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The school principal's action towards addressing high school dropout in the São Paulo state education network[i]

A atuação do gestor escolar no enfrentamento da evasão no ensino médio da rede estadual paulista

La actuación del director de escuelas en el enfrentamiento de la evasión en la enseñanza secundaria de la red estatal paulista

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Abstract: This paper aims to analyze the school principals' actions of the São Paulo State Department of Education (SEDUC-SP) towards addressing the high dropout rates pointed out in High School, since the practices and decisions of these professionals can generate significant repercussions on the students' trajectory. This is a qualitative approach research, whose data were obtained through interviews with principals from seven public schools of SEDUC-SP. The school principals' statements were analyzed and interpreted from the perspective of Laurence Bardin's Content Analysis, and in the light of the literature on the subject. The results show that, among other elements, early student entry into the labor market is the main reason for dropouts in High School; however, the performance of school principals has been instrumental in reducing high dropout rates.

Keywords: Education Management. High School. School dropout.

Resumo: *Este artigo objetiva analisar as ações de gestores de escolas públicas da Secretaria de Estado da Educação de São Paulo (SEDUC-SP) para enfrentar os altos índices de evasão escolar apontados no Ensino Médio, visto que as práticas e as decisões desses profissionais podem gerar repercussões significativas na trajetória dos estudantes. Trata-se de uma pesquisa de abordagem qualitativa, cujos dados foram obtidos por meio de entrevistas com diretores de sete escolas públicas da SEDUC-SP. Os depoimentos dos diretores foram analisados e interpretados na perspectiva da Análise de Conteúdo de Laurence Bardin e à luz da literatura que discorre sobre o assunto. Os resultados mostram que, dentre outros elementos, o ingresso precoce do aluno no mercado de trabalho é o principal motivo da evasão escolar no Ensino Médio; contudo, a atuação dos gestores escolares tem sido fundamental para reduzir os altos índices de evasão escolar.*

Palavras-chave: *Gestão da Educação. Ensino Médio. Evasão escolar.*

Resumen: *Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar las acciones de los directores de escuelas públicas del Departamento de Educación del Estado de São Paulo (SEDUC-SP) para enfrentar los altos índices de evasión escolar encontrados en la Enseñanza Secundaria, ya que las prácticas y las decisiones de estos profesionales pueden generar repercusiones significativas en la trayectoria de los estudiantes. Se trata de una investigación de enfoque cualitativo, cuyos datos se obtuvieron por medio de entrevistas con directores de siete escuelas públicas del SEDUC-SP. Las declaraciones de los directores fueron analizadas e interpretadas desde la perspectiva del Análisis de Contenido de Laurence Bardin y a la luz de la literatura que trata sobre el tema. Los resultados muestran que, entre otros elementos, la entrada temprana del alumno en la actuación de los directores escolares ha sido fundamental para reducir los altos índices de evasión escolar.*

Palabras clave: *Gestión de la Educación. Enseñanza Secundaria. Evasión escolar.*

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Introduction

This paper is part of a research carried out in the Graduate Program in Education of the Municipal University of São Caetano do Sul, São Paulo state, Brazil, that analyzed the actions of school principals in tackling High School dropout. The motivation for conducting the research was to find that, despite the fact that the State has implemented public education policies that almost all guaranteed access to Elementary Education (BRASIL, 1996), as well as extended this prerogative to High School students, yet, so far, schools are unable to ensure that most of these young people stay in school, causing them not to complete Basic Education. Thus, most of these students abandon or even drop out of school in the first grade of High School, raising concerns for both families and governments, and especially for school principals, who are increasingly asked for proposing actions that minimize this problem.

As this research focuses on school dropout in High School and there is a correlation between enrollment, performance, dropout and abandonment, it is necessary to comment on these terms. The number of enrollments serves as a reference for calculating the school flow that indicates the progression of students of a cohort, in a given level of education, in relation to their pass, fail or dropout status. Thus, school achievement rates for each school are generated from the sum of the number of students who pass, fail, and drop out at the end of each school year (SILVA, 2017).

Regarding the terms "dropout" and "abandonment", although there are different understandings of the subject, to us, abandonment occurs when the student stops attending school during the school year, and dropout when he/she leaves school or fails in a given school year and does not enroll in the following year to continue his/her studies.

