outlined in the previous section, the school curriculum is developed by the Pedagogical Council with the involvement of the school administration. The Pedagogical Council must also seek approval from the School Board before finalising the curriculum.

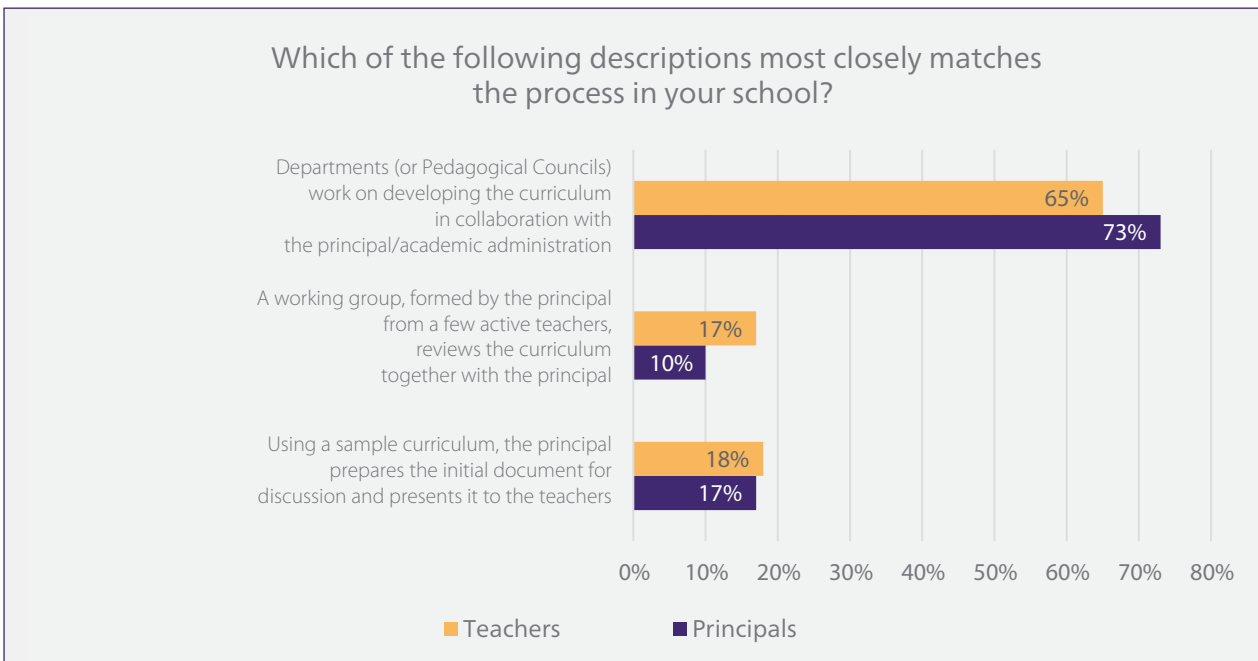
The survey results indicate that, in practice, the process of developing the school curriculum sometimes slightly differs from the legally prescribed procedure. Additionally, there is some disagreement between school principals and teachers regarding the extent of teacher involvement in curriculum development. For example, a higher percentage of principals than teachers claim that members of the Pedagogical Council actively participate in the development of the school curriculum.

Diagram 4: Stakeholders involved in the development of the school curriculum.



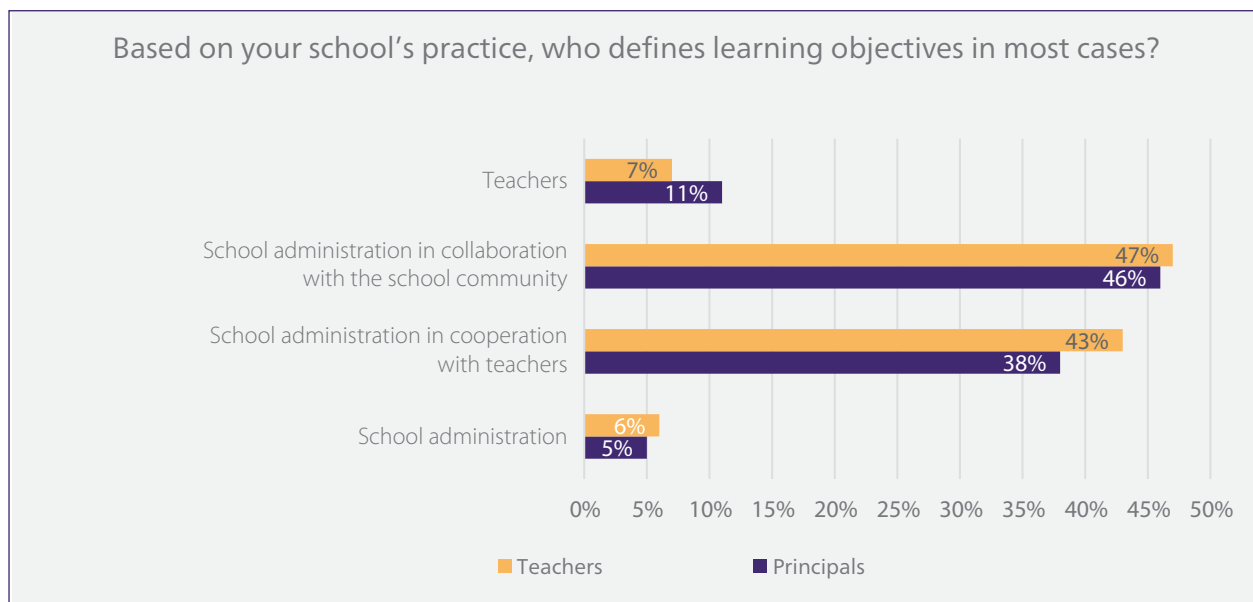
Teachers and principals provided slightly different responses to the question: "Which of the following descriptions most closely matches the process in your school?". Most of them (65% of teachers and 73% of principals) reported that subject departments or Pedagogical Councils work on school curricula through collaboration with the principal/academic administration. However, 10% of principals and 17% of teachers stated that "a working group composed of several active teachers, formed by the principal, develops the school curriculum together with the principal" (see Diagram 5).

Diagram 5: Existing practices for school curriculum development in schools.



According to the survey results, in most cases, learning objectives are defined by the school administration in collaboration with the school community or in cooperation with teachers (see Diagram 6).

Diagram 6: Defining learning objectives.



As we can see, both teachers and principals mostly selected responses that reflect positive participatory practices. However, the qualitative research component of this study shows that respondents struggled to provide specific examples or name similar practices. Additionally, in focus groups and interviews, principals stated that only a small number of teachers are actually involved in curriculum development. Principals primarily attribute this to a lack of interest among teachers:

"Only about five to six are involved in the development of the school curriculum. I can't say they are very actively engaged. The rest simply have no desire, they avoid it—some even cite health issues". (Interview with a principal)

As part of this study, we also analysed school curricula from seven different schools. These curricula were developed based on the NC framework and mostly contain the same components, such as school mission, vision and values, processes for organising the teaching and learning process, school year calendar and student assessment criteria. It is evident that schools used identical or highly similar templates in developing their school curricula. Moreover, in some cases, the descriptions of many components were entirely identical across different schools or only slightly modified. In many schools, the following sections of the school curriculum were nearly identical:

- Teaching and learning objectives;
- Key methodological approaches;
- Student assessment criteria (in rare cases, the assessment components were more detailed or varied slightly);
- Educational resources (mostly, school curricula only listed general types of educational resources);
- Principles of inclusive education and home-based learning.

The actual differences between school curricula were found in the following components:

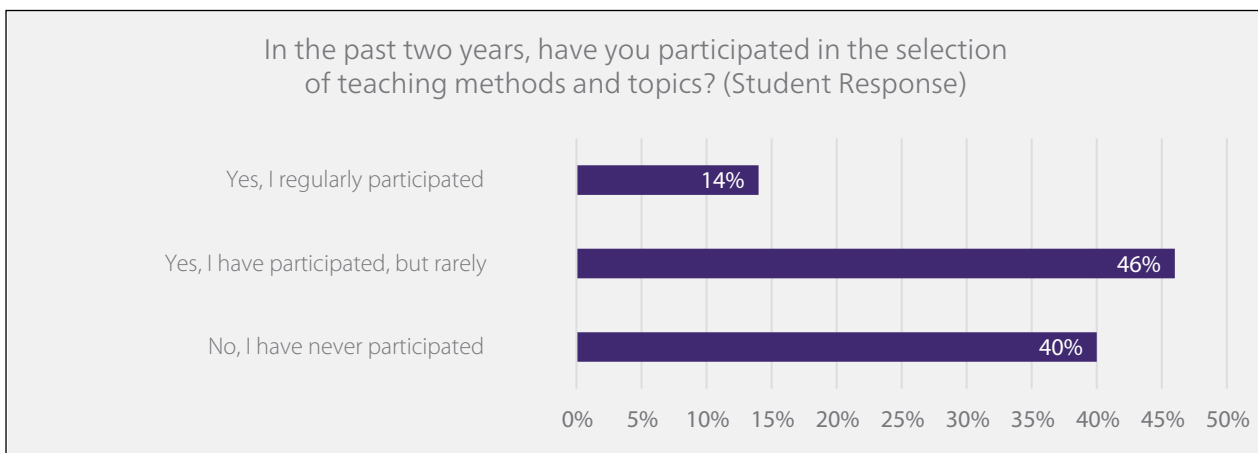
- Lesson duration;
- School calendar;
- Lesson hour distribution (hourly grid);

- Elective subjects;
- Additional educational and developmental services not covered by the national curriculum (e.g. extended learning sessions);
- Programmes for professional orientation and career planning;
- Formation of class groups;
- Selection of textbooks.

Student participation in the teaching and learning process

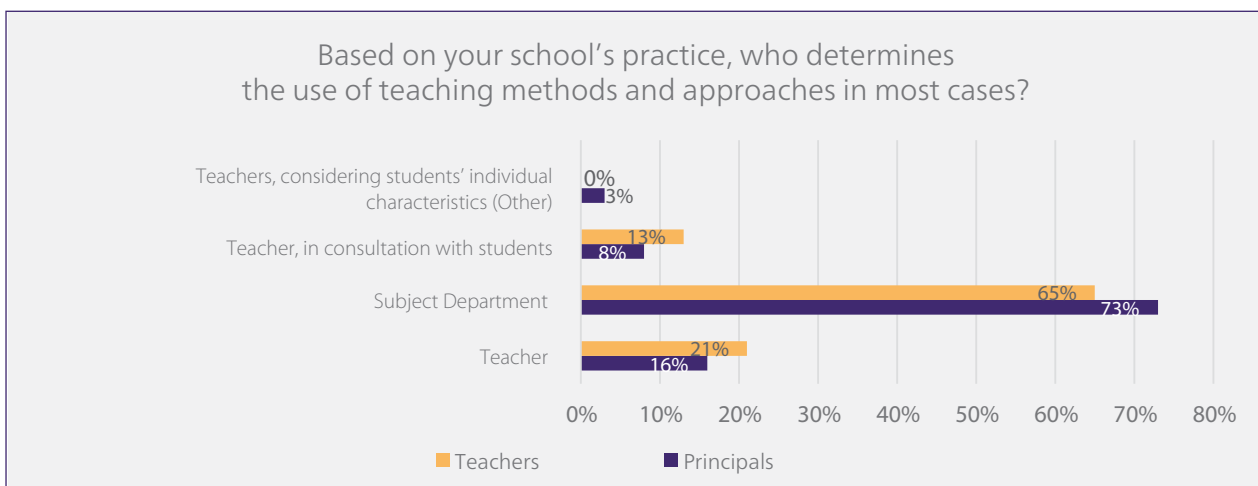
This section of the study focuses on students' involvement in selecting teaching methods and approaches, self-assessment and peer assessment and potential reasons for low participation. Only 14% of surveyed students reported regularly participating in the selection of teaching methods and topics, while 40% stated that they have never been involved in this process (see Diagram 7).

Diagram 7: Student participation in selecting teaching methods.



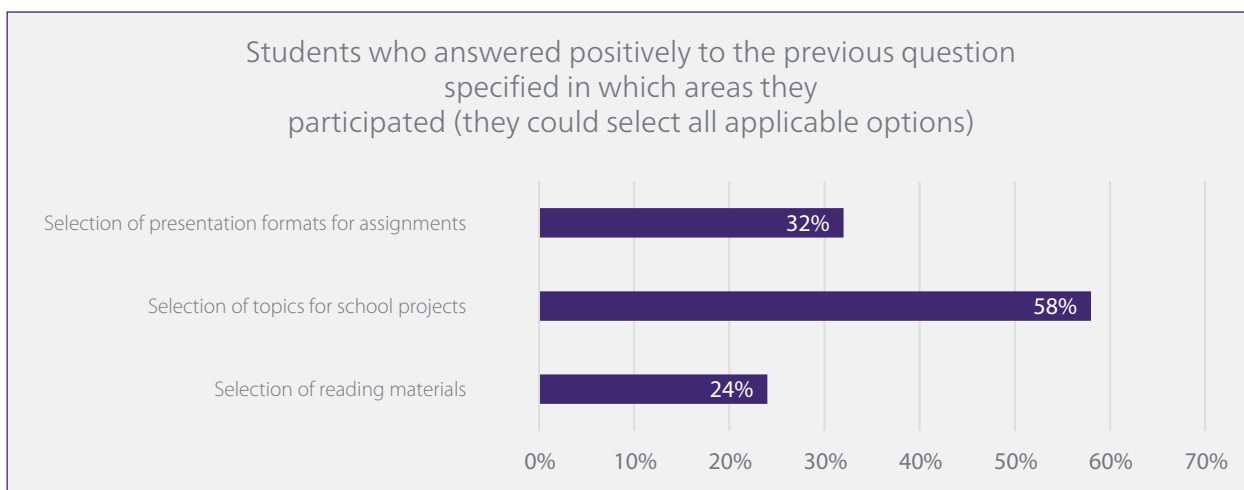
A very small percentage of teachers and school principals stated that teaching methods and approaches are determined in consultation with students (see Diagram 8).

Diagram 8: Selection of teaching methods and approaches.



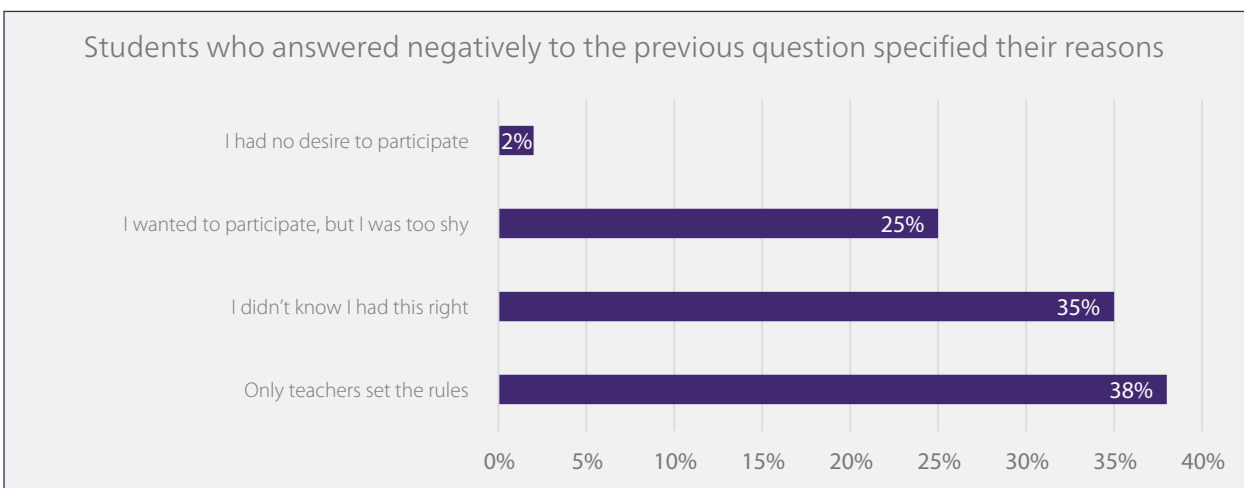
Students were also asked to specify how they participate in the teaching and learning process when given the opportunity. The most frequently mentioned form of participation was selecting topics for classroom projects (see Diagram 9).

Diagram 9: Forms of participation in the teaching and learning process.



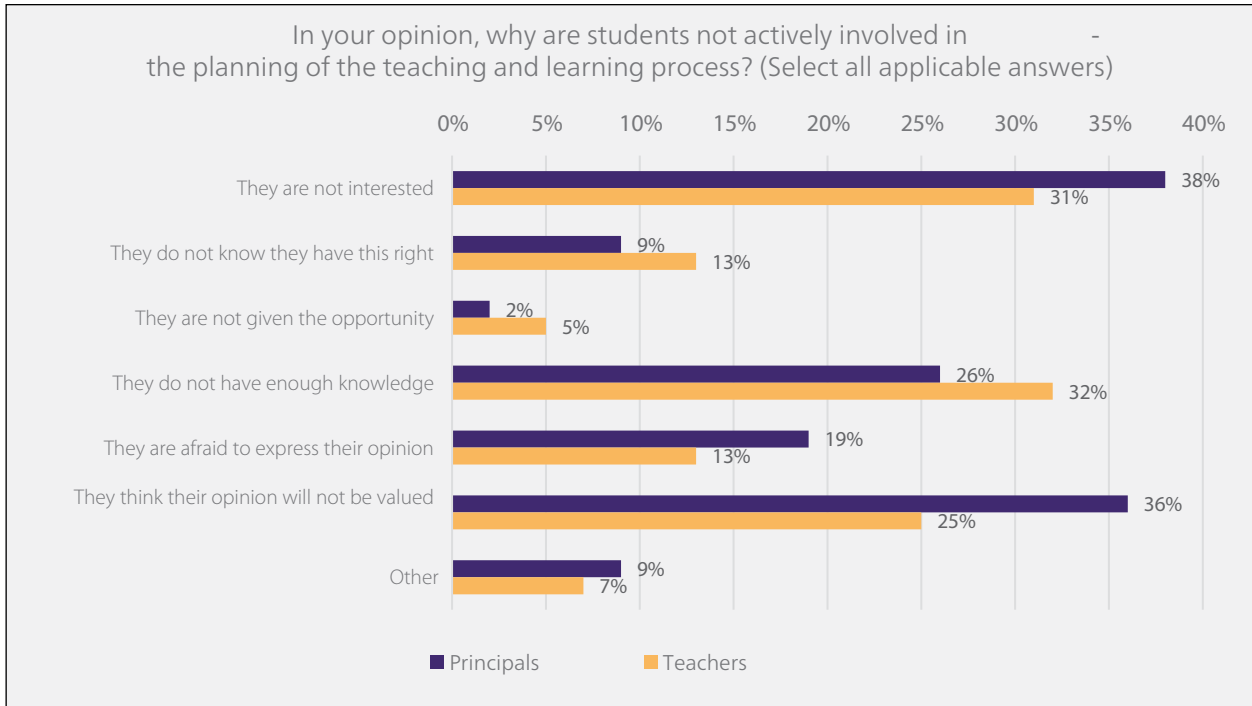
Students also had the opportunity to name the reasons they believed hindered their participation in the selection of teaching methods and topics. The most frequently cited reasons were: "Only teachers set the rules" (38%), "I didn't know I had this right" (35%), "I wanted to participate, but I was too shy" (25%). As we can see, students either do not know they have the right to participate, or they want to participate but feel hesitant. Very few students stated that they had no interest in participating in the selection of teaching methods and approaches (see Diagram 10).

Diagram 10: Reasons for lack of participation in the teaching and learning process.



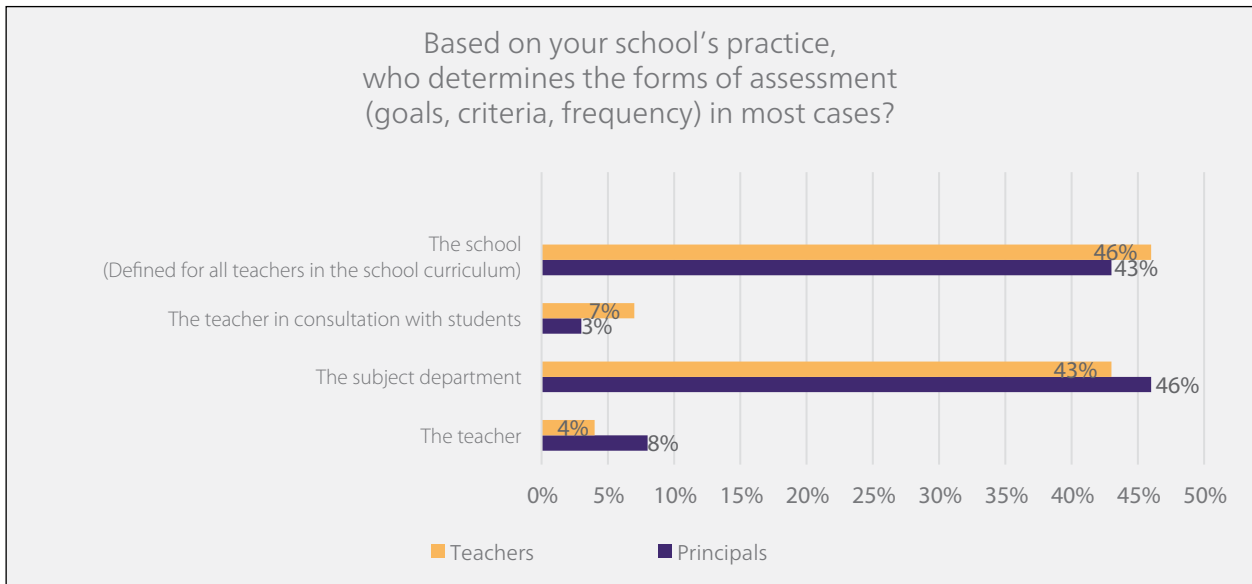
Teachers and principals respond differently to a similar question: 31% of teachers and 38% of principals believe that students do not participate in the teaching and learning process because they are not interested (see Diagram 11).

Diagram 11: Potential reasons for students' lack of participation.



