Books of good practices - 'Alternatives to grade retention'

Samen tot aan de meet (STAM)

Description

As part of the STAM initiative in Belgium, a good practice guidebook has been published which looks at grade retention and alternative solutions. It analyses the context in which grade retention is embedded, provides an overview of research into the topic and provides guidance on implementation.

Beneficiaries

Educational staff at school level in school education and, potentially, policymakers.

Countries

🇧🇪 Belgium

Country/ies or organisation that developed the tool

City of Antwerp – Belgium (Flanders)

Date of creation of toolkit and periodicity of updates

The first book was published in 2010, a second one in 2012 focusing on primary education, and the last one in 2013 focusing on secondary education. The English summary includes parts of all 3 books.

Purpose of the toolkit

Guidance on best practices (to improve the design of policies and practices)

Description of each of the tools

The guide is an overview of international scientific research on retention, new didactic approaches and managerial practices in schools. It also provides specific information on

how schools can implement alternatives to grade retention (i.e. the STAM project) and proposes a set of good practices.

The guide is structured as following:

- **What does research tell us about grade retention?**
- **Building together – The house of STAM** – detailed presentation of the STAM project, its strategy and success factors.
- **The implementation process for replacing grade retention with alternatives to enrich and accelerate the individual learning process** – guidance on how to implement STAM, divided into 4 phases:
    - contesting grade retention
    - coping with resistance
    - selecting, outlining and implementing the building blocks
    - evaluating the process and the product

- **2 practical examples of STAM** – examples of STAM implementation at school level.

Type of guidance given to users

The STAM initiative counters grade retention. It aims at replacing grade retention with other alternatives which enrich and accelerate the students' individual learning processes.

The guide provides an analysis of the context in which STAM is embedded and an overview of research on the topic of grade retentions. It then describes the STAM hypothesis, strategy and success factors and explains in detail the 4 implementation phases. Examples of best practices and guidance on how to implement STAM is also provided.

The 4 implementation phases are:

- **Countering grade retention (at national level):** the objective is to make school staff aware of the fact that grade retention is not a self-evident practice and that there could be several effective alternatives to deal with students who fall behind. This is done through making all parties reflect critically and enter a discussion on their (the school's) own practices and views about grade retention. The outcome should be that all parties can see grade retention as a problem and consider it meaningful to think about alternatives to it.
- **Coping with resistance**: the objective is to overcome resistance, with the intention of making a positive change by replacing grade retention with alternative educational practices. This phase is implemented by means of a thorough and thoughtful debate which further defines and explains the countering of grade retention, and addresses the problematic link between grade retention and educational delay. The outcome should be that the school reaches a collective diagnosis which explains why grade retention needs to be countered and why better alternatives need to be chosen. This is an ongoing process and requires constant attention throughout all implementation phases, as new kinds of resistance may emerge at any point. The ultimate result would be that the entire school staff recognises and supports this diagnosis, and jointly advocates STAM.
- **Selecting, outlining and implementing the building blocks** : the aim is to choose building blocks which enrich and accelerate the individual learning process and to define a school-specific plan of action. The school needs to develop a step-by-step approach of realistic initiatives which will bring it closer to the ideal school model, where grade retention is no longer necessary.
- **Evaluating the process and the outcome** : in order to have a clear overview of what works and what needs to be adjusted, there should be an evaluation of the implementation and effects of STAM, via a process evaluation (i.e. a continual evaluation, directed at the implementation) and a product evaluation over time (i.e. a measurement of the effects, focused on the outcomes).

Source of information of the different tools

Education policy, City of Antwerp

Link/s to the toolkit and further information

http://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/files/esl/downloads/44_BE_NL_Together_Manual.pdf

The toolkit is available as a PDF document.

Downloads

⧉ The toolkit in a pdf version

EN

Related intervention approaches

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