

National Knowledge Centre for 'Mixed Schools'



School segregation is an unyielding problem in The Netherlands and around the world. Segregation along both ethnic and socio-economic lines tends to overlap as a result of the influx of mostly unskilled labor from Mediterranean countries through the last few decades. Only recently has socio-ethnic school segregation become an issue on the Dutch policy agenda.

Education offers the best opportunity for children with different social and cultural backgrounds to learn how they can live and work together. For this reason the population of students in primary schools should reflect the inhabitants in the area of the school. That is a mild criterion for segregation, but one that allows for identifying schools with a fair chance of combating segregation effectively: in a 'mixed' neighborhood each school would be mixed in terms of socio-ethnic backgrounds.

White schools in white neighborhoods and minority schools in minority neighborhoods can build partnerships to give students the opportunity to meet one another and to learn and play together. Secondary schools should also take appropriate action to usher in a mixed population.

Municipalities, parents, schools and their boards need to cooperate to realize mixed schools. Moreover, none of these participants can create integrated schools without the support of the other. That is why municipalities and school boards have to discuss integration and segregation within the (legal) framework of the local educational agenda. Furthermore, these institutions need to involve parents and individual schools in order to effectively implement their policies.

Over the last 8 to 10 years schools and their partners have steadily gained more experience in the prevention of school segregation as well as the promotion of integration. An important step in this process was the start of a four year pilot program in twelve cities aimed at experimenting with policy instruments to promote mixed schools and to identify factors for success (2008-2012). The Knowledge Centre supported the local pilots with advice and hands-on involvement from experts.

The Centre

To prevent others from having to reinventing the wheel the National Knowledge Centre for Mixed Schools was founded in 2007. The two main functions of the Knowledge Centre are dissemination of knowledge and pushing for action.

- Dissemination of knowledge means that the Knowledge Centre passes on available knowledge and generates new knowledge (e.g., through research and debate). This means it is a centre of expertise that acts as a clearing house.
- Pushing for action means that the Knowledge Centre alerts municipalities, parent groups, schools and school boards to the importance of the subject and the urgency to take action.

The aim of the Knowledge Centre is to circulate knowledge on school segregation between the areas of research, policy and practice. To reach that goal the National Knowledge Centre for Mixed Schools:

- Organizes national, regional en local meetings for municipalities, parents, schools and their boards
- Writes and releases manuals on how to create mixed schools
- Manages the website: www.gemengdescholen.nl, where an overview of news and background information can be found.

The National Knowledge Centre for Mixed Schools is supported by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The Centre has a clearing house function: creating and maintaining a database of extensive information regarding school segregation. The Centre also aims to activate and empower participants to combat segregation and promote integration in schools. For more information visit www.gemengdescholen.nl.