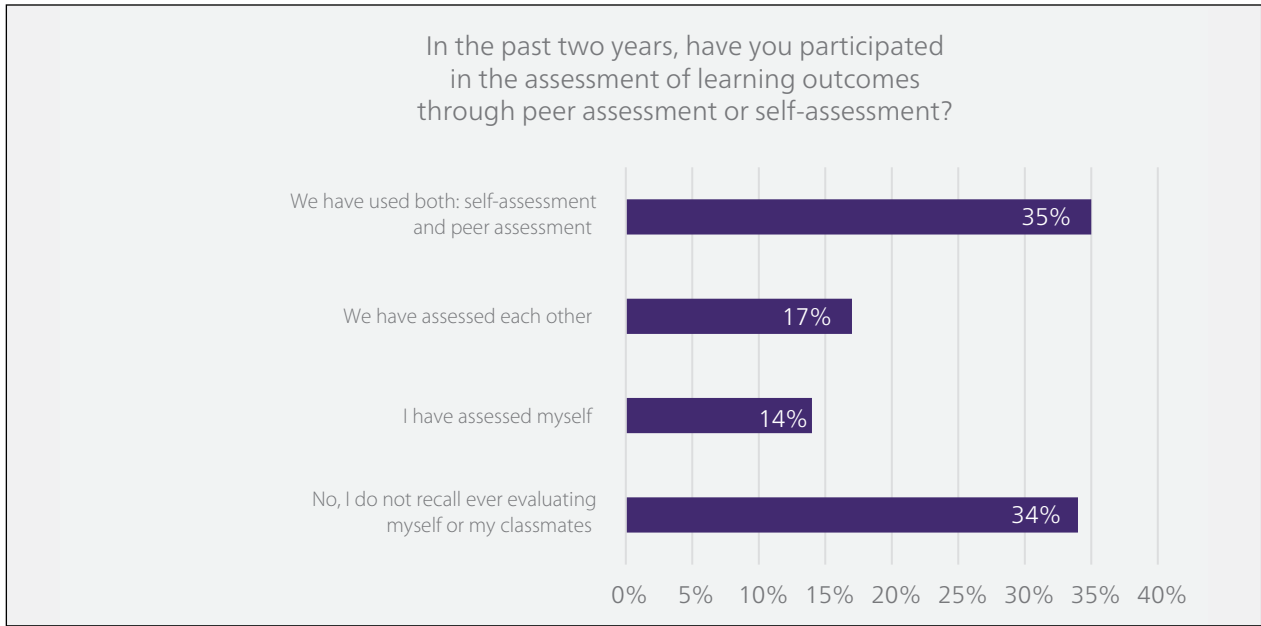
In schools, the forms and criteria for assessing student participation in the teaching and learning process are primarily determined by the school administration or the subject department rather than by teachers or in consultation with students. Only a very small percentage of principals and teachers reported that assessment criteria are developed in collaboration with students. Here, quantitative and qualitative research findings align (see Diagram 12).

Diagram 12: Determining assessment criteria in schools.



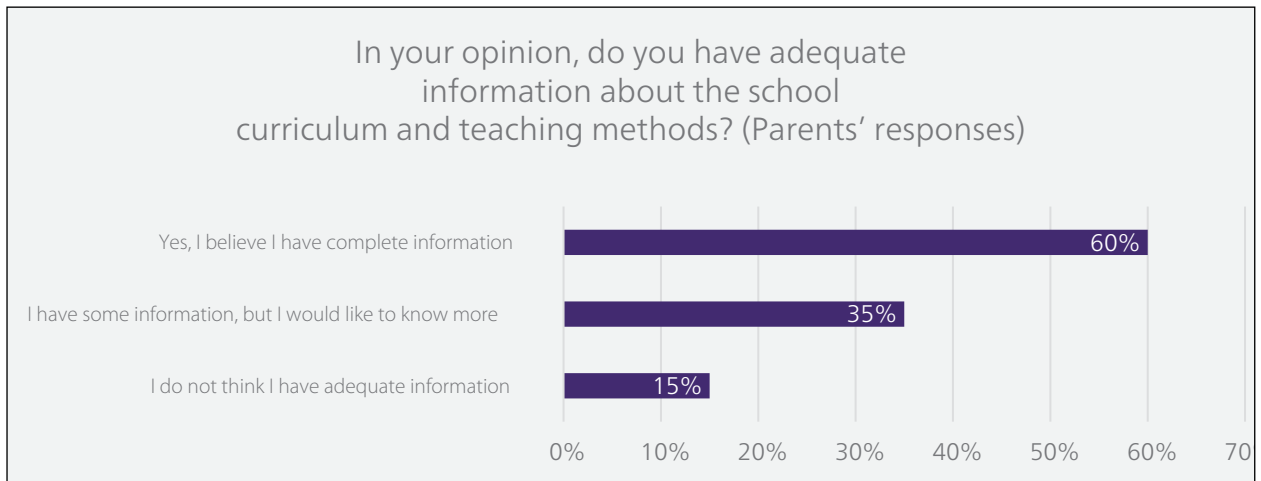
It should be noted that the NC does not explicitly mandate student involvement in developing assessment criteria. However, the curriculum does specify that students should participate in formative assessment through self-assessment or peer assessment (Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia 2018; Chapter II, Article 29). More than one-third of students reported that, in the past two years, they do not recall ever having evaluated themselves or a classmate (see Diagram 13).

Diagram 13: Student participation in the assessment of learning outcomes.



Regarding parental awareness of school curricula and teaching methods, half of the surveyed parents believe they have complete information on these topics, while the other half state that their knowledge is either limited or insufficient. This indicates that schools need to improve engagement in this area by ensuring greater parental involvement and using diverse methods and channels to disseminate information effectively. A significant portion of parents reported that they do not have sufficient information about the school curriculum and teaching methods. However, most attributed this to their own lack of time rather than a lack of communication from the school.

Diagram 14: Parents' level of awareness about teaching methods and the school curriculum.



Regarding student involvement, the qualitative research components confirmed the trends observed in the quantitative results. Students mentioned that, aside from feeling hesitant, they were also uncertain whether teachers would respond positively or with understanding if they took the initiative to express their opinions on teaching and learning matters. Additionally, students noted that teachers rarely introduce modern teaching methods, and young people primarily learn about these approaches through social media:

"Teachers should offer us more modern methods. Just memorising lessons and taking tests isn't enough—we need different formats. We see on social media that there are all kinds of assignments, like card-based learning, group work, or diverse uses of digital tools". (Student)

However, there are also examples of good practice:

"For example, we talked to our English teacher about this, and now we sometimes watch movies, do group work, and the lessons are much more engaging. We have a closer relationship with our English teacher, and when we made suggestions, they agreed". (Student)

Regarding assessment formats and criteria, the qualitative data suggest that teachers may inform students about these aspects, but students are rarely involved in selecting assessment methods or criteria that they find acceptable. Nevertheless, some students shared examples of positive practices:

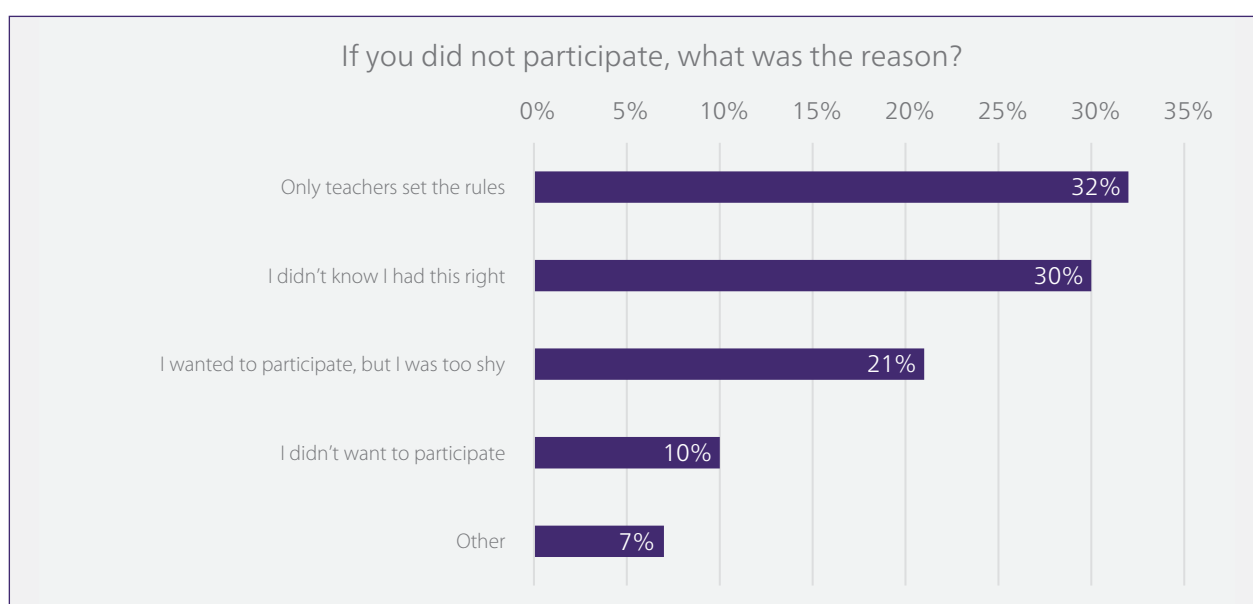
"I mainly remember my Georgian and history teachers—beforehand, they inform us about the assessment criteria. I can't think of other teachers who do this. I sometimes wonder why I received a particular grade, but I've also thought that it's not worth asking". (Student)

Classroom rules

Student participation in the development of classroom rules is essential to ensure that students feel a sense of ownership over these rules rather than perceiving them as imposed. Collaboratively developing classroom rules can also help prevent conflicts between students as well as between students and teachers. Moreover, participation in this process serves as practical experience for engaging in a democratic society in life beyond school.

Half of the surveyed students stated that they had not participated in the development of classroom rules during the current academic year. When asked why they had not participated, most students responded that only teachers set the rules and that they were unaware that they could participate in this process (see Diagram 15).

Diagram 15: Student participation in the development of classroom rules.



The majority of students stated that classroom rules reflect gender equality and do not categorise tasks as "girls' work" or "boys' work". However, almost a third (28%) reported experiencing some form of gender-based division.

These findings were also confirmed in qualitative research, where students mentioned that they are often not involved in setting classroom rules. In some cases, students had never even considered the possibility of participating in rule-making:

"In our class, we don't have officially established rules. Only teachers give us remarks when needed". (Student)

This comment accurately reflects the broader issue of democratic participation in schools -many rules and procedures are not institutionalised and are instead applied situationally. However, students also shared examples of positive practices:

"In our class, we have a poster with student rules. I remember we wrote them down on flipchart paper, and the teacher put them up on the wall. The same happens with the school's regulations—they remind us of the rules when necessary". (Student)

When discussing gender norms in classroom rulemaking, most respondents stated that the rules were not gender-differentiated. However, there may still be informal gender norms at play. For example, while dress code regulations were mentioned, these rules primarily targeted girls' clothing rather than boys'. Teachers mentioned that they discuss appropriate dress codes with students and parents, emphasising that students should not dress inappropriately at school. However, when asked what might be considered inappropriate clothing for boys, teachers provided no examples, whereas for girls, they specifically mentioned short skirts and crop tops:

"We developed classroom rules and posted them in the class. There was also a rule about clothing. It's a bit different for boys - they don't wear skirts, so dress codes mainly apply to girls...". (Student)

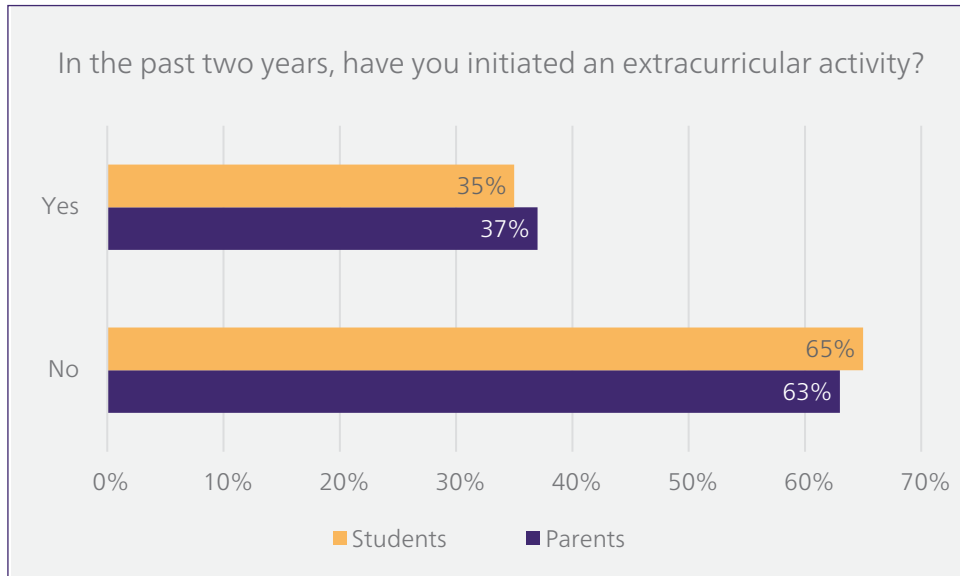
Both students and parents demonstrated low awareness and involvement in the development of school regulations. Focus group discussions revealed that students and parents only learn about school policies when a violation occurs- they are not involved in the rule-making process:

"I learned about the school's internal regulations from teachers, but I never participated in their development. Teachers talk to us about them occasionally, but honestly, there were no meetings where we discussed these issues. We only hear about the rules when there's a violation—when they tell us which specific points were broken. I don't have access to these documents, and I've never reviewed them". (Student)

Extracurricular activities

Previous research indicates that student and parent participation in extracurricular activities is generally higher than their involvement in choosing teaching methods or participating in school governance (Council of Europe 2023; Malazonia et al. 2022). This is expected, as the Law on General Education states that planning and organising extracurricular activities is the responsibility of student self-government (Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia 2005). Additionally, the Teacher's Professional Standard emphasises that student needs and interests should be considered when planning extracurricular activities. However, according to our quantitative survey results, less than half of students and parents reported having initiated extracurricular activities in the past two years.

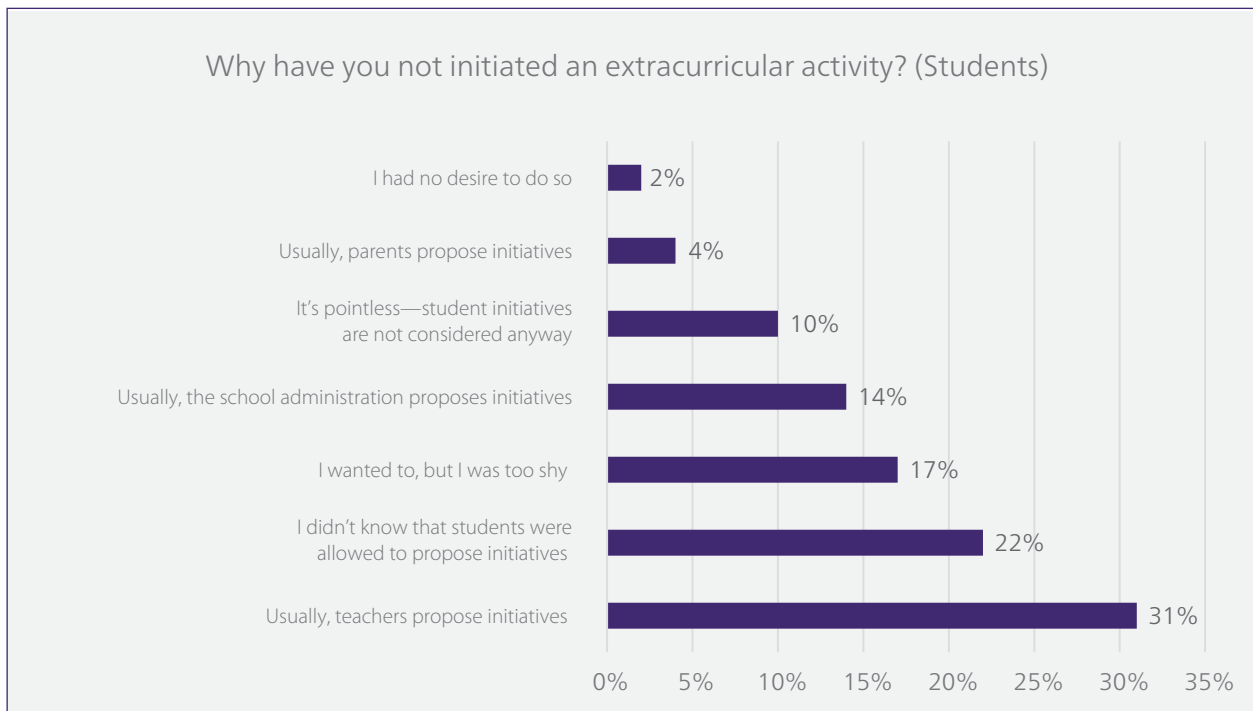
Diagram 16: Student initiatives for organising extracurricular activities.



Those who had not initiated any extracurricular activities most commonly cited the following reasons for their lack of participation - established practices, where it is typically the teacher who initiates activities, lack of awareness about their right to propose activities, lack of expectation for positive feedback, which made them feel hesitant.

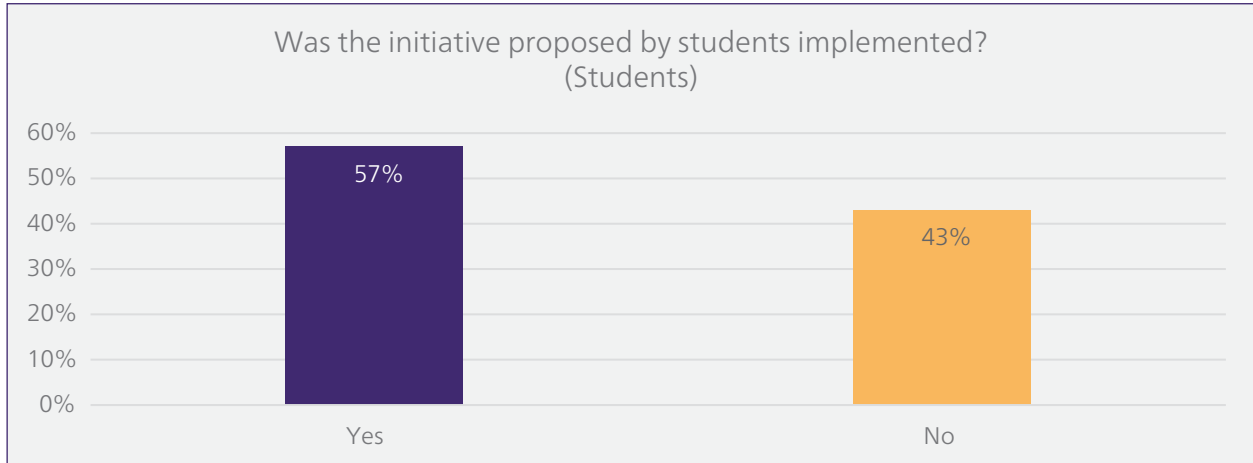
It is important to note that during focus group discussions, students expressed even stronger criticism of these same trends.

Diagram 17: Reasons for student inactivity in initiating extracurricular activities.



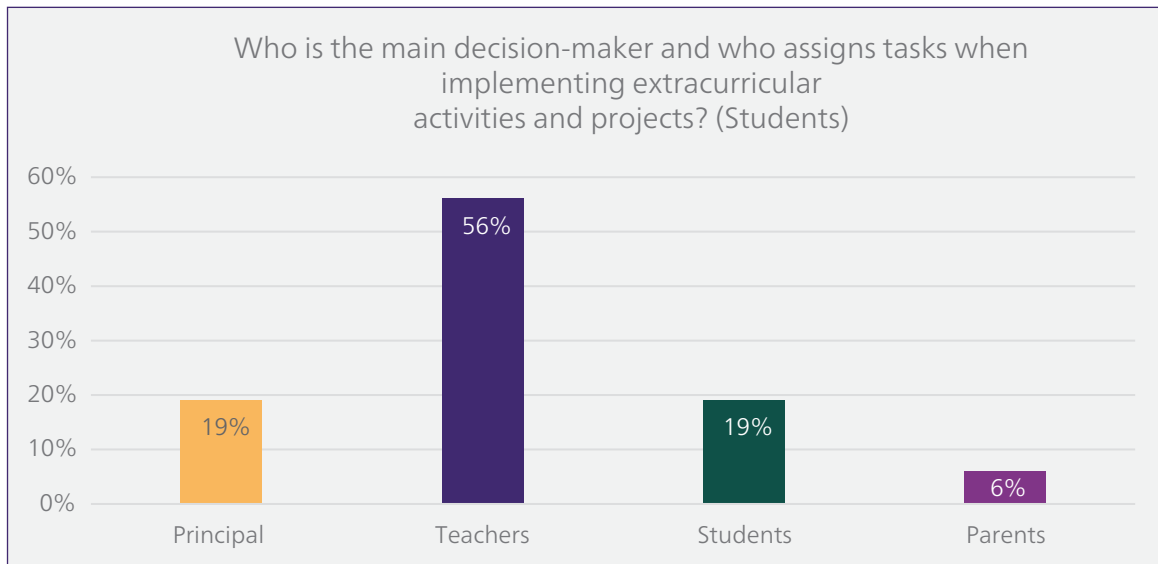
It is also noteworthy that while a significant portion of student initiatives were successfully implemented, a substantial number were not pursued further. This trend may discourage students from proposing initiatives in the future, as they may feel that their ideas are rarely acted upon.

Diagram 18: Implementation of student-initiated extracurricular activities.



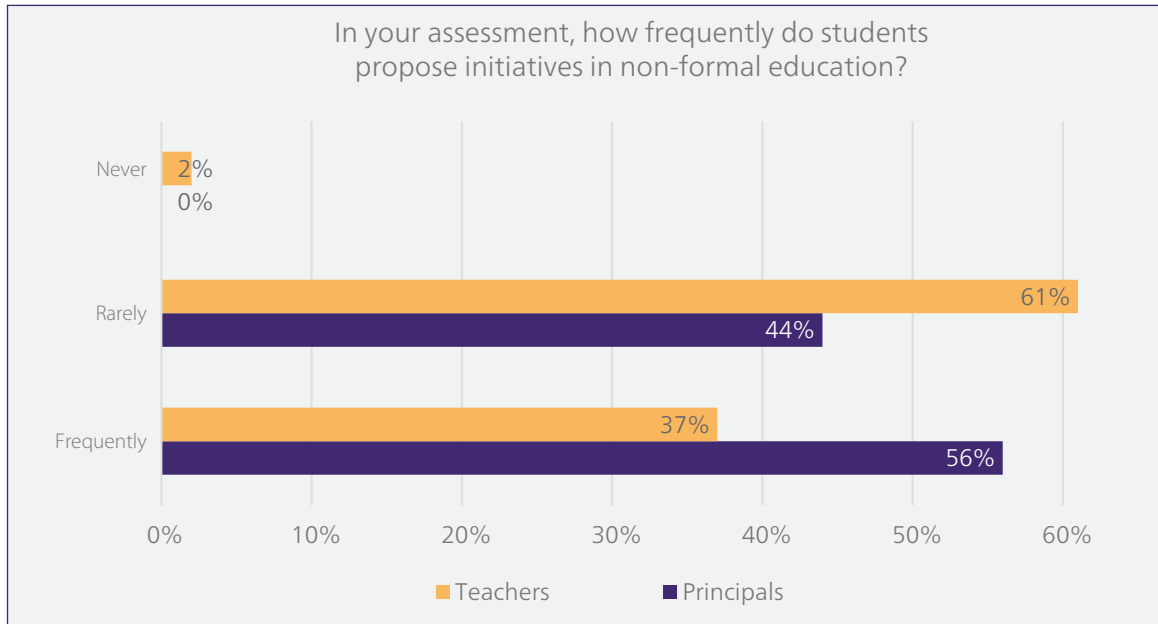
Student participation in extracurricular activities is not low, however, they have limited ability to independently distribute tasks within these activities. According to the research data, teachers make most of the decisions regarding how these activities are carried out.

Diagram 19: Implementation of extracurricular activities.



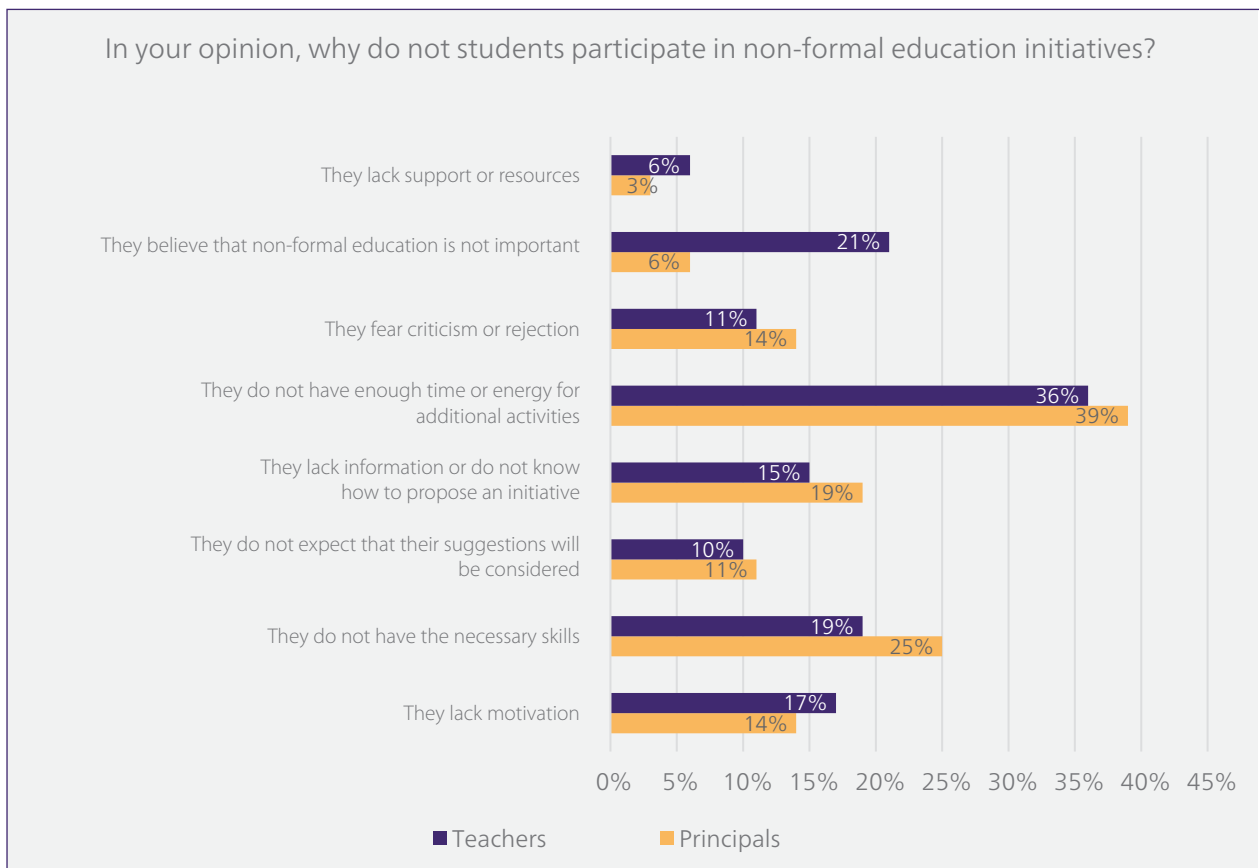
It is interesting to analyse the perspectives of school principals and teachers regarding student initiatives in non-formal education. A large portion of teachers (61%) state that students rarely propose initiatives. In contrast, principals believe that students are more active in putting forward initiatives in non-formal education. This suggests that teachers may have a more realistic perception of student initiatives, as they interact with them more frequently in classroom settings.

Diagram 20: Frequency of student initiatives in non-formal education—teacher and principal perspectives.



Regarding the factors that may prevent students from openly and confidently proposing initiatives, both principals (39%) and teachers (36%) most frequently cited lack of time and energy for extracurricular and additional activities. In some cases, other influencing factors included lack of necessary skills among students and perceiving non-formal education as less important.

Diagram 21: Reasons for student inactivity in extracurricular activities - teacher and principal perspectives.



Key findings and needs

This chapter presents the quantitative and qualitative research results on democratic participation in the teaching and learning process from the perspectives of students, parents, teachers and school administration. According to the main findings, low levels of awareness regarding rights and responsibilities as well as a lack of information about specific ways to ensure participation can be considered the primary reasons for low engagement. However, lack of interest and time constraints also play significant roles. More specifically, the research provides the following key findings:

- ▶ The teaching and learning process is subject-based and mainly managed by subject departments (katedras).
- ▶ Schools, according to the NC, have considerable freedom in planning their own learning processes. However, the process of developing school curricula is sometimes not formalised or institutionalised, preventing schools from effectively utilising their autonomy in this area.
- ▶ General decisions regarding teaching methods, approaches and assessment are primarily made by teachers. Students are often unaware that they have the right to be involved in these decisions, or even if they are aware, they may feel hesitant or believe their participation would not lead to tangible results. As a result, they refrain from engaging in the process.
- ▶ Engaging students in defining various aspects of the learning process—such as selecting topics, choosing teaching methods, setting assessment criteria, and engaging in peer evaluation—can be highly beneficial in encouraging active student participation and developing their competences and skills.
- ▶ Students are interested in alternative teaching and learning methods they come across in various social media platforms.
- ▶ While positive practices exist regarding student participation in planning the learning process, these remain fragmented and lack a structured framework.
- ▶ Student participation in extracurricular activities is relatively high, but student-led initiatives remain rare. Active involvement in planning and implementing activities is still limited.

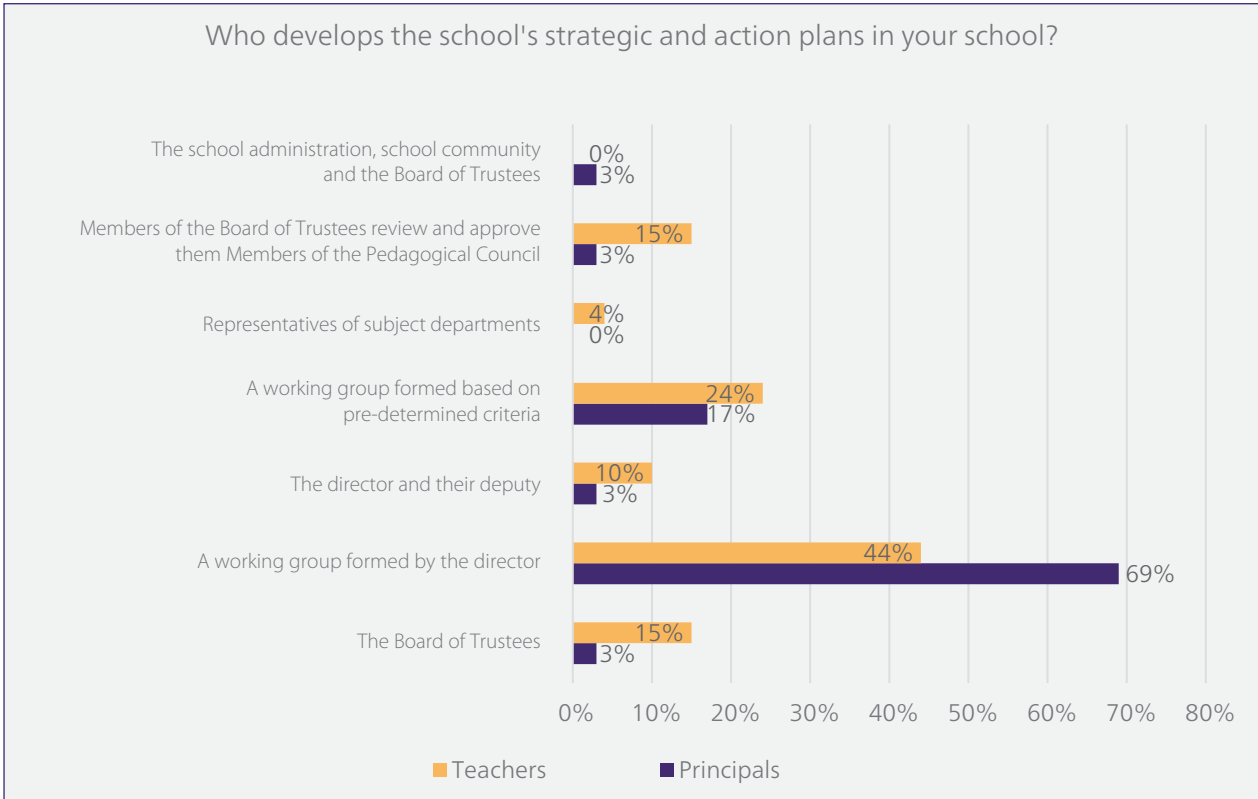
School governance and culture

This chapter examines issues related to school governance and school culture. More specifically, it explores stakeholder involvement in strategic planning and the development of management documents, the functioning and effectiveness of governing bodies, school culture and decision-making processes.

School documentation

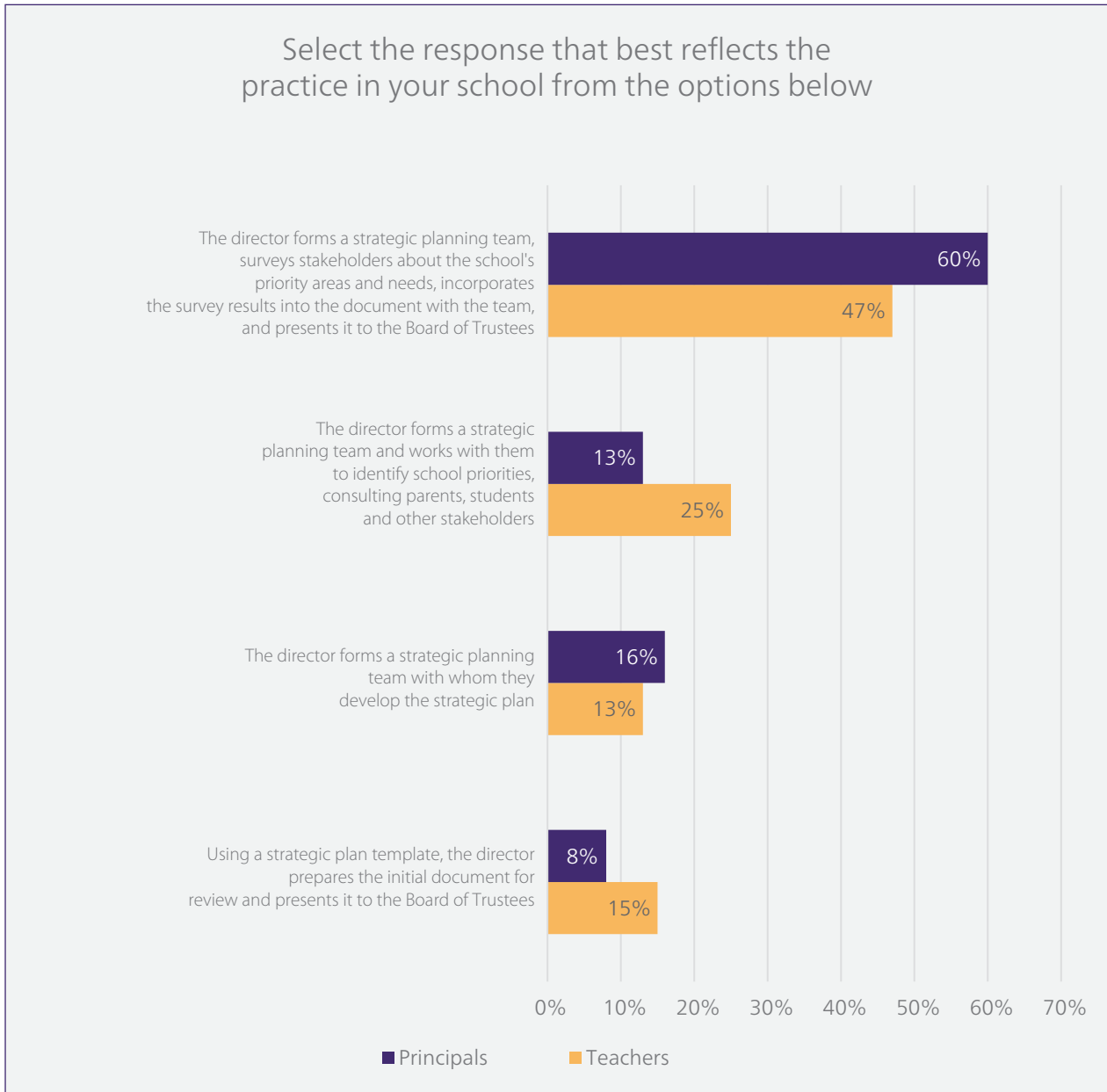
Important school documents include the strategic plan and the action plan. In most cases, these documents are developed by a working group formed by the school director, while in some cases, a pre-defined criteria-based working group is responsible. The perspectives of teachers and school administration on how strategic documents are developed and who plays a role in this process vary significantly.

Diagram 22: Stakeholders involved in the development of the school's strategic plan.



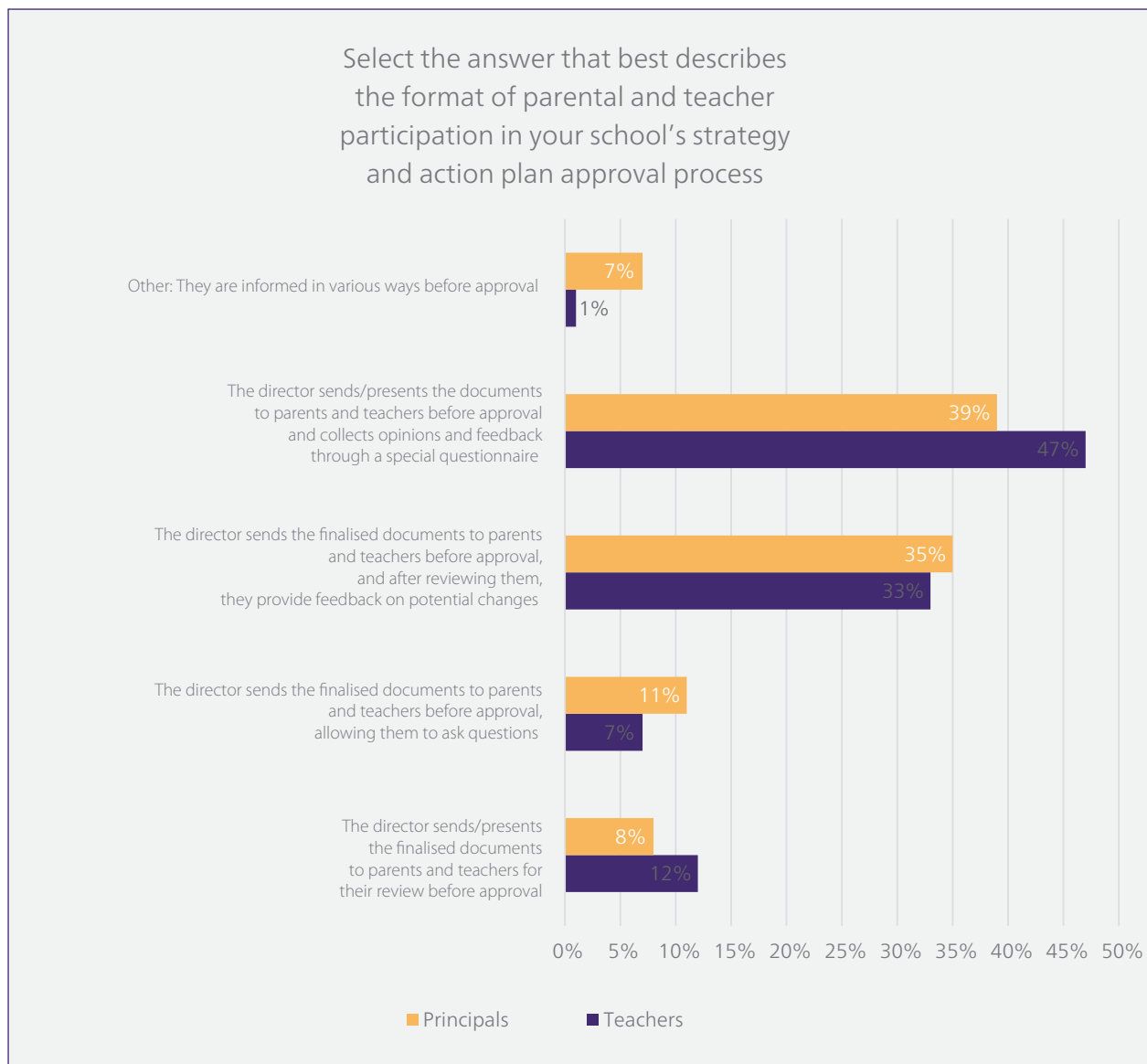
Directors (60%) and teachers (47%) largely state that in their schools, the strategic planning team is formed by the director, who consults with parents and students, determines priority areas, reflects the results in the document and presents it to the Board of Trustees. A relatively smaller number of respondents indicate that the strategic plan is developed by the director together with a team they have created.

Diagram 23: School strategic plan development practices.



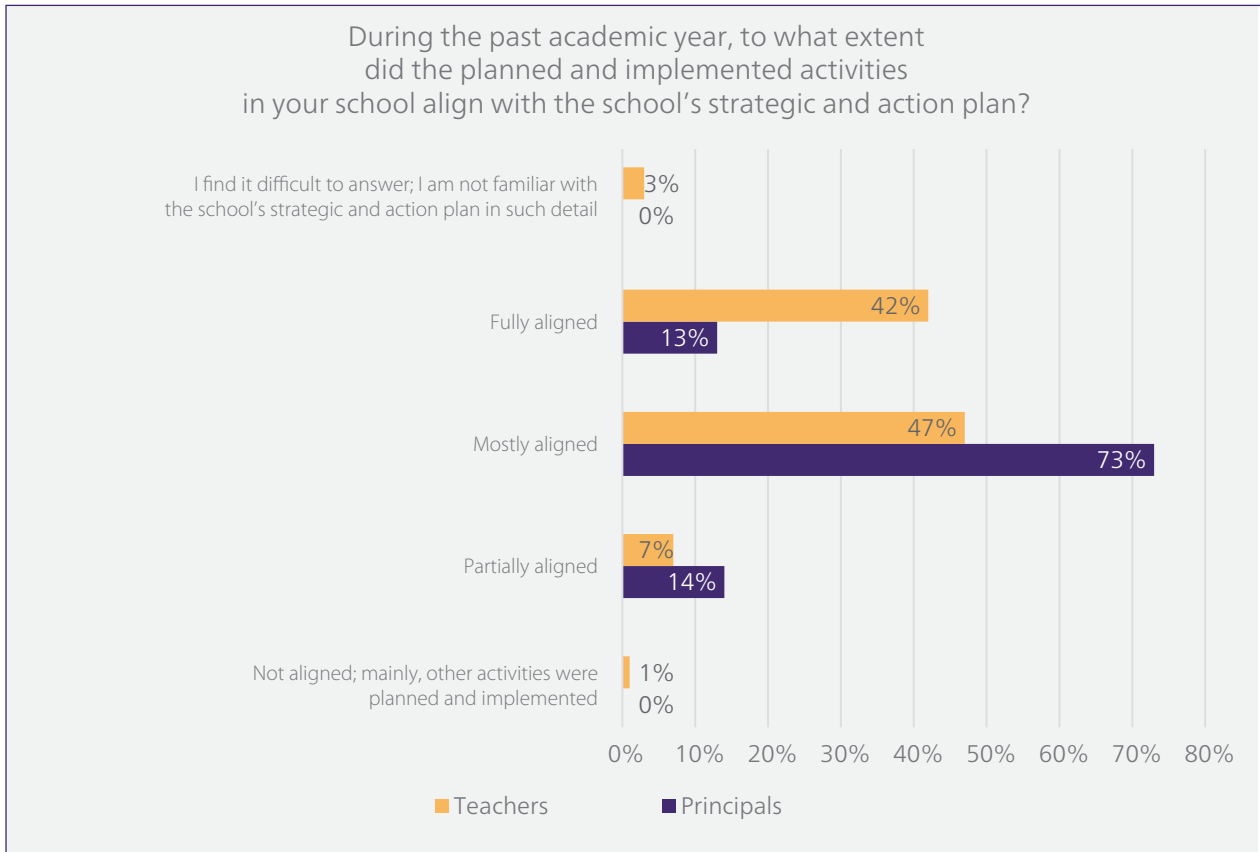
School community involvement in the development of the strategy and action plan, before these documents take their final form, is not high. At best, it is limited to collecting opinions and feedback through a special questionnaire. In some cases, the document is shared with school community members for review, but as focus group results in this study indicate, this process is largely formal. Additionally, there is no mechanism to determine whether the target groups have actually reviewed the shared documents.

Diagram 24: School community involvement in the development of the school's strategic plan.



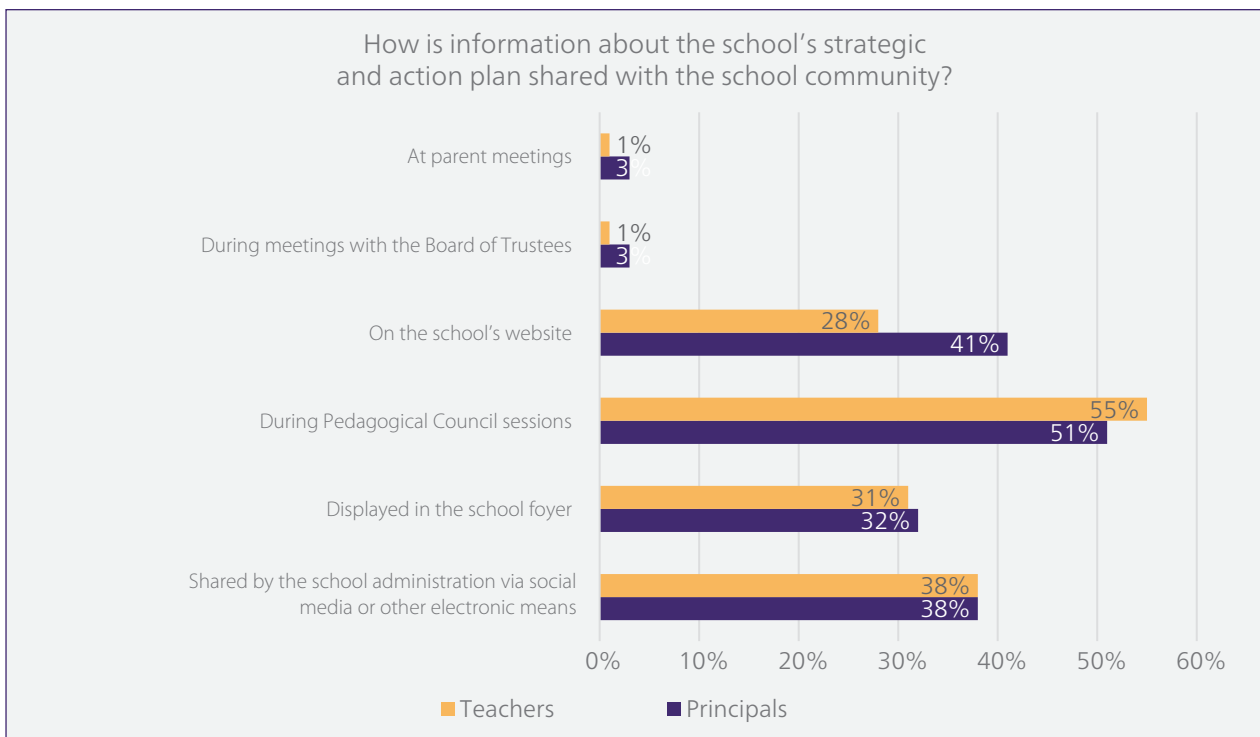
The activities outlined in the strategy's action plan, according to respondents' assessments, largely or fully corresponded to the activities that were actually implemented. However, there are also differences in the perspectives of teachers and school directors.

Diagram 25: Implementation of the school’s strategic and action plan.



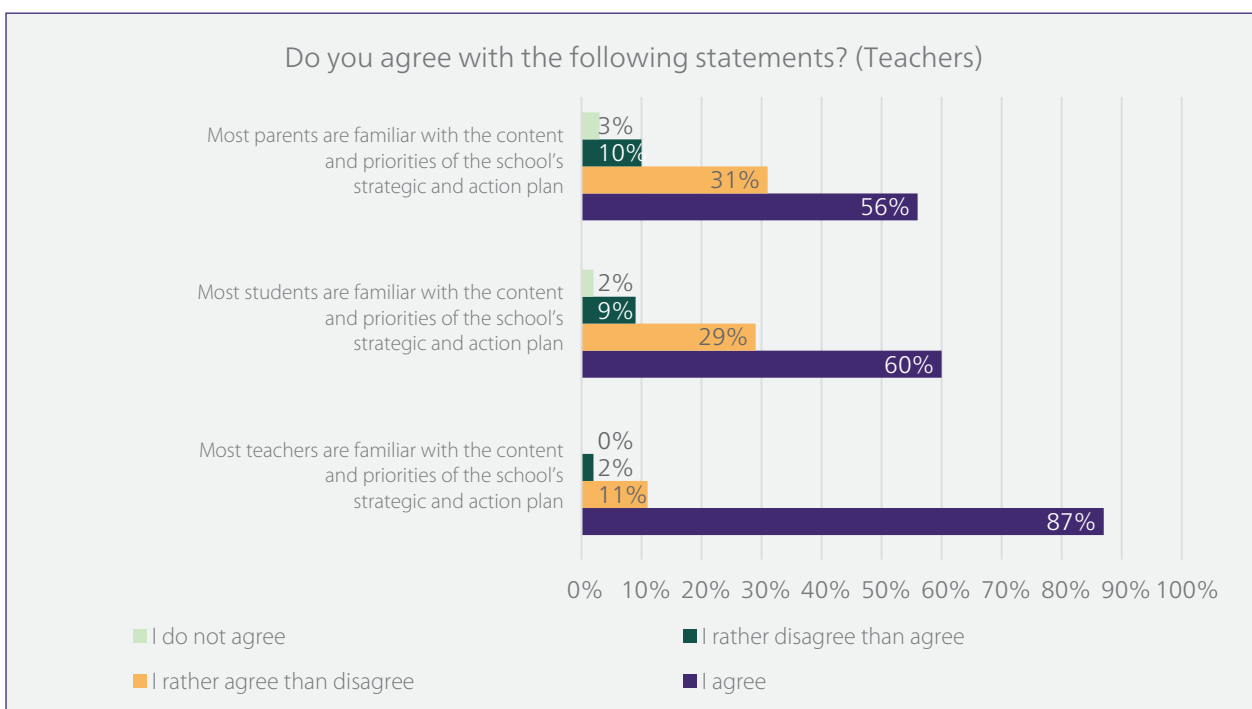
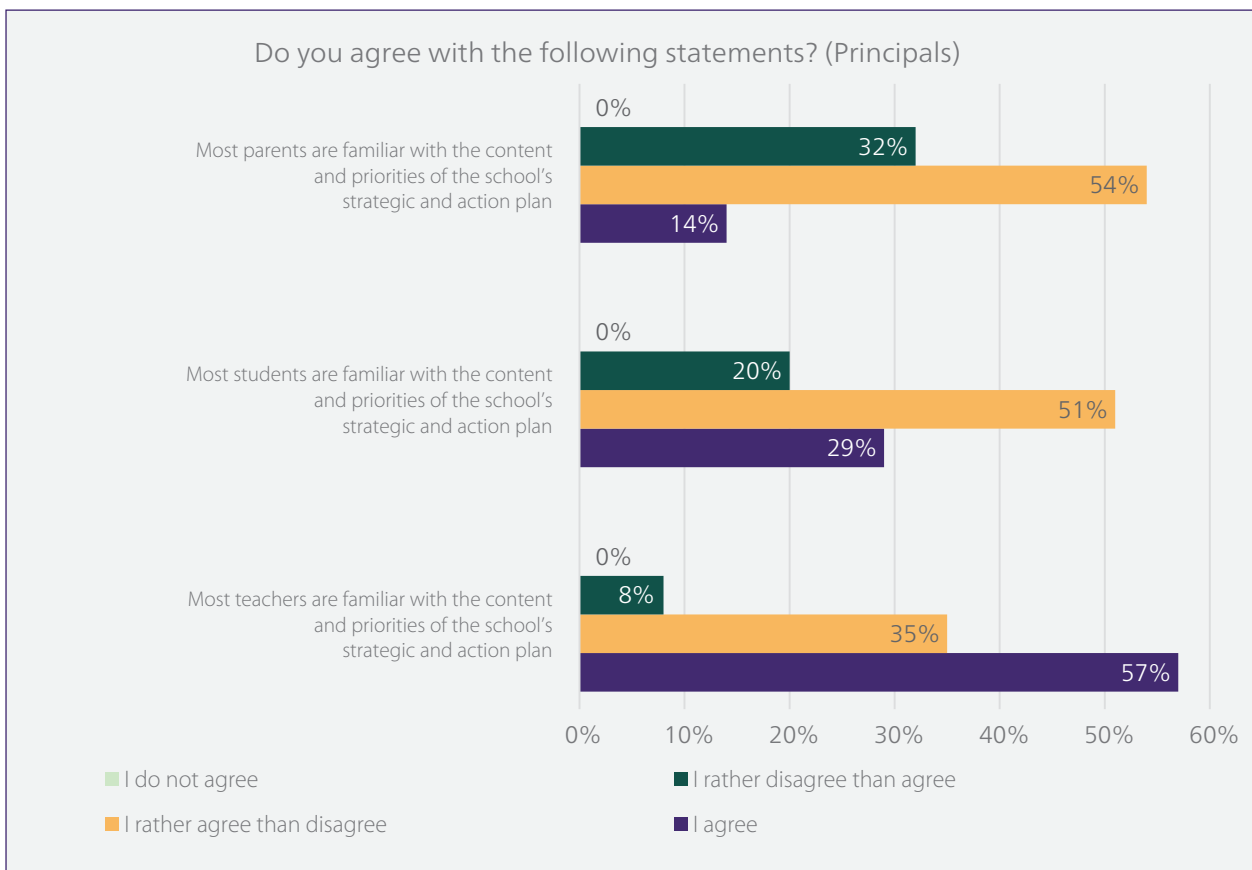
A significant portion of respondents stated that the school community primarily learns about the strategic and action plan through the Pedagogical Council. Some also indicated that this information is shared by displaying it in the school foyer or through social media and electronically distributed documents.

Diagram 26: Dissemination of information about the school’s strategic and action plan.



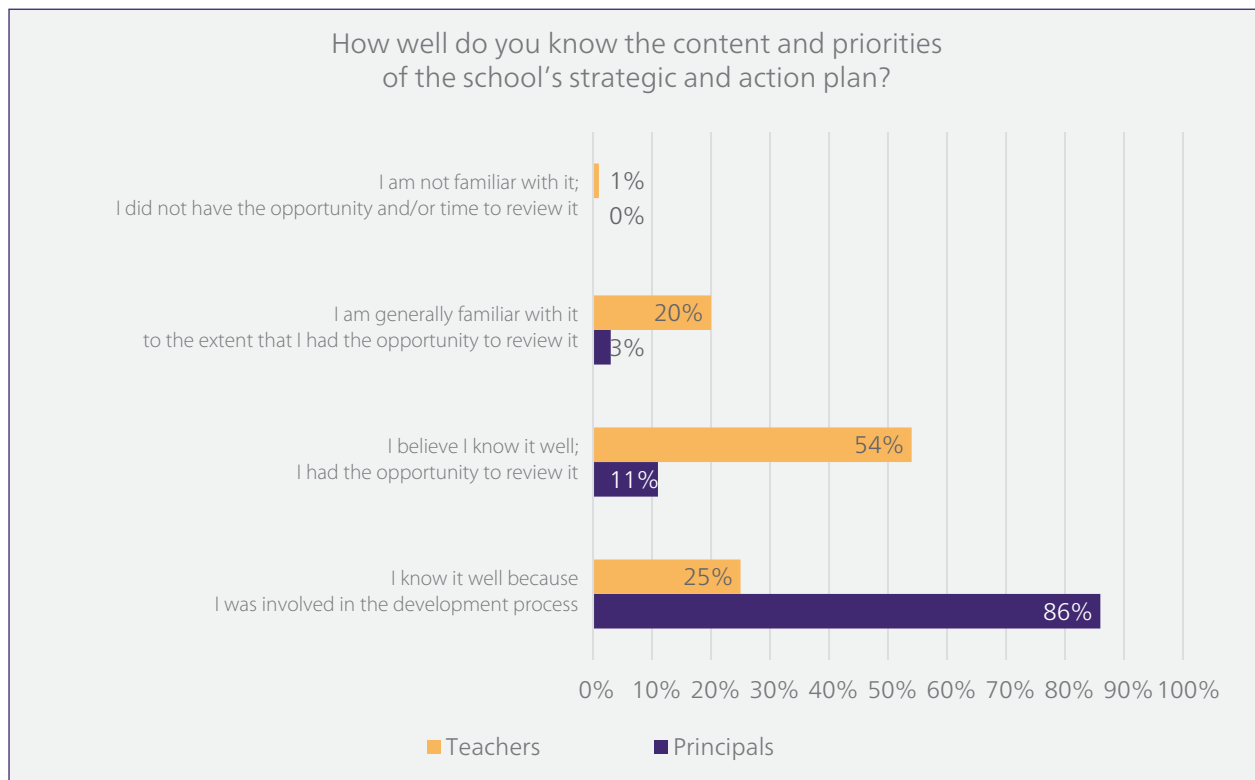
School principals overwhelmingly believe that the school community is familiar with the school's strategic and action plan. They consider parents to be the least informed group, while teachers are seen as the most informed. This trend is also reflected in the survey results among teachers.

Diagrams 27 and 28: Level of awareness regarding the school's strategic and action plan from the perspectives of teachers and principals.



When it comes to self-assessment of awareness regarding these documents, principals are more likely (86%) to consider themselves well-informed, which can be explained by their direct involvement in the development of these documents. Teachers also indicate familiarity with the documents, however, a notable portion (21%) feels the need for more information on the subject.

Diagram 29: Knowledge of the school’s strategic and action plan.



Regarding students, 8% (171 students) of surveyed students stated that they had participated in the development of their school's strategic and action plan in the past two years. Additionally, 9% of surveyed parents believe that their children have the right to participate in the development of the school’s strategic and action plan, while 9% believe that their children have actually taken part in this process.

Students are generally less familiar with the school’s strategic or action plan, as schools do not usually inform them about the annual report of the action plan.

"They don't (inform us), but we have clubs at school, and they usually present the action plans". (Student)

During the focus group with school directors, the process of developing school documents was discussed in detail. Directors noted that working groups are created by the school principal, which work on school documentation, such as the strategic plan, action plan etc. These groups may have different names, such as strategic planning groups, but they are distinct from the Board of Trustees, although board members may also be included. In schools that have undergone authorisation, such groups were formed as part of the preparation process for authorisation.

When asked how members of the working group are selected, directors responded that there are no formal written criteria, and that principals choose these individuals themselves: "Mostly people who are more creative and whom I can rely on". In some cases, formal criteria may apply, such as teacher status: "A mentor, a leading teacher participates..." or educational background: "One of them has a doctorate, so I included them—I thought they would be more creative". Other selection criteria were

also mentioned: "For example, we try to involve teachers from the 'Teach for Georgia' programme—they are also interested in participating".

Regarding the content of strategic documentation, directors noted that these documents are often based on existing templates and sometimes have a formal character. While this may not necessarily be a problem, since many schools share similar strategic priorities, the focus groups and document reviews revealed that sometimes not enough attention is paid to the content and details of these documents.

During in-depth interviews with school directors, it became evident that, in their view, teachers are often not interested in school documentation or strategic planning processes:

"We have sent out the school regulations and school plan, but they don't read such lengthy documents. Then, at meetings, I introduce them. They sit there staying silent. They can't refuse to come, but they are not interested". (Interview with a school director)

The wider school community has limited awareness of strategic documents. During the focus group with school directors, it was noted that schools deliver strategic documents to their communities through various means, most commonly via social media chat groups. When asked for clarification, some directors admitted that they share these documents before finalising them and gather feedback:

"I have never put it up for public discussion, but I did introduce it to the Board of Trustees". (Focus group with school directors)

"Usually, in September, headteachers inform parents during advisory hours". (Focus group with school directors)

As part of the research process, the school documentation of participating schools was analysed, and a focus group discussion was conducted to examine the documentation and its development process. The results confirm that school short- and long-term strategies, as well as action plans, often have a formal character. In many cases, strategies and action plans contain very general activities, such as "Ensuring access to public information", "Proper and effective delegation of governance". Other activities listed are routine processes that schools already carry out, for example "Approval of the school budget" and "Development of lesson plans". There are also cases where new strategic goals and activities are included, but without sufficient details on how they will be implemented. An example of a strategic goal is "Establishing the practice of encouraging the best students based on the analysis of student achievement dynamics". However, some schools do include new strategic goals and initiatives in their strategies and action plans, as, for instance, "Increasing access to vocational education programmes by developing and approving vocational programmes".

The monitoring of strategic and action plans is not effectively conducted. Typically, school strategies and action plans do not include a list of indicators or a concrete monitoring and evaluation plan. Even in cases where a monitoring plan is attached to the action plan, it lacks detail and often has a purely formal character. This issue was further confirmed by the findings from the focus groups with teachers and school directors.

School governance bodies

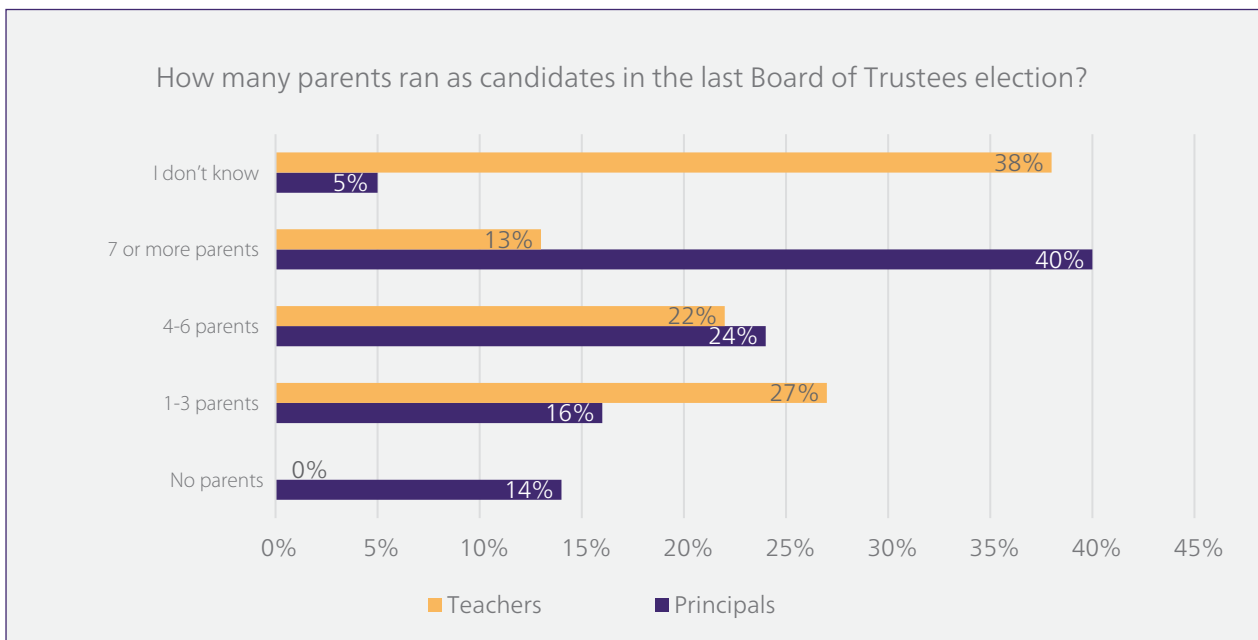
In this part of the study, the focus is on the activities of the Board of Trustees and student self-government as part of school governance bodies.

Board of Trustees

Parental involvement in the work of the Board of Trustees is low. According to the survey, 55% of parents reported that they had never participated in elections for the Board of Trustees. As noted in the methodology description section, this may not be fully representative of the entire parent population in these schools. It is likely that the actual participation rate in the overall population is lower, as more active parents were probably the ones who filled out the questionnaire. Consequently, the proportion of parents who have participated in elections may be higher among the survey respondents.

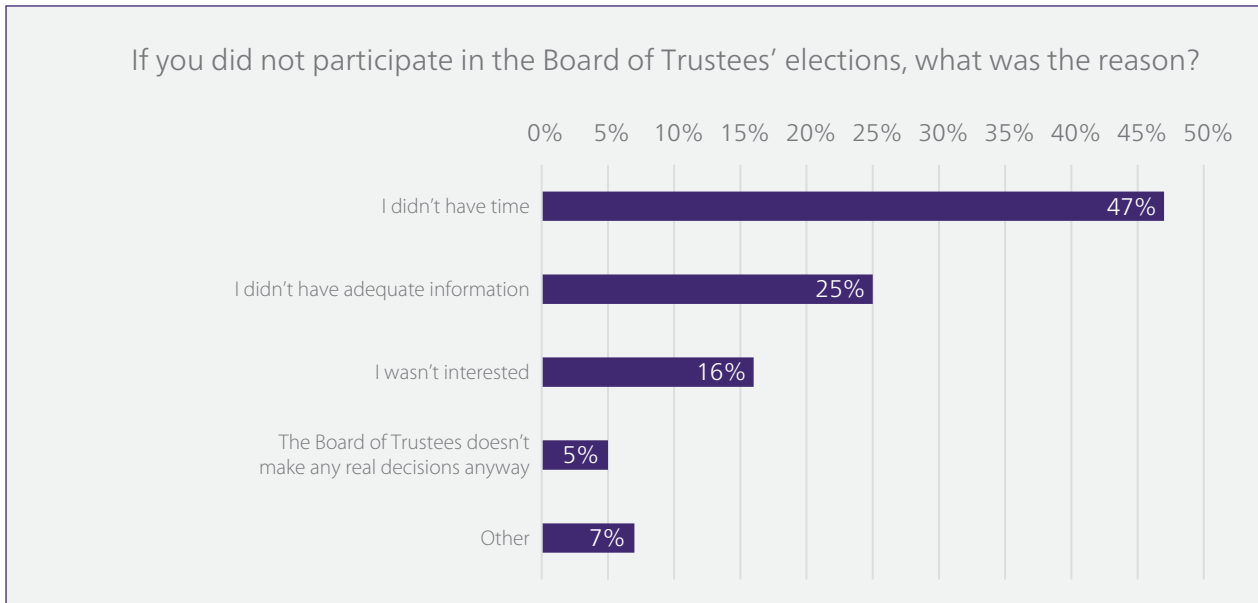
The results of the teacher and principal surveys also indicate a low level of parental participation in Board of Trustees elections. At the same time, teachers often lack information about parents' participation in these elections.

Diagram 30: Participation in Board of Trustees elections.



In response to the question of why they did not participate in the Board of Trustees elections, the majority of parents stated that they did not have enough time. However, a quarter of respondents also indicated that the reason was the lack of adequate information. This highlights the need for better dissemination of information about the activities of the Board of Trustees among parents.

Diagram 31: Reasons for low participation in Board of Trustees' elections.



Experts also point out that parents' low levels of participation and engagement in Board of Trustees elections and activities is linked to their lack of awareness regarding the board's functions. Parents do not fully understand why they should dedicate time to this matter or what their specific role is. Increasing the significance of this decision-making body should be encouraged and supported.

"Parents don't know about the Board of Trustees, they don't understand why they should make time for it or what it is needed for... Even the board members are often elected out of courtesy, and the entire approach is quite unserious. This was evident in school director elections....". (Expert)

"It is likely necessary for the Board of Trustees to be more functional rather than composed of parents who are merely loyal supporters or public sector employees. Additionally, parents are not adequately informed about what their responsibilities would be if elected". (Expert)

Parents who serve as members of the Board of Trustees typically attend board meetings three to four times a year, where they primarily listen to the director's reports or review the school's budget in a formal manner:

"We meet about four times a year. Mostly, we just get familiar with some information, sometimes we discuss certain topics if there's anything important happening at school". (Parent)

"We met three times, reviewed the budget, discussed how funds were spent, and conducted the election of the school director". (Parent)

During focus groups, teachers also noted that it would be beneficial if parents showed more interest in the work of the Board of Trustees. However, they believe that without financial incentives, this may be a difficult goal to achieve:

"During the Board of Trustees elections, we have to plead with parents to nominate themselves as candidates. Of course, students are much more engaged in comparison. When the Board of Trustees was first introduced, we thought it would be effective, but parents never truly got involved. Parents need at least some financial incentive - maybe a salary or some other form of compensation - to take the role seriously". (Teachers' focus group)

School principals also acknowledge that it is difficult to generate parental interest in serving on the Board of Trustees, and even more challenging to maintain the motivation of those who do become members:

"If we were to announce a call for new Board of Trustees members tomorrow, no one would participate. The main reason is that they believe this is all just paperwork and has nothing to do with reality. 'I don't know if that's our fault or someone else's'. They assume that this process should run on its own, without their involvement, and they can't imagine that they could actually influence any changes". (Interview with a school principal)

One principal also mentioned in an interview that many parents simply have very little time to dedicate to the Board of Trustees. Extending the term of service could have a positive impact on parental engagement, since members often leave the board when they just have been growing an interest in the issues and have become familiar with the role.

As is the case for other topics, principals and teachers sometimes share contradictory opinions and experiences regarding the functioning of the Board of Trustees. For example, one principal stated:

"In my experience, there has never been a case where board members showed interest in participating on their own initiative". (School Principal)

However, in the same interview, the interviewees noted that when their administrative officer clearly explained a situation to the board members, members become interested in school governance matters such as the difference between appointing an acting director in contrast to electing a permanent one. This suggests that with proper and well-directed efforts, it is possible to engage even less motivated parents.

As described in the situation analysis section, the two most significant roles of the Board of Trustees are reviewing and approving the school budget and selecting the school director. However, in Georgia, due to structural and other factors, these responsibilities are largely symbolic. Many schools, particularly those with smaller student populations, have little to no flexibility in budget planning, as their funds tend to cover essential expenses only -these are salaries and utility bills. Only larger schools have the ability to allocate budget funds for other purposes:

"We don't have money—it's always in deficit—so what is there to plan? We still present the budget to the Board of Trustees for approval, but it's just a formality and routine. We even joke about it—how can we plan anything when we don't have any funds?" (Interview with the principal of a small-size school)

Furthermore, student interviews reveal that students are largely unfamiliar with the functions of the Board of Trustees. In most cases, they have little to no information about its role:

"I'm not really informed about it. I don't know exactly, but I think parents get elected". (Student)

"My classmate's mother is the Chair of the Board of Trustees, and she organises some projects. For example, they have a 'Parent in the Classroom' initiative where parents come in and talk to students". (Student)

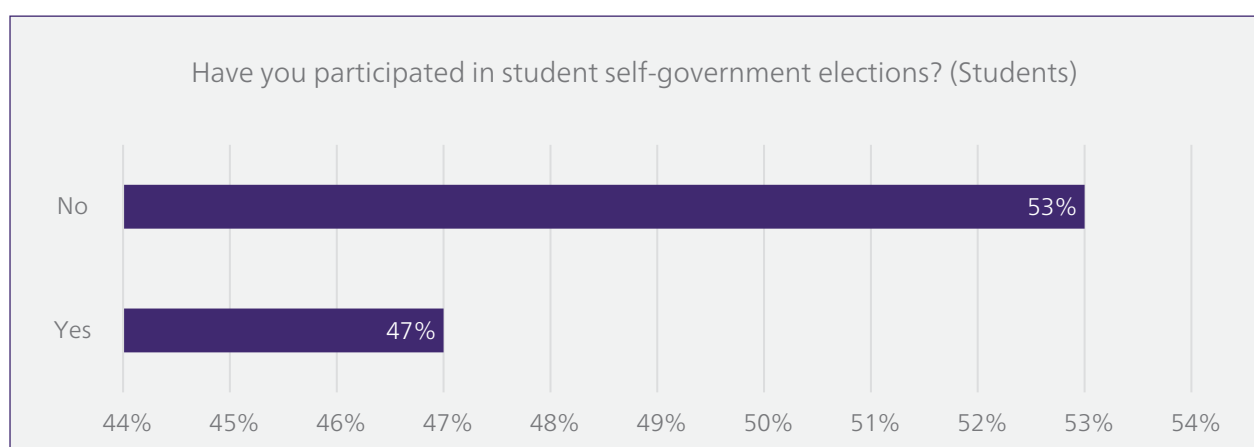
"At our school, students aren't informed about this. I only know that they review the budget, but students aren't really involved in it". (Student)

Overall, interviews and focus groups confirm that parental engagement in the Board of Trustees can be increased if they feel they can actually make a difference and if they understand that their decisions, directly or indirectly, affect their children.

Student Self-Government

Among the decision-making bodies in schools, student self-government is one of the most important. Student self-government gives all students the opportunity to participate in various aspects of school life and management. However, according to our survey, more than half of young people do not participate in this process.

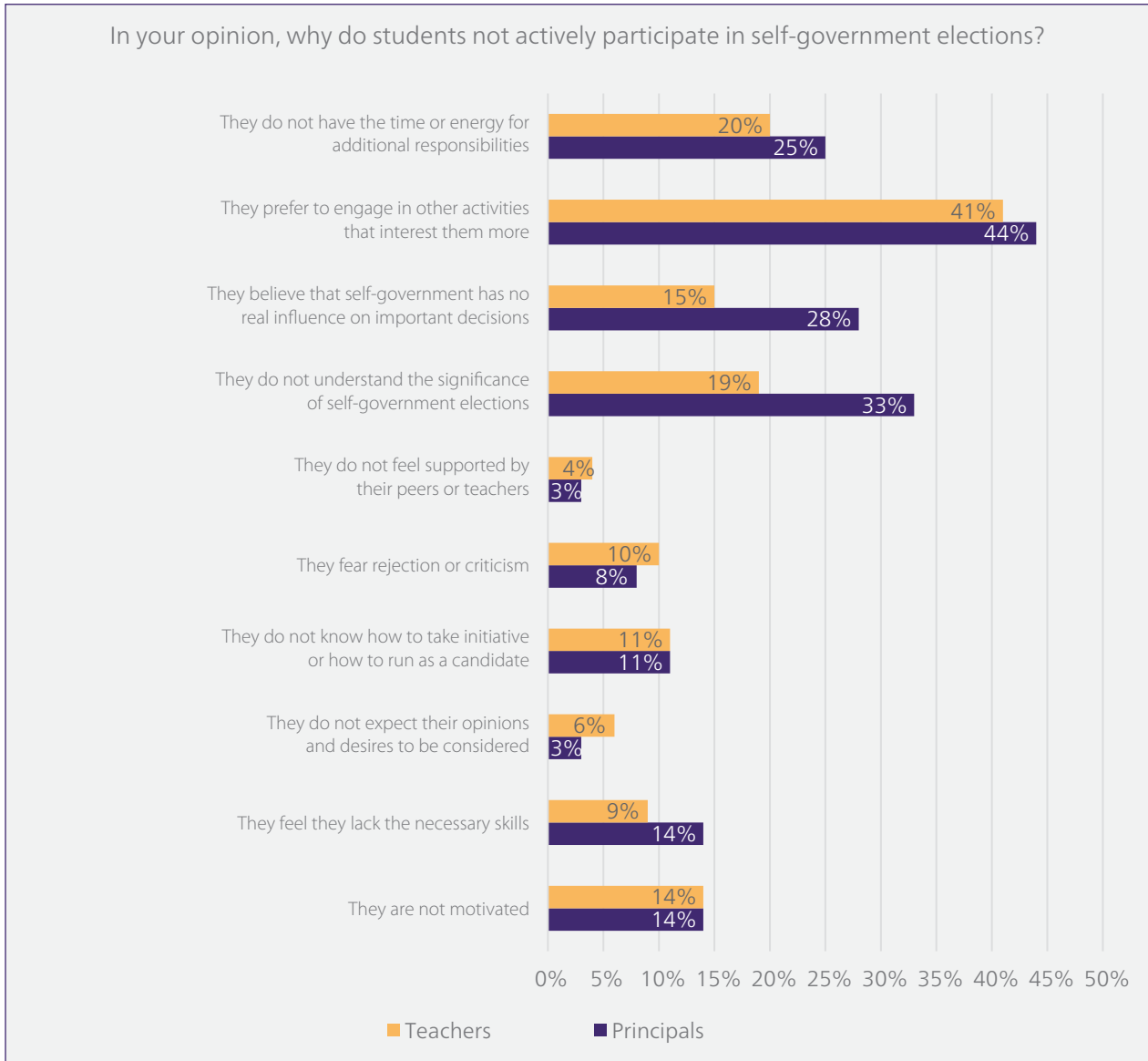
Diagram 32: Student participation in self-government elections.



A significant proportion of surveyed students (24%) stated that they did not participate in the process due to a lack of adequate information. Additionally, 23% and 21% of students, respectively, cited a lack of interest and time as reasons for their non-participation.

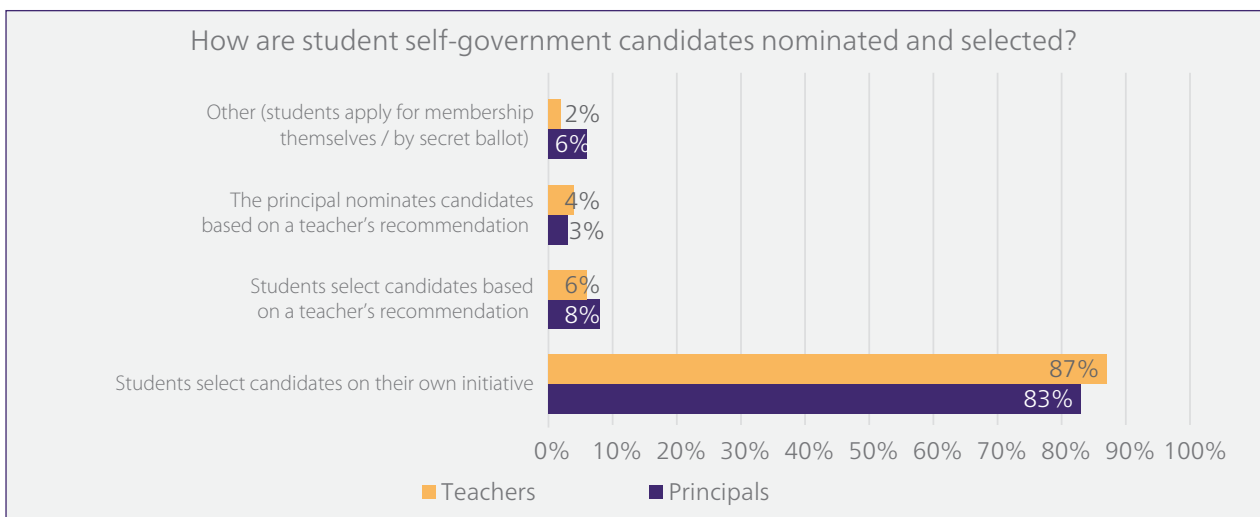
Teachers and principals most frequently attributed low student participation to students preferring to engage in activities that interest them more, lack of time, and a failure to recognise the importance of student self-government.

Diagram 33: Reasons for low participation in student self-government elections.



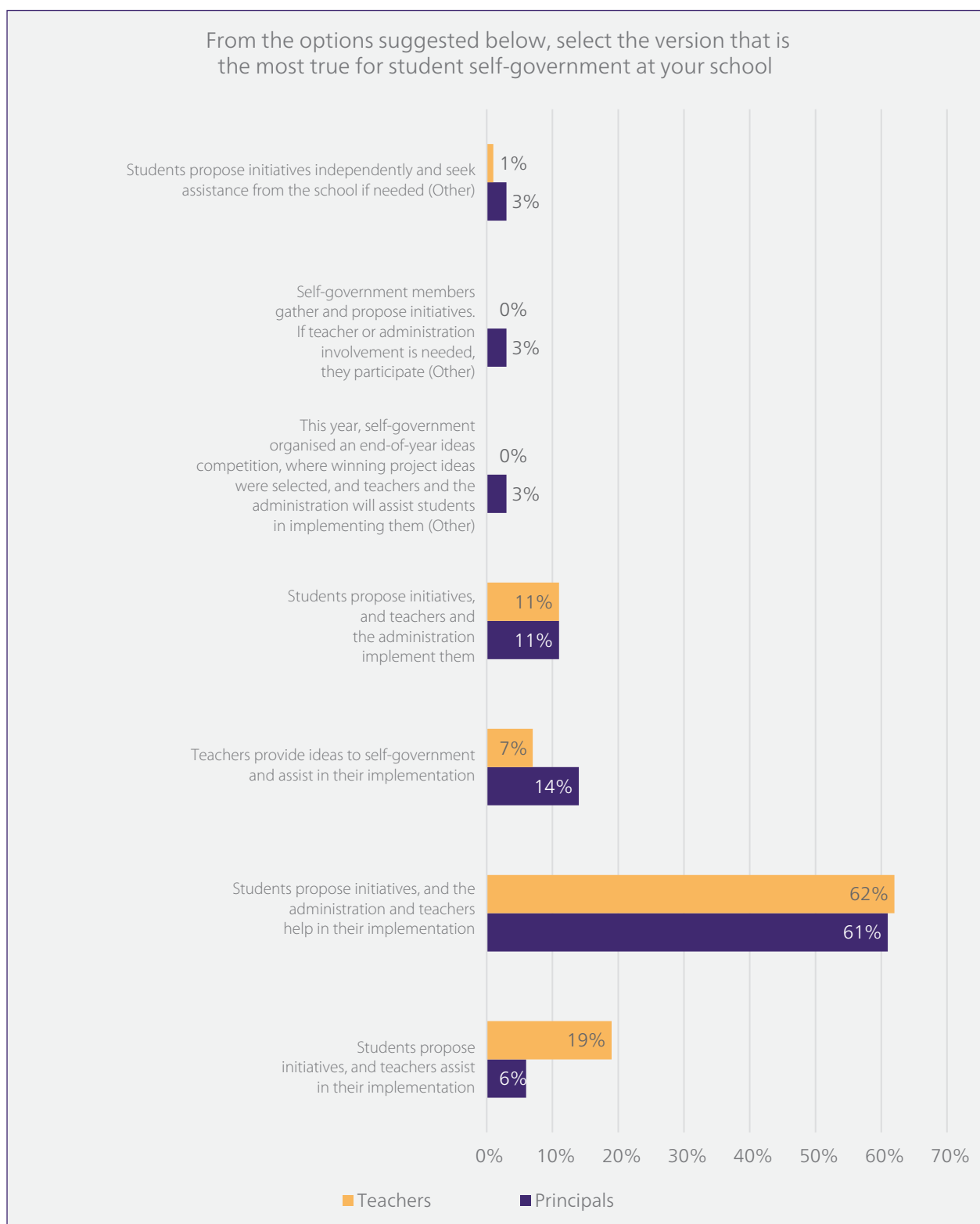
During the survey of principals and teachers, respondents stated that students select candidates for student self-government on their own initiative (see Diagram 34).

Diagram 34: Selection of student self-government candidates.



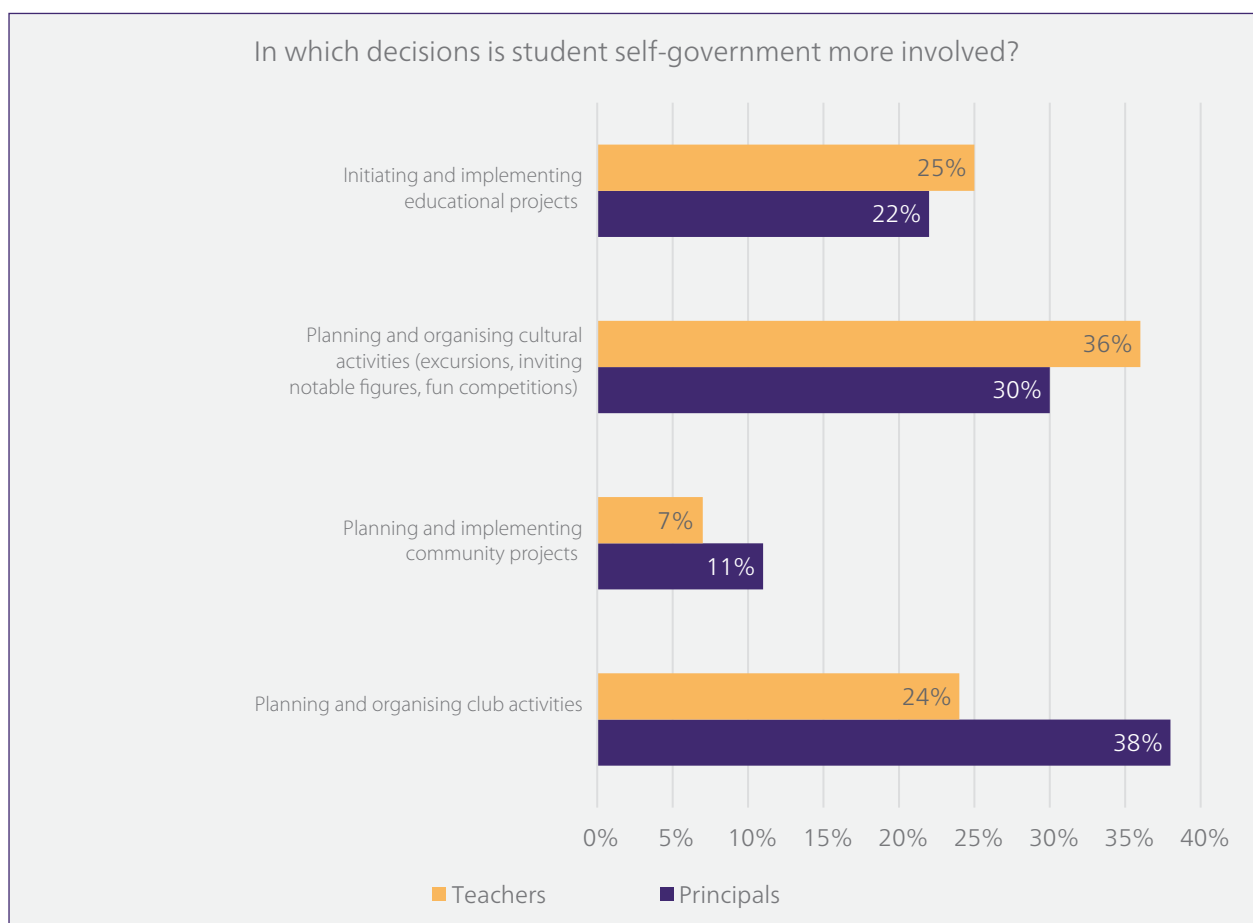
Regarding the functioning of student self-government, according to the survey of principals and teachers, the majority stated that students propose initiatives, while the school administration and teachers assist them in their implementation.

Diagram 35: Student self-government operational practices.



Student self-government is mostly involved in cultural and educational projects as well as in planning and implementing club activities. Participation in planning and executing community projects remains significantly low.

Diagram 36: Student self-government engagement in various fields.



The majority of students (64%) do not recall a situation where they wanted to express their opinion but refrained from doing so. While students are relatively well-informed about student self-government elections, participation is primarily driven by students in the upper grades:

"We are somewhat informed, but there isn't really a culture in our school of actively using this privilege. Mostly, students from the 11th and 12th grades get involved, while students from other grades participate less". (Student)

Although teachers and principals claim in the survey that students independently choose self-government candidates, focus groups and interviews revealed that, in some cases, a student's connection with teachers and the role of educators in the nomination and selection process are significant. It appears that teachers and principals sometimes prefer to involve "active" students, as they tend to be proactive collaborators:

"In our school, when student self-government elections take place, everyone is involved—the administration, students—and they take our opinions into account". (Student)

"I just asked the headteachers to discreetly guide students not to elect kids who won't contribute anything, who have no ideas. Whisper to them, please... Select active students". (Interview with a school principal)

Low student involvement in teaching and learning processes - such as methods, approaches, topics and assessments—as well as the lack of student-led initiatives in non-formal education, is often due to the insufficient support from their teachers and school administrators. However, since all activities and processes should be student-centred, the best recommendation for schools is to regularly seek student input:

"The school belongs to the students, and if we don't ask them, it won't work". (Expert)

Decision-making process

As the study reveals, the decision-making process is not uniform and varies based on several factors, such as school size (and, consequently, school budget), number of staff members, school location and the length the principal's tenure.

The responses of school principals suggest that institutionalised decision-making practices are rare, and the form of decision-making often depends on specific circumstances. Principals generally consider consulting teachers necessary only when making decisions related to teaching and learning or non-formal education. Teacher survey results reflect a similar trend (see Diagrams 37 and 38).

Diagram 37: Principals' experiences with the decision-making process in schools.

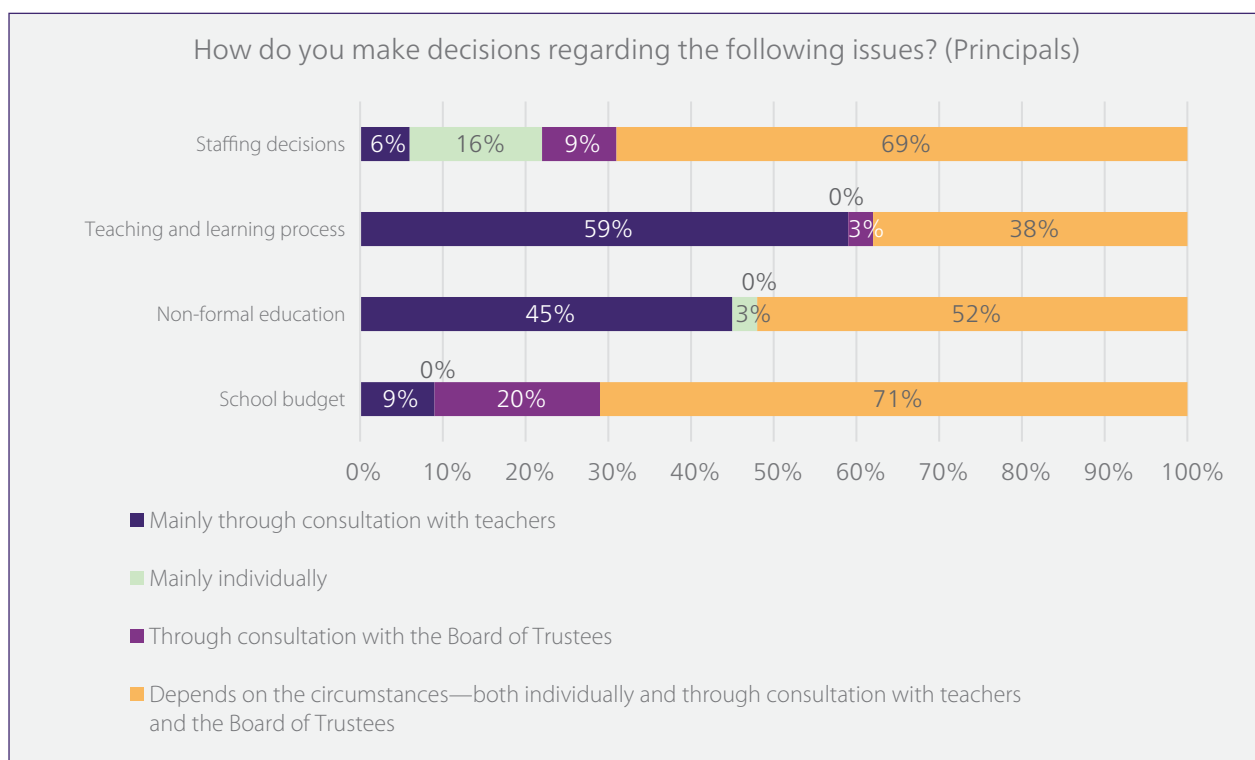
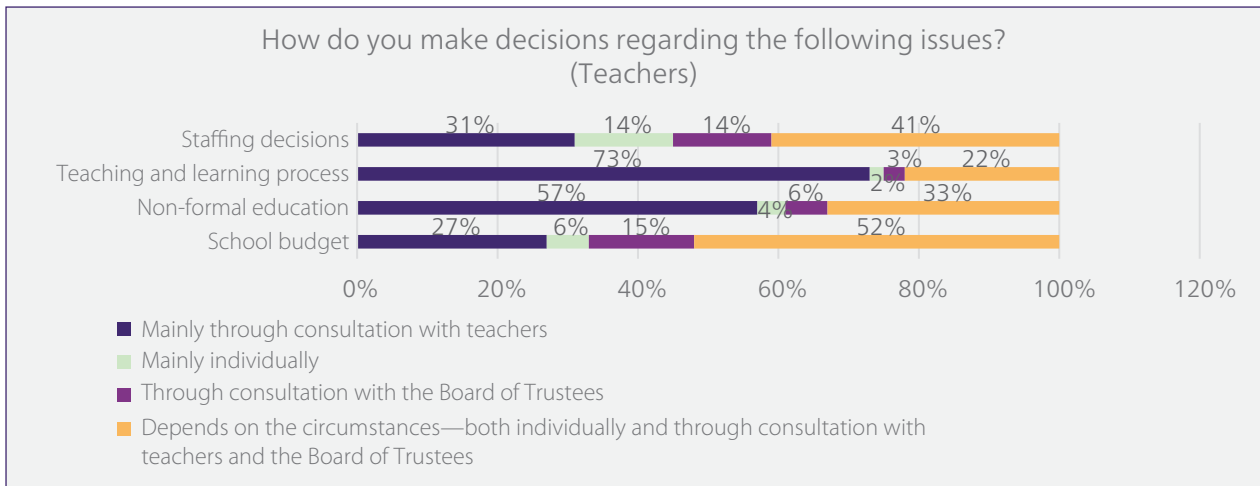


Diagram 38: Teachers' perspectives on the decision-making process in schools.



Regarding initiatives proposed by teachers, most of their suggestions focus on the teaching and learning process as well as non-formal education. They are less involved in or less likely to propose initiatives related to the school budget or other administrative matters.

Diagram 39: Teachers' initiative to make proposals from the perspective of principals.

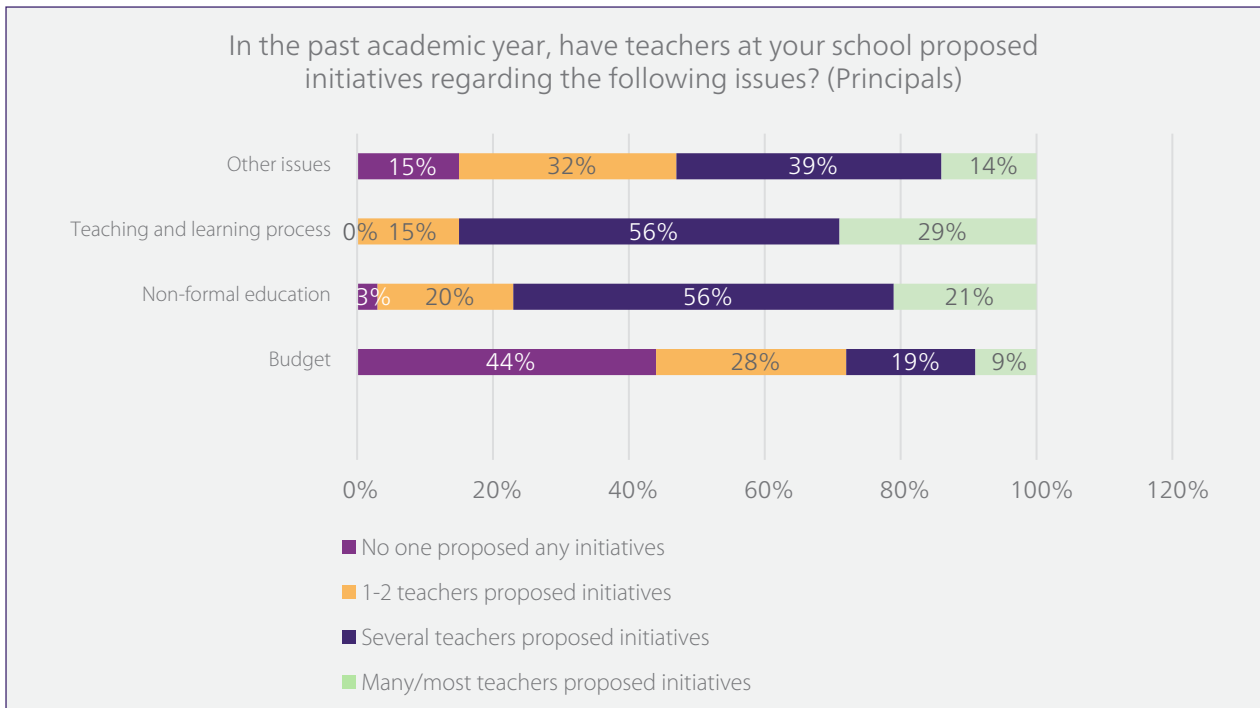
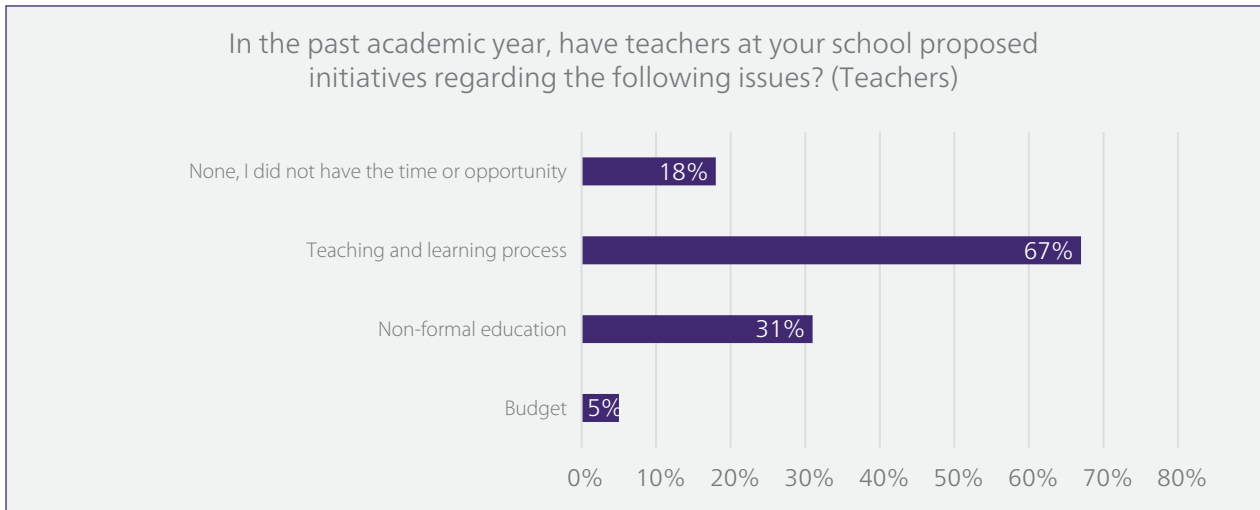
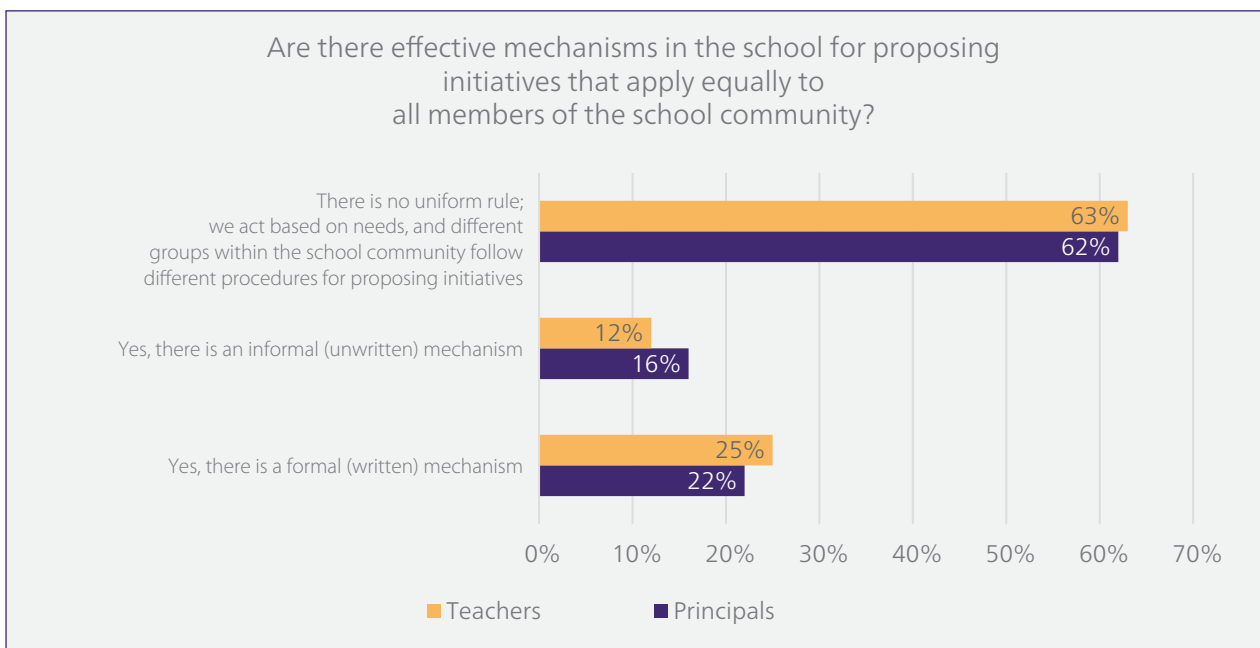


Diagram 40: Teachers' initiative to make proposals from the perspective of teachers.



It is noteworthy that, according to the data, in most cases, there is no uniform procedure for proposing initiatives. School leadership employs different approaches when engaging with various groups within the school community.

Diagram 41: Mechanisms for proposing initiatives in schools.



Yet, in comparison to the above statistics, the qualitative data of the study highlights some positive practices of decision-making in schools. For example, teachers from different schools mentioned that principals frequently involve them in decision-making. Some even described cases where the principal does not interfere at all in certain decisions. Additionally, teachers appreciate the autonomy they are granted in the decision-making process.

"For example, our principal does not interfere at all in the process of distributing teaching hours. They tell us that it's our matter to decide. I used to work at another school before, and I left because no one ever asked for my opinion". (Interview with a teacher)

However, these positive practices tend to be informal and unstructured. As the quantitative results

suggest, they are often situation-dependent. For instance, teachers say they can go to the principal with any request or question at any time, but there are no clear procedures for how these requests are considered or implemented.

According to experts, if a school aims to ensure that decision-making is not dominated solely by the principal and that the broader school community is actively involved, it is crucial to encourage participation and initiative. Otherwise, democratic school governance remains merely a formality:

"If initiatives are encouraged, then democratic governance is functional. If participation is discouraged or punished, then it remains purely formal". (Expert)

Based on expert interviews, the prevalence of a vertical management structure—where principals make unilateral decisions—can be attributed to the hierarchical nature of the education system itself:

"Schools face a variety of challenges, and one of the main reasons for this is the vertical governance model of the education system—ministry, resource center, school and principal. The school community cannot make decisions when even the principal does not have the authority to do so". (Expert)

"If you ask anyone in the school who runs it, the answer is always 'the principal.' No one in the school community really knows what the law says. Most people don't have the patience or interest to find out what their rights and responsibilities are. Democracy becomes a burden—if something is done, it's only because the law requires it, not because people genuinely see its importance". (Expert)

School principals also confirm that the work of the Board of Trustees is sometimes merely formal, with parent and teacher representatives having equally limited decision-making power. However, in the same discussions, principals mention that in some cases, board members can be engaged and involved in some matters—for example, during the school authorisation process:

"Board members do participate in the process, but I wouldn't say they are fully engaged. During the authorisation process, I had them involved. Even in board meetings, they attended, got familiar with what was happening at the school. One parent served as the secretary, though I helped with writing the minutes... I wouldn't say they are fully engaged. I see a lack of interest, not just from parents but from teachers as well". (Interview with a school principal)

Once again, this quote underpins a common trend - while there are positive practices (such as board member participation in the authorisation process), these practices are not institutionalised and are not extended to other similar cases.

Key findings and needs

In this section, we discuss issues related to school governance and school culture, demonstrating that the involvement of different actors in the governance processes depends on various structural, personal and institutional factors. One of the main problems identified is that positive practices do not tend to be fully institutionalised. The following key findings highlight the need for improved implementation strategies:

- ▶ The involvement of the administration in the strategic management of the school is high, whereas other decision-making bodies often participate in the process only formally. Awareness

of various processes is inconsistent and low. A particular challenge is communication with parents, who are not familiar with the school's strategy or curriculum. In most cases, these documents are developed by a working group selected by the school administration/principal.

- ▶ Decision-making bodies in schools are more or less active, although participation in elections, both in the case of self-government and the Board of Trustees, is low. In these cases, headteachers are responsible for informing students and parents about the processes. These bodies have little institutional character.
- ▶ As in other cases, different stakeholders have different perspectives on the decision-making process. Teachers often do not participate in decision-making when the issue does not directly concern their class or subject. Decisions taken independently by teachers are mainly related to the teaching process, initiating and implementing subject-specific projects and conferences. However, when it comes to the school's strategic development or budget planning, teachers are less involved in the decision-making process.
- ▶ Documents on school strategies often have a formal character and are developed based on existing templates with minor modifications. However, in schools that have undergone the authorisation process, greater effort is put into developing strategic documents, and the process itself is more formalised.
- ▶ Working on strategic documents during the school authorisation process has become more structured and organised, which can be considered a positive trend.
- ▶ Interest in participating in school governance bodies is low among students, parents and teachers. The lack of interest is at least partially related to insufficient information, particularly among parents. Parents either lack adequate information about the role of the Board of Trustees or do not feel that their participation could bring about change.
- ▶ In many cases, students and parents are unaware of how they can participate in various school processes.
- ▶ Parental participation in the Board of Trustees and in school activities tends to increase if parents feel that their involvement directly impacts their children's education and well-being.
- ▶ The Board of Trustees does not always function as an effective governing body, which is influenced by both individual and structural challenges.
- ▶ Most students do not feel that they can truly participate in school governance and lack adequate information on how to do so.
- ▶ Members of the school community recognise that unilateral decision-making is not a good practice, and that participatory decision-making is more effective for school processes. There are cases of good practice where principals delegate responsibilities; however, in most cases, these experiences are fragmented and not systematically integrated.

Community engagement

Parental involvement

Parental involvement in school life is important for both the development of the school and the educational and social development of students. Both school principals and teachers, in quantitative and qualitative research, emphasise the necessity of parental engagement in school life while also identifying it as one of the major challenges.

In the survey, parents reported that the two most significant reasons preventing them from participating in their children's school life are lack of time (46%) and lack of adequate information (30%). Only a small percentage of parents (12%) stated that they had not participated due to a lack of interest and even fewer (8%) indicated that they did not engage because they felt they lacked the necessary skills.

However, as shown in Table 5, the survey results from teachers and principals present a different picture.

Table 5: Parental involvement in school life.

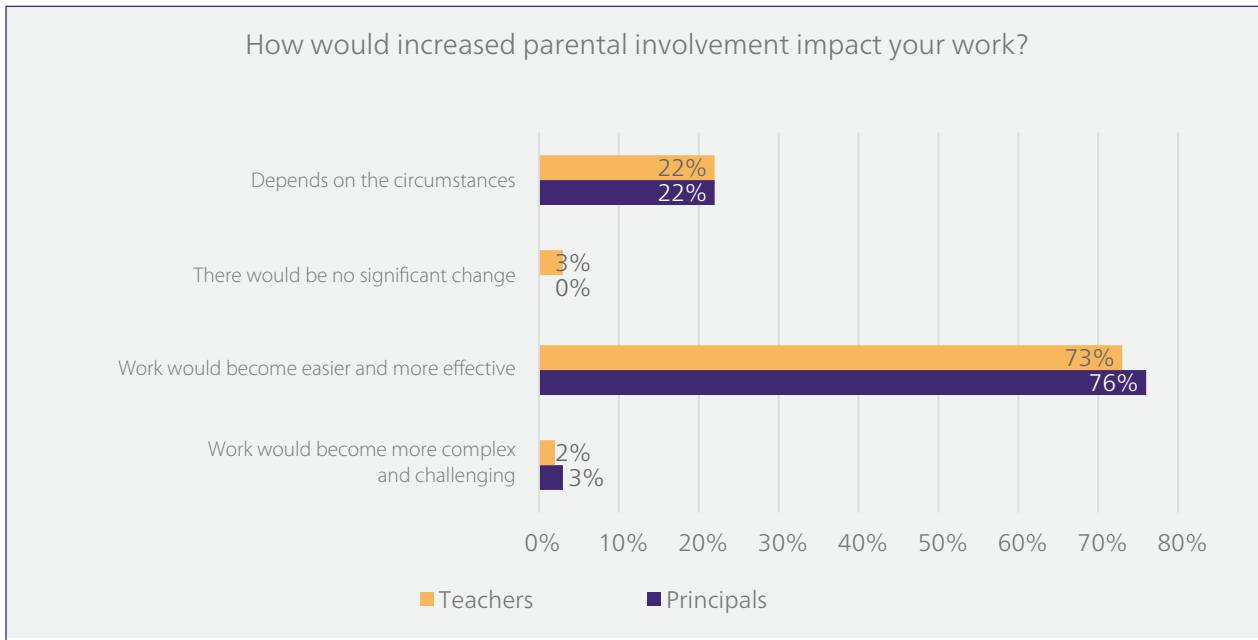
Parental involvement in school life						
Respondent status	Principals			Teachers		
Response options	Not a hindering factor	Somewhat hindering	Significantly hindering	Not a hindering factor	Somewhat hindering	Significantly hindering
Lack of adequate skills	6%	63%	31%	34%	48%	18%
Lack of interest	9%	54%	37%	28%	46%	26%
Lack of time	9%	23%	68%	34%	36%	30%
Lack of information	27%	43%	30%	43%	39%	18%
School administration does not encourage involvement	37%	44%	19%	79%	14%	7%
Teachers do not encourage involvement	31%	53%	16%	78%	15%	7%

Parental participation in school life is effective when they have the appropriate motivation and skills. At the same time, principals and teachers state that they struggle to engage parents and ensure their involvement in school life (see Table 5).

Do you agree with the following statements?								
Respondent status	Principals				Teachers			
Response options	Agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree
Parental participation in school life is more effective when parents have the necessary knowledge and skills.	49%	32%	11%	8%	63%	20%	7%	10%
Principals and teachers are unable to engage parents in school life if the parents themselves are not interested in this process.	15%	54%	17%	14%	17%	30%	23%	30%

The majority of school principals (76%) and teachers (73%) believe that increased parental involvement would have a positive impact on their work, making it easier and more effective (see **Diagram 42**). Consequently, as discussed earlier, one of the most crucial issues is assisting schools in establishing an effective system for communicating with parents.

Diagram 42: Perspectives on the impact of increasing parental engagement.



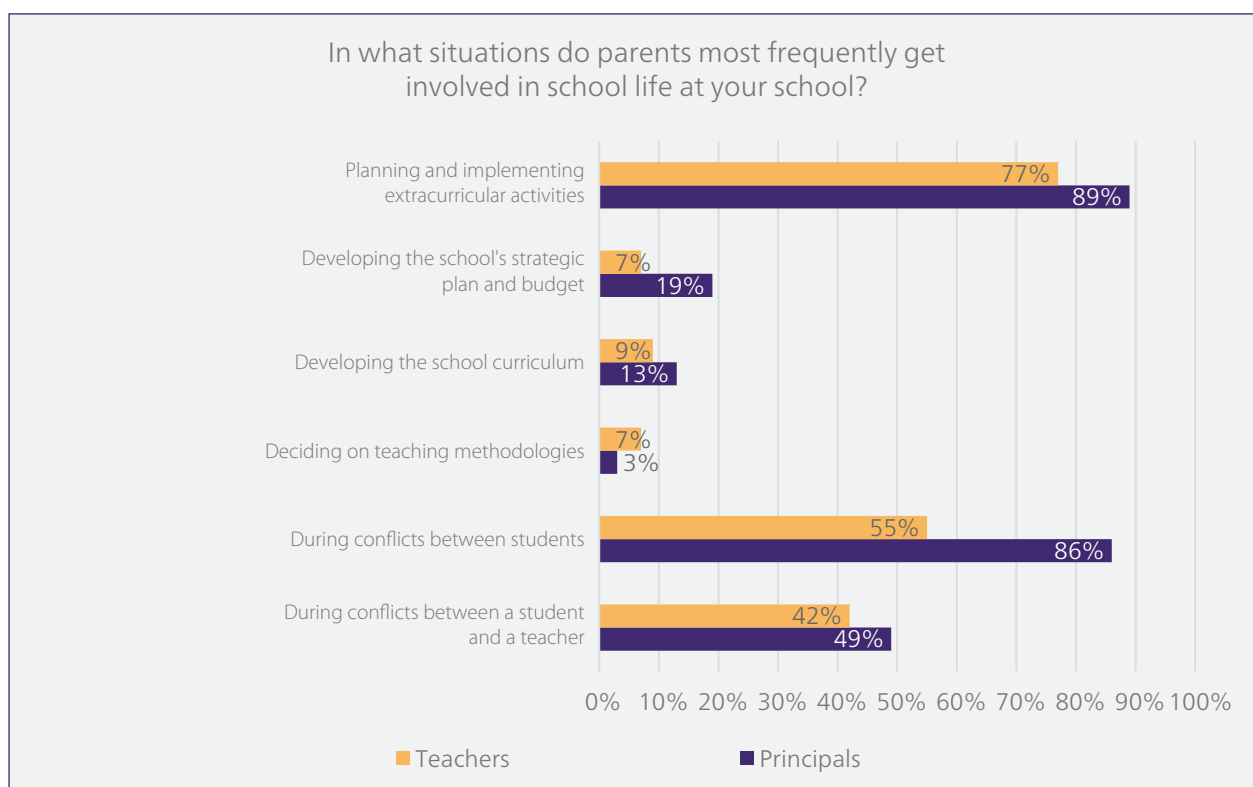
Parental initiatives are primarily related to the teaching and learning process. However, in some cases, they also propose initiatives concerning non-formal education and budget-related matters.

Table 6: Frequency of initiatives proposed by parents.

In the past academic year, how actively have parents proposed initiatives regarding the following issues?								
Status of respondent	Principals				Teachers			
	No one has proposed any initiatives	Only 1-2 parents have proposed initiatives	Several parents have proposed initiatives	Many/Most parents have proposed initiatives	No one has proposed any initiatives	Only 1-2 parents have proposed initiatives	Several parents have proposed initiatives	Many/Most parents have proposed initiatives
Budget	23%	31%	40%	6%	40%	22%	20%	18%
Extracurricular activities	23%	31%	40%	6%	15%	33%	33%	19%
Teaching and learning process	22%	19%	51%	8%	10%	31%	40%	19%

In terms of parental involvement in schools, in most cases, parents participate in the planning and implementation of extracurricular activities, as well as in situations involving conflicts between students or between students and teachers.

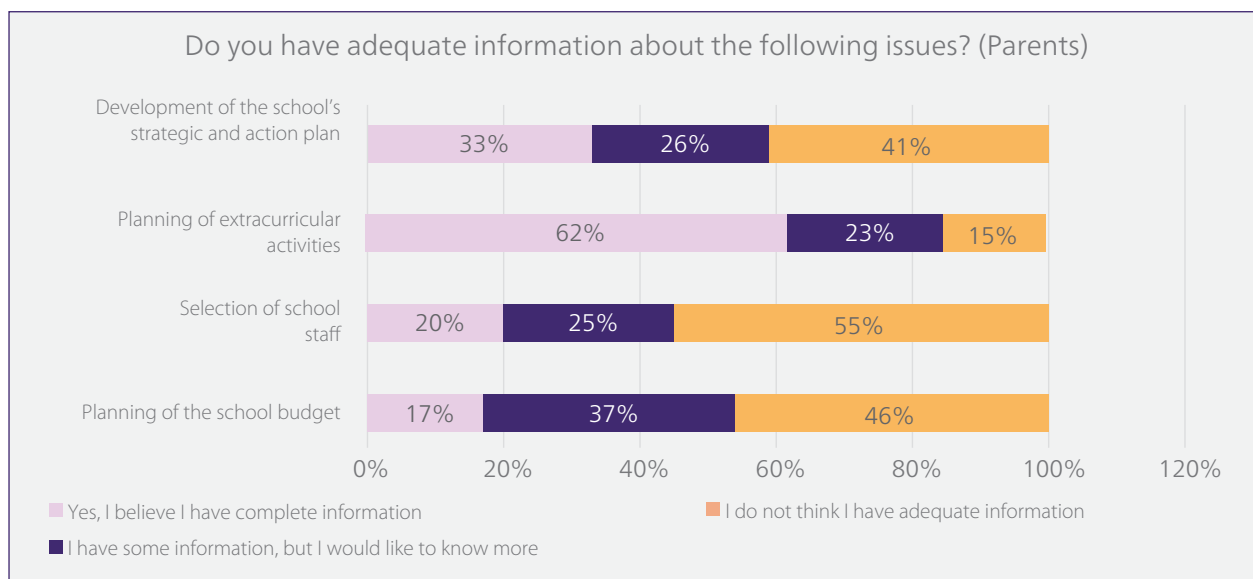
Diagram 43: Reasons for parental involvement in school life.



The majority of parents (76%) do not recall any issue—whether related to the teaching and learning process, discipline, school governance or budget—where they wanted to express an opinion but refrained from doing so. Still, a quarter of parents have had such an experience.

According to school administration and teachers, communication with parents remains a challenge. Informing parents can also be difficult, as they rarely visit the school and show little interest in various matters and are at most engaging in extracurricular activities. In this regard, survey data from parents align with the perspectives and experiences of principals and teachers. Parents report being most informed about extracurricular activities, while they are less informed about school staff, school budget and the school’s strategic/action plan.

Diagram 44: Level of parental awareness.



Parents primarily receive information from the headteacher and, as previously mentioned, communication between the school and parents tends to only occur when there is a problem. Teachers frequently use meetings or social media messaging to communicate with parents:

"We have a class chat where all students and parents are included. The teacher writes messages like 'check this and that with your child.' That's how parents get informed—if the student shows them the message". (Student)

"My headteacher personally contacts the parents of problematic students, and we also have a chat group. Teachers really put in the effort, and I think it depends on the student as well". (Student)

"There have been issues in our class, even extreme situations, which led the academic department and the headteacher to conduct a survey asking why the problem occurred. They told us, 'You will be able to solve this with our help.' The headteacher contacts the parent, fulfils their duty and informs them about everything. But students also need to be willing to talk to their parents". (Student)

In terms of awareness and engagement in school processes, parents who are members of the Board of Trustees tend to be more informed. However, even in these cases, communication primarily occurs when problems arise:

"Our school's regulations are visibly posted. But when it comes to major issues, it is mainly the Board of Trustees members who are involved". (Parent)

"We have discussed approaches to dealing with students, issues related to mobile phones and dress code problems—these are the topics usually emphasised in meetings. Whatever they ask of us, we then handle with our children". (Parent)

It is also noteworthy that parents have limited knowledge about student self-government activities:

"I know that a student self-government body exists, but I don't have any other information about it". (Parent)

"We have it at our school too, but my child is not involved. However, I know they organise projects and hold meetings". (Parent)

School principals and teachers value parental engagement, but, as noted earlier, they often mention a lack of parental knowledge, skills and time as barriers. However, principals rarely focus on the school's role in ensuring parental involvement, despite the importance of parent's engagement. With effective practices, schools can actively engage parents in school governance processes.

Focus groups identifies a recurring trend across all target groups: parents are usually called to school only when there is a problem, or they themselves reach out to the school administration to resolve difficulties. Communication between the school and parents is rarely associated with positive experiences or expectations. All target groups emphasised the importance of incorporating positive interactions so that parents do not feel that visiting the school is solely linked to problems or negative events and that schools do not perceive parental engagement as something that happens only when complaints arise.

According to principals and teachers, two primary reasons were identified in focus groups and interviews: lack of time -many parents, especially those who are employed, struggle to find time to engage in school life, and low parental interest in the educational process:

"When I go to the market to buy food, I don't care how the product was made. Similarly, when parents send their children to school, they just want them to be taught and don't care how it happens or what goes on inside the school". (Focus group with principals)

"There is little interest from parents. They believe that once their child goes to school, their responsibility ends. They hand them over to the school, and that's it". (Focus group with teachers)

School principals note that parents are not interested in reviewing school documentation. However, considering that many strategic school documents are formal and template-based, it is not surprising that parents do not feel particularly motivated to engage with them.

At the same time, the same principals and teachers also mention that many parents are open with them and provide specific examples of active parental involvement when decisions directly affect their children. For instance, parents show high interest in the work of the Board of Trustees when it comes to electing or dismissing a principal.

The qualitative research confirms the recurring pattern that parent-school communication mostly occurs in response to problems. Additionally, parental involvement is mostly related to teacher-initiated activities, such as helping with school-planned events, assisting with classroom activities and participating in school territory cleanup efforts:

"Whenever students have had an initiative, they have received full support from the administration. For example, the literature club, 'What? Where? When?' competitions and other activities. Parents are informed, but they don't necessarily need our help. We mostly engage in civic-oriented activities". (Parent)

If schools want parents to be more open and to proactively initiate discussions on various topics, their participation must be actively encouraged by the school. Volunteerism should be promoted, and parents should be able to see a clear connection between their initiatives and real actions taken by the school:

"Participation and engagement should be encouraged. Schools and teachers should genuinely care about whether the curriculum is manageable, and parents should feel comfortable sharing their concerns without fear. Teachers should also be receptive to this feedback". (Expert)

"We probably need to establish a more structured communication schedule and show immediate results to parents". (Expert)

"It's important to introduce a structured parental volunteer system. Schools should think of ways to encourage this. Abroad, you often see large posters addressed to parents saying: 'We need your help! When would you be available this year?'" (Expert)

Community projects

Although schools rarely take the lead in initiating partnerships, many have participated in collaborative projects—often facilitated by local authorities, private companies or community leaders. These collaborations tend to focus on infrastructure improvements, event organisation or symbolic support for students, but they also demonstrate the capacity of schools and communities to mobilise around shared goals when appropriate opportunities arise.

Focus group discussions with school principals revealed several types of successful cooperation:

- ▶ In one municipality, a school formalised its relationship with the local government by signing a memorandum of cooperation. This agreement led to the construction of a new sports field, enabling students to engage more actively in physical education and recreational activities.
- ▶ Another school, located in a rural area, secured support from a community council representative, who acted as a liaison with local authorities. This led to the development of a public recreational space, supported not only through funding but also through active participation from parents and other community members. Their contributions included manual labour, transporting materials and cleaning the area—demonstrating strong local ownership of the initiative.
- ▶ Several municipalities reported awarding top-performing students, either financially or symbolically, in recognition of academic achievement. While modest, such recognition fosters civic pride and maintains positive visibility of the school within the community.
- ▶ In the Adjara region, schools appear to have relatively stronger and more consistent relationships with both local municipalities and the regional government, often participating in structured programmes supported at the regional level.
- ▶ A notable example of private sector engagement involved a school where a company initiated and funded the installation of solar energy panels, indicating the potential for mutually beneficial school–business partnerships when there is proactive outreach or community-minded leadership.

Despite these promising examples, proactive and strategic engagement by schools remains rare. Collaborations are often initiated by external actors and tend to be one-off or project-based rather than embedded in a school's broader development vision. In interviews and focus groups, principals, teachers and parents identified several key barriers to expanding such cooperation:

- ▶ Lack of awareness: Respondents frequently noted they are not aware of existing opportunities, such as grant schemes, NGO support or relevant government programmes. Even when they hear about opportunities, the information often reaches them at too short notice to act.
- ▶ Limited know-how: Many school staff reported not knowing how to initiate contact with potential partners, draft proposals or formalise agreements. Teachers and principals expressed uncertainty about how to approach organisations, what kind of support to ask for or how to frame projects in ways that align with community or business interests.
- ▶ Time and capacity constraints: Especially in smaller schools, the workload of teachers and school leaders leaves little time for partnership-building. Without dedicated support staff or external facilitation, it is difficult to coordinate complex collaborations alongside regular school responsibilities.

- ▶ Lack of coordination structures: Schools often lack internal mechanisms—such as community liaison roles or project coordination teams—to plan and sustain long-term engagement with external actors. As a result, even motivated individuals may struggle to follow through on initial ideas.
- ▶ Bureaucratic uncertainty: Respondents expressed hesitancy about the formal and informal approval processes required to engage with outside partners. Some fear that entering into unofficial arrangements may lead to administrative complications or pushback from education authorities.
- ▶ Fear of rejection or disinterest: A few teachers and principals mentioned that previous attempts to engage local businesses or organisations were met with little response which discouraged them from pursuing future outreach efforts.
- ▶ Narrow perceptions of community collaboration: Finally, many participants equated “community engagement” with infrastructure support or occasional events. The broader educational potential of partnerships—such as co-curricular learning, student mentorship or workplace exposure—was often overlooked.

These insights suggest a need for capacity-building, not only in technical skills (e.g. proposal writing, partnership management), but also in broadening mindsets about the role of community engagement in school development. With the right structures and support, schools could become active hubs of community learning, resource-sharing and innovation rather than passive recipients of external input.

Key findings

In this section, we examined parental and community engagement. The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data revealed that while there is potential for greater parental involvement and successful community initiatives, this potential remains largely untapped, as shown by the following key findings:

- ▶ Parents are involved in school life to some extent. However, they are less engaged in strategic or teaching-related matters and are more active in non-formal education and conflict resolution – both between students or between students and teachers.
- ▶ School administrators and teachers value relationships with the community, particularly with the school community. However, they tend to see parental know-how – commonly associated with parents’ educational levels – as a necessary condition for meaningful parental engagement and collaboration.
- ▶ Parents' lack of time is a key barrier to engagement. Employed parents may struggle to actively participate in school life due to their professional responsibilities.
- ▶ Lack of information is a problem that tends to hamper parental interest in engaging with school activities.
- ▶ Parents often do not feel that their involvement in various school matters directly affects their children's well-being. School administrations and teachers play an important role to help parents recognise this connection.
- ▶ Schools should take a proactive approach in encouraging parental engagement. When parents do not fully understand their role in their children's school life, principals and teachers should ensure that they are informed about different ways they can participate and the benefits their involvement can bring to their children's education. Additionally, schools should actively

consider and incorporate parents' initiatives and suggestions to foster positive and mutually beneficial collaboration between schools and families.

- ▶ Most schools participating in the study collaborate with local self-government authorities. These partnerships primarily involve infrastructure-related projects, where local governments assist in repairing and improving school facilities.
- ▶ Schools rarely take an active approach in seeking partnerships and collaboration opportunities with external entities. Proactive engagement in building partnerships remains an uncommon practice.

INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICES

This section of the study presents specific examples from different countries around the world, illustrating how student, teacher and parent engagement in various aspects of school life could be increased. In line with the study framework, these examples are organised into our core categories: teaching and learning, school governance and culture, and community engagement.

As described in the introduction, Georgia’s legislative and regulatory framework largely provides mechanisms for democratic participation. However, as demonstrated by this study and other research, these mechanisms do not tend to be effectively implemented in practice. Therefore, instead of examining other countries’ national or regional legislation and strategies, we focus on cases where local initiatives—at the school and community levels—have successfully fostered school community engagement.

Many of the selected examples of best practice address the specific challenges identified in this study. Each case study includes a brief summary followed by a more detailed description. Finally, recommendations on how similar practices could be applied in Georgia are provided.

Teaching and learning

CASE 1 – INTERDISCIPLINARY TEACHING APPROACH IN ICELAND

This example from Iceland demonstrates how teachers can collaborate to plan interdisciplinary lessons for students and involve them in selecting learning objectives and teaching methods.

►► *Case Description*

Teachers from four different subjects—Icelandic language, history, geography and English—decided to combine their curricula and conduct a joint lesson for students of various age groups. Students were introduced to the learning objectives and the tasks they needed to complete to achieve these goals.

Students were allowed to choose their preferred working style—individually, in pairs or in small groups. They could also select the type of assignments they wanted to complete, such as exercises, research tasks and other activities. Students independently planned their learning process and could consult teachers when they had questions.

During lunchtime, students and teachers went on walks together, engaging in discussions on various topics. Each student was required to participate in these discussions at least once a week.

Initially, planning the learning resources and process was highly labour-intensive. However, over time, the materials and structure could be reused multiple times, making the approach more sustainable.

►► *Recommendations*

This approach requires proper preparation, including:

- A detailed description of learning outcomes for subject-integrated teaching;

- Clear assessment procedures and grading criteria;
- A collection of assignments (for individual, pair, and group work);
- Formal approval for schedule modifications.

Students need time to adapt to this teaching method and must understand that they are responsible for self-monitoring. The initial phase might feel messy before students adjusted to the new approach. Like any other teaching and learning approach, this method is not ideal for everyone—some students will prefer it more than others.

CASE 2 – TEACHER WORKING GROUPS IN POLAND

This case highlights successful collaboration among teachers to share experiences, best practices and solve school issues together.

►► *Case Description*

In Poland, school principals may establish working groups within the teachers' council to address specific school challenges.

Each working group is led by a chairperson, appointed by the school principal. Participants may also include individuals who are not employed at the school. Once the group is formed, it must develop a work plan and define tasks for the academic year. The group presents its findings and outcomes at the final teachers' council meeting of the school year.

Commonly, working groups focus on:

- Coordinating educational interventions for specific student groups;
- Adapting learning requirements for students with individual needs;
- Enhancing collaboration with parents;
- Increasing student participation in school decision-making;
- Providing psychological and social support for students;
- Reviewing and updating school documentation (e.g. school regulations, policies, strategic plans);
- Involving students with disabilities into school activities;
- Ensuring school safety;
- Supporting and mentoring early-career teachers.

Most working groups hold regular online and in-person meetings to share experiences and monitor progress. Meeting records are documented, and the principal is kept informed. The groups discuss their goals and progress with the teachers' council.

►► *Recommendations*

If working groups are too formal, require too many meetings or lack decision-making power, teachers might lose motivation to participate. However, when working groups are highly motivated and listened to by the school administration, they can make a real impact.

Since regular meetings are the core of working group activities, it is essential to:

- Schedule meetings in advance and inform all participants beforehand;
- Set an agenda for each meeting, ensuring that all participants are aware of the discussion topics;

- Start and end meetings on time;
- Begin each meeting by reviewing previous progress;
- Allocate time for discussing key issues;
- Ensure that all participants, regardless of their status (principal, teacher, parent, student), have an opportunity to share their perspectives and ideas;
- Define clear deadlines for task completion and establish a monitoring system.

CASE 3 – STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

This is a successful practice from Germany that describes how students can be involved in selecting learning objectives, teaching methods, and assessment tools, ultimately leading to increased student participation.

►► **Case Description**

Once a week, an algebra teacher offered students three to four different activities, allowing each student to choose an activity that reflected the skill they felt they needed to develop the most.

At first, students struggled with choosing an activity. According to the teacher, this was because they had little experience making decisions at school, as teachers typically made decisions for them. Recognising this as an issue, the teacher prioritised guiding students on how to make appropriate choices.

By the third week, students were confidently selecting activities and working productively. The teacher was pleasantly surprised to notice that students were spending more time helping each other and even monitoring each other's behaviour. They gave feedback to peers who were not sufficiently focused on their work.

Overall, the teacher observed that students knew what they needed to work on. When students needed help, they turned to peers or tried to find a solution independently. This meant that students spent more time working and less time asking for help from the teacher. As a result, the teacher had more time to assess students' progress and support those who genuinely needed additional assistance.

►► **Recommendations**

Providing students with genuine choices in the classroom—what they learn, which assignments they complete, who they work with etc.—can increase their engagement and motivation, help them develop their strengths and address their individual needs. However, many teachers initially worry that giving students too much choice might overwhelm them. Like any teaching method, the success of this approach may vary, with even small adjustments potentially impacting success.

It is crucial that students have some level of influence over what and how they learn in class. However, not all choices are equally important. Teachers should develop strategies that allow students to build both autonomy and competence.

Autonomy

Students feel a sense of independence when they understand the value and purpose of a task—especially when they believe that the task aligns with their personal values, interests and goals. Simply participating in the decision-making process is not enough; the choices must hold real significance for them.

Competence

Students feel empowered when they believe they know what to do and can handle challenges. If they are presented with too many choices or if the selection process is too complicated, they might choose randomly or let someone else decide for them. Teachers should simplify the decision-making process, provide clear instructions and ensure that students understand what each option entails.

Although this process can take time and may not succeed at first, involving students in choosing teaching methods and approaches is a highly effective tool for enhancing student participation. It is also beneficial for teachers to explain why they are giving students a choice and to evaluate the extent to which students appreciate having decision-making opportunities.

School governance and culture

CASE 4 – PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN PORTUGAL

This example from Portugal demonstrates how students and parents can be involved in participatory budgeting, allowing them to define, discuss and prioritise school expenditures while granting them real decision-making power over budget allocation.

►► *Case Description*

The school management, in collaboration with the local municipality, decided to allocate a portion of the annual budget to implement a participatory budgeting scheme, a practice that is becoming increasingly popular in many European cities, villages and schools.

The project required clear and well-defined rules outlining the process, format, budget and selection criteria. These rules were developed in cooperation with the School Council, the Teachers' Council, and the Students' Council, with guidance and support from a local NGO. To ensure that student initiatives were clear and of high quality, the NGO advised school representatives to develop a guide and ensure that the guidelines were written in simple and accessible language understandable to all students.

The budget for the project of approximately 300 Euros was relatively small.

The process was organised into five phases. In the first phase, students could propose ideas to improve the school community through a special blog on the school's website. They could also use school hallways to post posters to promote their ideas and invite other students and parents to join their initiatives.

In the second phase, students and parents formed teams to develop project proposals. Teams could receive support from teachers or external mentors. Each participant could join only one team, and each team could work on only one project proposal. During this phase, teams collaborated to transform initial ideas into detailed project proposals, evaluating costs, implementation timelines, sustainability, feasibility and potential impact. Projects had to benefit the school community and be completed within the current budget cycle. Proposals were submitted by filling out an application form on the school's website.

In the third phase, a Project Evaluation Committee, consisting of the school principal, the vice principal and seven teachers, was responsible for reviewing the submitted projects within a specified timeframe and providing feedback. The committee approved a list of projects that were eligible for voting. The final project list and descriptions were published on the school website and displayed on the school information board.

In the fourth phase, students and parents reviewed the published proposals and discussed their

advantages and disadvantages. Additionally, subject teachers were asked, where possible, to integrate these discussions (or elements of them) into subjects, while homeroom teachers added meetings with parents to the agenda.

Voting began one month after the publication of the projects. Every student, teacher and parent had the right to vote, but each person could only vote for one project.

The voting process followed the principles of confidentiality and impartiality. Members of the coordination committee responsible for vote counting did not have the right to vote themselves. The voting results were announced on the school's website, and the winning project was implemented.

►► **Recommendations**

This project is implemented in the school on an annual basis, and all participants are now well acquainted with the process, format, budget and project selection rules. However, it was initially launched as an initiative by the school principal in collaboration with the city hall. The rules and procedures were developed in cooperation with school management, the School Council, the Teachers' Council and the Students' Council. Careful preparation of the step-by-step process is essential to avoid misinformation, low-quality proposals and conflicts.

A similar initiative has been implemented in Georgia within the framework of a Council of Europe-supported project, which promotes student participation in school budgeting. Referencing and learning from this emerging local practice could support adaptation and scale-up in Georgian schools by providing contextually relevant examples and demonstrating the feasibility of participatory approaches within the existing system.

CASE 5 – WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH IN 100 SCHOOLS IN TURKEY

This is an example of a successful collaboration model between students, parents, school administrators and teachers in Turkish schools. The model was introduced through the "Strengthening Democratic Culture in Primary Education" project, implemented by the Council of Europe and the European Union between 2019 and 2022 in 100 schools across 10 provinces.

►► **Case Description**

The model was developed by local and international experts to support pilot schools in engaging students and parents in decision-making processes.

The model consisted of seven stages: forming a commission, a situation analysis, identifying development priorities, forming teams and developing work plans, implementing work plans, evaluating results and reporting and ensuring sustainability. Each stage prepared for the next, the results of the previous phase having served as a foundation for the next.

The process began with the formation of two commissions—one within the school to coordinate and support internal work and another within the temporary regional education directorate to provide guidelines, resources, monitoring and progress evaluation. The school commission was led by the school principal and included the vice principal, at least two teachers, the school counsellor, a non-teaching school staff member, at least two students, and at least two parents.

The first task of the school commission was to conduct a situation analysis, setting focus on a key area, such as teaching and learning, school climate and governance or family and community engagement. This analysis often included a review of school documents and surveys for students, parents, teachers,

school administrators and non-teaching staff.

After collecting responses, the school commission carried out a needs analysis and selected one or two priority areas that were both important and realistic to tackle.

Once the focus area for improvement was agreed upon, school action plans were developed. These plans include a description and analysis of the problem as well as expected outcomes. The school commission then formed teams to assist in implementing the action plans. The teams could be homogeneous or mixed, but each had to have a work plan to help achieve a specific outcome outlined in the action plan. The school commission oversaw the development and feasibility of the work plan.

The next step was the practical implementation of work plans by the working groups. Each team was responsible for executing its plan, while the school commission monitored progress and provided support where necessary. While the work plans were not intended to be complex or lengthy, they could lead to tangible results, especially if multiple plans were implemented in a single school.

Once the work plans had been carried out, they were evaluated, and a performance report was presented to the school commission. Each team assessed its own work, and after all the teams submitted their reports, the school commission evaluated the overall results and shared them with the school community and the regional commission. Finally, discussions took place on how schools could sustain these efforts in the future to ensure sustainable results.

►► **Recommendation**

This approach was implemented in a project involving regional education directorates in 10 provinces and 100 schools. However, the model can also be implemented in a single school without oversight from higher authorities. Importantly, successful implementation requires motivation from school leadership, especially the principal. The regional commission can be replaced by a school-level commission, and partnerships between two schools may also be established to implement this model.

CASE 6 – “EVERY STUDENT’S VOICE MATTERS”

This is an example from an Australian school, demonstrating how a Student Council can effectively engage all students in the decision-making process.

►► **Case Description**

One of the biggest challenges for school leadership is ensuring that every student's voice is heard, given that not all students can be members of the council or hold leadership positions.

To address this issue, one school in Australia informed students that they could submit ideas or concerns via email. Additionally, the school created a website feature where students could submit proposals for initiatives or changes, they wished to see implemented in the school. Regular school-wide surveys further allowed students to express their views and suggest improvements.

However, the most effective initiative that gave real significance to student voices was the establishment of a direct connection between the Student Council and the student body. A special procedure was developed, assigning each Student Council member to communicate directly with certain classes except their own class. For example, in a school with 30 classes and 10 Student Council members, each representative was responsible for three classes, ensuring that none of them were from their own class.

Communication occurred via email and face-to-face meetings, following a structured plan developed at the beginning of each school year.

The Student Council also introduced a quota system to ensure equal representation of both genders, all grade levels, and different student groups, so that every student had a representative to voice their concerns.

CASE 7 – PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING IN AN AUSTRIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

This is a model of effective decision-making, involving both teachers and students which can be applied in any classroom setting.

►► *Case Description*

When teachers at a primary school in Austria discussed the possibility of increasing student participation in decision-making, some were concerned that involving students might lead to a loss of control. Others were unsure of their own abilities to implement a participatory approach or believed that students would not be interested in participating.

However, one teacher had been using a participatory approach and shared their experience with colleagues. The teacher provided an example of a collaborative problem-solving discussion, describing how students were invited to propose different solutions to a specific issue and then select the best option together.

As a result, the Teachers' Council agreed to integrate collaborative decision-making into daily classroom activities using four simple steps:

1. Reflect on which decisions teachers currently make alone and identify which ones could be made together with students (instead of for them);
2. Ask students which aspects of classroom activities they would like to be more involved in;
3. Introduce students to lesson plans and ask what additional information they would like to explore;
4. Evaluate these experiences and try to apply the same approach in other situations (e.g. conflict resolution between students).

After an initial trial period, the teachers evaluated their experiences and were surprised at the success of this approach. Contrary to their initial fears, instead of losing control, teachers found that collaborative decision-making helped them connect their own skills and expertise with those of their students, ultimately improving classroom management and the learning environment.

►► *Recommendations*

Collaborative decision-making occurs when teachers and students work together to make decisions that affect the class. These decisions may relate to classroom community, curriculum planning, discipline, environment, resource management or time allocation.

Decisions made collaboratively with students can range from small choices—such as deciding the order of tasks in a lesson ("Should we read the story first or go over homework?")—to more significant questions, such as "How can we improve everyone's literacy skills?"

Community engagement

CASE 8 – ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP HACKATHON IN POLAND

This is an example of how a local NGO collaborated with schools in the region to encourage students to think about their local community's needs, challenges and potential solutions.

▶▶ *Case Description*

The Active Citizens Fund, a Warsaw-based NGO, organised Active Citizens Hackathons under the slogan "For Youth, By Youth." Over two days, students from local schools analysed the challenges faced by their community and brainstormed solutions. Experts assisted students throughout the process.

The hackathon was highly popular among young people. Since the event was time-limited, participants had only 12 hours to come up with solutions to a problem. However, during that time, they were focused fully on addressing that specific challenge.

At the end of the event, students presented their proposals to the audience. Experts then evaluated and rewarded the best ideas.

▶▶ *Recommendations*

This approach can also be adopted by schools to encourage student involvement in decision-making or by local educational authorities to focus on their community's needs. Teams can be mixed, including parents, teachers and school staff to enhance collaboration among all school community members.

CASE 9 – CROWDFUNDING INITIATIVE IN DENMARK

This example from Denmark demonstrates how students successfully conducted a crowdfunding campaign to secure funding for their project..

▶▶ *Case Description*

A group of students, who were members of the school's film club, were assigned by their teacher to create a short film on the theme of COVID-19. They were encouraged to develop their own storyline, and they came up with a narrative about a teenager who ignored the seriousness of the pandemic and continued attending parties. As a result, he became a carrier of the virus, infecting his parents and others, which ultimately led to his parents' deaths. The film follows the protagonist's struggle with guilt and his gradual understanding of social and personal responsibility.

The screenplay was compelling, but the production required significant financial resources, including casting actors, securing locations, creating sets, obtaining equipment, arranging transportation and ensuring the well-being of the cast and crew.

The students were highly motivated to bring their idea to life. After months of research, they discovered a crowdfunding platform that allows people to raise funds for causes they care about, ranging from personal needs to events and projects. The website was easy to use, so they described their project, set goals and published their campaign.

Soon after, they raised the necessary funds and successfully produced their film.

►► Recommendations

To start a crowdfunding campaign, it is crucial to choose a reliable platform that provides simple steps to create a dedicated project page, shares it with the global digital community and receives instant donations via credit/debit cards or PayPal.

When selecting a crowdfunding platform, ensure that it:

- Is secure and trustworthy;
- Provides guidance and support;
- Does not penalise users for not reaching their fundraising goal;
- Is compatible with mobile devices;
- Operates on a global scale and supports multiple currencies;
- Is effective and results-oriented;
- Offers customisation options.

While this example demonstrates the potential of student-led fundraising through digital platforms, the **feasibility of similar initiatives in Georgia should be carefully assessed**. Georgian legislation concerning school fundraising, online financial transactions, and the handling of funds by minors or student groups may impose restrictions or require specific institutional oversight. Schools interested in adapting this model are encouraged to consult with relevant legal and educational authorities to ensure compliance with local laws and regulations.

CASE 10 – SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PROJECT IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

This example illustrates how schools can collaborate with local governments, businesses and the non-governmental sector.

►► Case Description

If schools lack experience in launching new initiatives and do not know how to identify potential partners or collaborative opportunities, it is advisable to join existing social projects offered by NGOs.

A rural primary school in the United Kingdom decided to collaborate with the UK Young Citizens Fund, which provided methodology and consultations to guide the school through the process.

After the initial presentation to the Teachers' Council, two teachers and their classes, consisting of 11- and 12-year-old students, expressed interest in participating. The teachers attended an introductory training session, where they learned about the goals, benefits, mechanisms and methods of student participation. They also established connections with NGO representatives and other schools involved in the project.

In the next phase, teachers facilitated classroom discussions to determine what topics students were interested in exploring. Since many students lived far away from school, they expressed a desire to learn more about their classmates' communities and villages—including how far they lived from school, their family backgrounds and who else lived in their villages.

This led to the development of a research project, which revealed that their community was home to a wide variety of social, economic, ethnic and age groups, each with different needs and abilities. As a result, the students and teachers decided to focus their project on the theme of "diversity."

Following a brainstorming for ideas and a democratic vote, students selected three concrete actions to promote diversity in their community: Creating posters celebrating diversity to be displayed on the school's website; researching local businesses to assess how inclusive they were toward people with different needs; raising funds for the school library to purchase diverse books representing different cultures and perspectives.

All ideas originated from the students themselves, while teachers acted only as technical consultants, assisting in roles as requested by the students. Additionally, students conducted surveys with teachers to understand what materials they used in class to promote diversity and wrote a letter to the School Board requesting their perspectives. This sparked further discussions on gender roles in fairy tales, traditionally “masculine” or “feminine” careers and traditional family structures.

Students remained engaged throughout the entire process because they were implementing their own ideas rather than simply following teacher-led instructions. After evaluating the project, the classes decided to repeat the initiative the following year and planned a celebration event at which they invited the regional governor responsible for diversity policies.

►► **Recommendations**

NGOs often provide simple and well-tested strategies that schools can easily implement, even if they have little prior experience in running community projects. These strategies typically follow a five-step model:

- Situation analysis (identifying the problem);
- Planning (deciding what actions to take to address the issue);
- Implementation (taking action);
- Monitoring and evaluation (measuring the impact);
- Dissemination and feedback (applying lessons learned and making further improvements).

If a school joins such a project, teachers and school leaders often receive additional support, including training, consultations and opportunities to exchange experiences with other schools. This five-step cycle can be applied not only to community projects but also to classroom initiatives or parental engagement efforts within Parent Councils.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions and recommendations are based on the research framework, which examines our three key areas: teaching and learning, school governance and culture and community engagement. As outlined in the research framework, the study seeks to assess how and the extent to which democratic participation is integrated in Georgian schools through policies, practices and values across these areas.

For each area, conclusions have been drawn based on the data collected during the study. Alongside these conclusions, recommendations are presented that may be useful for schools and organisations implementing programmes aimed at strengthening democratic participation in schools.

Teaching and learning

There are efforts in schools to reflect some principles of Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education within the school curriculum (Council of Europe 2010). These principles are embedded in various subjects. Human rights, cultural diversity and democratic values are emphasised across different subjects. Schools have the authority to develop their own school curricula (aligned with national standards), allowing them to tailor democratic themes to local needs.

Students and parents are actively involved in shaping extracurricular and non-formal activities. These activities may include club participation, planning excursions, engaging in extracurricular competitions and more. However, the low levels of student-initiated extracurricular activities are noteworthy, as it may be linked to their daily school experiences.

The daily classroom experience plays a fundamental role in shaping students' understanding of participation and helps them develop relevant skills. Some students report having some experience in choosing teaching methods and topics. However, the proportion of students who regularly participate in such decision-making in the surveyed schools is low (14%), while a significant percentage (46%) say they occasionally make decisions on aspects such as the format of assignments, project topics or reading materials.

Such participation is essential for fostering independent decision-making skills and a sense of responsibility for one's own learning. Involving students in shaping their own learning experiences may also strengthen their sense of belonging to the school.

Interestingly, some students are aware of alternative teaching methods through various online media sources which is an important insight. Inspiration from digital sources might inspire students to suggest alternative teaching approaches to their teachers. However, the study indicates that teachers and school principals perceive low student engagement as a result of students' uncertainty about whether their opinions will be taken into account.

Considering students' perspectives on teaching and learning could help teachers diversify their instructional methods. Additionally, student participation could enhance their learning motivation. The study reveals that students hesitate to propose new teaching methods to teachers, or they lack awareness of this opportunity. Strengthening democratic participation in schools could address this issue as a key focus area.

Teacher involvement in teaching and learning decisions appears to be relatively higher to student involvement. To define learning objectives and methods, teachers tend to consult professional subject committees, the Pedagogical Council and the school Supervisory Board. However, the study also highlights occasional challenges in the involvement of teachers in the development of the school curriculum.

Although teachers report to be participating in curriculum development in the survey responses, school principals perceive teachers' engagement to be mostly formalistic and express dissatisfaction with teachers' motivation to engage in the process.

There may be several reasons for teachers' lack of active participation in curriculum development. One significant factor is workload—many teachers dedicate considerable effort to planning and delivering lessons, and finding extra time for participation in additional processes may be challenging.

Recommendations

Schools should encourage greater student involvement in shaping teaching approaches and content. This engagement should be promoted at both the school and classroom levels.

At the school level, school leaders could facilitate discussions among teachers about existing best practices within their schools.

At the classroom level, it may be useful to establish regular routines where teachers and students jointly decide on different aspects of teaching and learning. These routines could include periodic discussions (e.g. at the beginning and in the middle of the semester) between students and teachers to review potential teaching methods for a given subject and/or reflection sessions at the end of the semester during which students and teachers assess the learning journey—reviewing the approaches used throughout the semester and discussing collaborative planning for the next one.

To strengthen student participation in initiating and implementing non-formal educational activities, three key strategies can be employed. During class sessions, headteachers can encourage brainstorming among students. Student self-government bodies can be activated to gather student ideas and coordinate initiatives with school administration. At the beginning of each semester, the school administration could convene student meetings at different grade levels, where students present their ideas for clubs, initiatives and non-formal learning groups through oral presentations. Additionally, the school administration could disseminate surveys to help identify students interested in non-formal educational activities. Periodically, school clubs could showcase their activities to engage and inspire others.

Since schools have the autonomy to define assessment criteria, the number of assessments and their contents, teachers technically have the opportunity to co-create assessment tools with students. For example, if teachers regularly developed assessment rubrics together with students, they would not only enhance student participation but also help them develop metacognitive skills and a sense of ownership over their learning process.

One of the most critical steps to fully engage teachers is to strengthen subject departments while increasing parental participation. Subject departments could periodically present their planned learning objectives and activities to the Pedagogical Council and parents throughout the school year. One effective tool for fostering collaboration between teachers and parents are "Open House Days", inviting parents to meet subject departments, learn about curriculum plans, ask questions and provide feedback.

School governance and culture

One positive outcome identified in the study is that school decision-makers and teachers recognise the importance of involving the school community in decision-making processes. It is encouraging that schools actively share their strategic documents through websites, social media and teacher councils.

However, the study also reveals that, in practice, true participation in decision-making continues to be weakly implemented. Students rarely participate in defining rules at the school or classroom level, and collaboration with parents is not a systemic part of school governance.

According to the study, the main reasons for this lack of involvement are related to limited awareness. Students report that they do not know they have the right to participate in shaping school or classroom rules. Parents also lack sufficient information about student self-government activities. The school community, including teachers, is not well informed about strategic school documents. Furthermore, the strategic documents themselves are often not sufficiently informative or written in an inaccessible language.

Another key reason why members of the school community are not sufficiently engaged in decision-making is the lack of opportunities for meaningful participation. Even when parents and students wish to be involved, they do not know how to participate, what they are entitled to request, whom to approach or what their role should be. Additionally, schools rarely take active steps to encourage or motivate students and parents to participate through structured initiatives.

Limited formats for involvement in decision-making present another challenge. For example, opportunities for participation in defining strategic goals tend to be restricted to just a few channels - engaging in the work of the Supervisory Board, participating in a working group established by the principal or occasionally providing feedback through surveys. School principals tend to involve teachers less in staffing decisions, further limiting participation.

Another factor relates to structural problems within the system. In small schools with limited student populations, the school community itself is small, making broad participation more difficult. School budgets often lack discretionary funds, meaning there is little to no room for discussion on financial decision-making. If a school's revenue is automatically allocated to centrally determined salaries and utility costs, the decision-making space remains minimal. Schools, especially smaller ones, struggle to attract additional financial or other resources which could otherwise require the involvement of the Supervisory Board and other school community members. This may be one of the main reasons why parents show low interest in engaging with the Supervisory Board.

Teachers and principals also confirm that students rarely express a desire to participate in self-government. The activities typically conducted by student councils are not focused on problem-solving but are instead oriented toward club organisation and cultural and entertainment events.

Recommendations

To increase the school community's involvement in school governance, strategic documents should be developed gradually, based on discussions of teacher councils. Since teachers may find it difficult to review lengthy documents, school administration or working groups should introduce a step-by-step approach to discuss different critical aspects (e.g. curriculum, assessment, fundraising, school regulations etc.) separately at regular meetings. To support this process, it would be beneficial for schools to establish a regular calendar for teacher council meetings to ensure systematic discussions.

To enhance awareness, particularly among parents and students, instead of merely distributing formal documents, schools should develop user-friendly operational guides or handbooks written in clear and

accessible language. These could include simplified versions of the school's internal regulations or FAQ-style explanatory appendices. These documents should be written in an accessible language and should emphasise democratic values, participation opportunities and the significance of engaging in democratic processes.

Before elections for student self-government or Supervisory Board membership, schools should organise meetings at which teachers and administrators explain the importance of these bodies, ways to participate and the process involved.

One effective approach to increasing participation is the creation of working committees. These could include the Teaching and Learning Committee, the Disciplinary Committee, the Non-Formal Education Committee or the School Life Improvement Committee. Such formalised committees should ideally be facilitated by the principal, but decisions should be made collectively.

In schools where vacancies arise, it would be beneficial to allow teachers to participate in the hiring process for new staff. For example, reviewing candidates and conducting interviews could take place not only within the administration but also within subject departments. Teachers need to be aware of who their future colleagues will be, as they will need to collaborate closely on teaching and curriculum planning.

One effective way to revitalise student councils is to establish regular meetings (e.g. every two weeks) between student council members and the school principal. During these meetings, the principal could inform student representatives about upcoming decisions and gather feedback. These meetings could also serve as a platform for students to voice concerns and propose improvements. If students know that their representatives regularly meet with the administration and that these meetings lead to real changes, this could be a powerful incentive for broader student engagement in self-government activities.

Community Engagement

The study shows that parents are involved in school life to some extent, but their participation is mostly limited to non-formal education and conflict resolution rather than strategic decision-making or teaching and learning processes. While this engagement is a good starting point, it presents an opportunity for schools to further deepen parental involvement.

The school administration and teachers value collaboration with the school community, but they often view parental motivation and competence as prerequisites for effective engagement. According to them, parents need specific skills to collaborate successfully, and they often associate these skills with parents' educational levels. While specific skills may be helpful, they should not be a requirement for school administrators and teachers to involve parents in school life. Even if parents lack prior experience in collective decision-making, they should still have the opportunity to gain such experience, especially considering that many parents interact with schools for over 12 years (or longer if they have several children).

A key barrier to parental engagement is lack of time. Working parents may find it difficult to actively participate in school affairs. However, a lack of information is another significant factor that could be preventing parents from expressing interest in school life. Another factor that might discourage parents from engaging with schools is that communication mostly occurs when problems arise. Teachers—mainly headteachers—tend to contact parents only in cases of academic or behavioural issues with their children. In this context, communication between schools and parents is often associated with negative emotions which can further discourage proactive parental involvement.

Schools have limited experience in collaborating with external partners, beyond their existing relationships with local governments. Schools rarely establish partnerships with NGOs, local businesses or cultural institutions. According to the study, initiatives for collaboration mostly come from external organisations rather than from the schools themselves. This lack of external engagement may stem

from both knowledge gaps within schools and institutional or policy constraints. School administrators tend to interact more freely with government representatives, as these relationships provide greater institutional legitimacy and may be more acceptable to national education authorities. When engaging with other organisations, school administrators often seek external approval or official authorisation which can slow down the development of long-term partnerships.

The lack of community collaboration results in missed opportunities for schools, as external partnerships are an opportunity to increase school resources. Beyond financial and material support, external collaboration can enhance the competences of teachers, school leaders and other school staff, as, for instance, by connecting schools with other educational institutions, universities and partner schools. The absence of these relationships also limits opportunities to make school life more engaging and dynamic for students.

Recommendations

To increase parental involvement, schools should consider parents' time constraints when planning engagement activities. Parent meetings, open house events and School Board sessions should be scheduled in the evenings -after work hours- to accommodate parents' availability. Additionally, mothers and fathers should be equally encouraged to actively participate in school life.

It is essential that opportunities for parental engagement are structured, consistent and engaging. Schools should also use formal tools that help parents adapt to constructive collaboration formats. These tools include pre-defined meeting agendas, formalised regulations for meetings (e.g. duration, speaking order, discussion procedures) and effective facilitation. Headteachers may require support in this regard. Practicing meeting facilitation skills could be beneficial for teachers, helping them lead parent discussions more effectively.

To avoid associating school communication solely with difficult situations, teachers should contact parents not only when problems arise but also to share students' achievements. Even an informal phone call to a parent, informing them of their child's academic progress, can significantly improve parents' perception of the school.

Engaging with the broader community should not be driven solely by immediate benefits. Schools, as important social institutions, can invite community members to attend special school events, celebrations, open house days and club meetings. It is crucial to maintain relationships with partners, also beyond the completion of collaborative projects. Simple gestures, such as holiday greetings, can strengthen connections with individuals who have interacted with the school. Involving students in these efforts—such as creating greeting cards, videos or other personalised messages—can make these relationships more appealing and meaningful to external stakeholders.

Celebrating national holidays within the school can be another effective way to engage the broader community. Community representatives could be invited to participate in these school events, fostering stronger school-community relationships. The local community can serve as a valuable educational resource, enriching the teaching and learning process. Guest speakers can help make learning more engaging for students. Speakers do not need to be distinguished experts—individuals with experience in various fields can contribute insights related to school subjects, such as agriculture, entrepreneurship, health and sports, geography and environmental studies.

Joint projects have great potential to deepen the relationship between the community and the school. For example, students could study various issues concerning the community (e.g. stray animals, environmental pollution, transportation safety issues etc.) and then work together with community representatives to find solutions.

Collaboration with other educational institutions is particularly beneficial. School teachers could learn much from each other and exchange best practices during mutual visits. Moreover, cooperation with universities, professors and university students is an important opportunity to enrich the academic dimension of the school. One of the simplest ways to establish such collaboration is to engage school alumni. Their advice and shared experiences can be especially valuable for students in upper grades as they are preparing to make decisions regarding their future professional or academic paths.

General recommendations

In this section, we propose recommendations that go beyond specific issues related to teaching and learning, governance or community relations. Developing democratic engagement in schools is not a simple matter, as it is linked to institutionalised practices as well as to structural, cultural and competency-related factors. For schools to begin to foster democratic engagement, they should consider using a framework that could serve as a guide on this path. Concepts and guidelines developed by the Council of Europe offer valuable strategies on democratising participation in schools.

First and foremost, a framework for democratic participation should include the principles of Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (Council of Europe 2010). The Council of Europe's handbook *Democratic Governance of Schools* provides advice on democratic school governance (Beckmann and Trafford 2013). For a focus on engaging students in school governance, the „Student Participation in Democratic School Governance“ guide is another useful resource (Council of Europe 2023). To foster an understanding of democratic values in school life, the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture is a crucial resource (Council of Europe 2018). Georgian-language versions of the Charter and related EDC/HRE manuals have been distributed to all schools and are now part of school libraries. Additionally, the examples of student participation from other countries presented in this study can serve as sources of inspiration for Georgian schools.

Clearly, these concepts and guidelines might be challenging for schools to implement. Therefore, it might be helpful for schools to join various networks that actively seek to introduce democratic principles. Through these networks, schools share experiences, exchange tools and receive feedback. Such horizontal connections between school administrations and teachers would support the development of diverse and sustainable democratic engagement practices in schools. The events organised by the network could serve as spaces where representatives of other schools - who may also be considering strengthening democratic participation but are unsure where to start, could learn from the experiences of schools that are on the path of democratic transformation.

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Active student participation in school life helps young people develop the skills and competences needed to become responsible and engaged citizens. Schools that support student involvement become spaces where the interests and needs of all stakeholders are taken into account.

In Georgia, existing laws and policy documents provide a basis for student participation, yet in practice these opportunities are not always fully realised. Strengthening participation contributes to greater transparency in school governance, the creation of inclusive environments, and the development of a culture of democracy and cooperation.

This publication presents an analysis of policies and practices of student participation in 61 schools across Georgia. It identifies challenges, showcases successful examples, and offers recommendations for building more participatory and democratic school environments.

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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