There are several factors that encourage the student to drop out or even abandon High School, whose causes may be linked to school issues, family circumstances and, especially, the economic-social dimension. Regarding those related to the school itself, we can mention, among other elements, the precarious interaction with classmates, teachers and other members of the school community, extremely crowded classrooms, excess of content, poorly prepared teacher, parents who leave their children's learning aside and lack of time for students to perform school activities (SOUSA *et al.*, 2011). However, a problem that has a strong impact on dropout is the successive failures (MENDES, 2013).

There are also other aggravating factors that transcend the school dimension, but they have a great weight on dropout at this level of education. Among others, we cite the issues inherent in the family, such as the educational level of the parents, the income and the social structure of the family (LÜSCHER; DORE, 2011); the need for insertion in the labor market (CAMARGO; RIOS, 2018); the involvement with illicit activities (LOPES; SANTOS, 2015). In summary, the causes of dropping out are varied, ranging from socioeconomic, cultural and geographical conditions, as well as issues related to didactic-pedagogical referrals and the poor quality of public education.

Among the most common alleged reasons by parents or guardians for student dropout

from the final years of Elementary School and by the students themselves in High School, we highlight helping at home or at work, need to work, lack of interest and prohibition of parents to go to school (CAMARGO; RIOS, 2018; LOPES; SANTOS, 2015; MENDES, 2013; LÜSCHER; DORE, 2011).

This scenario is a paradox when it is found that, in accordance with the provisions of Article 4 of the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (known in Brazil as LDB), it is the duty of the State to guarantee basic, compulsory and free education (BRASIL, 1996) to all children and all young people. To this end, this same legal provision defines this task for the Union, the States, the Federal District and the Municipalities, which must establish competencies and guidelines that guide the curricula and their minimum contents in order to ensure common Basic Education. It also seeks to raise the level of education of the population by promoting the improvement of the quality of education at all levels and preparing students for the world of work to meet the regional and local demands of society (BRASIL, 1996).

However, it is found that in High School the State has not achieved the expected success in meeting this demand. Because of this, we have observed the implementation of a set of public actions in order to solve the problem that, in most cases, are planned by technicians who are distant from the school reality. As a result, many of these technicians are unaware of the complexity of the phenomenon, but even so, they charge school principals to meet goals that are sometimes far from the reality of schools.

In this sense, some solutions that minimize dropout rates depend intrinsically on the actions of the government, while others may be proposed and implemented by school principals and their teams. However, there is no way to think about equating the problem without understanding that behind school dropout in High School there are other very serious issues that are not within the governance of school principals.

In light of the above, this research sought to understand the actions taken by school principals of High Schools of the São Paulo State Department of Education (known as SEDUC-SP) in view of their relative autonomy in coping with dropout.

Possible causes of school dropout

Before mentioning the causes of school dropout, it is important to highlight that this phenomenon, historically, "[...] is part of the debates and reflections in the Brazilian public educational field", having acquired great "[...] relevance in the scenario of public policies and education in particular [...]" (MILLEN NETO *et al.*, 2010, p. 3, our translation), with greater emphasis from the 1990s, with the advent of educational policies guided by the neoliberal model. From then on, what is observed is that to some extent:

> [...] education is transferred from the scope of rights to the privileged scope of the market, transforming it from a social right to a service, a commodity that must be acquired in the free market, since education is redefined according to the logic of the market by neoliberal reforms (COSTA JR., 2010, p. 44, our translation).

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With this, it became increasingly privileged the guarantee of access and permanence of the student in school without due concern for the quality of teaching. One of the major concerns with ensuring this principle is that of keeping students in school, thus avoiding school dropout or abandonment. Yet,

> […] the democratization of education is not limited to access to the educational institution. Access is certainly the initial door for democratization, but it is also necessary to ensure that all those who enter the school are able to stay there successfully. Thus, the democratization of education is made with access and permanence of all in the educational process, within which school success reflects quality. But only these three characteristics do not yet complete the broad sense of the democratization of education (BRASIL, 2010, p. 45, our translation).

Thus, without much concern with the qualitative aspects, we are increasingly looking for the culprits for dropping out of school, which became a central element for the failure of the then promulgated education policies. In this context, it is observed that, in general, discussions about school dropout revolved around the intersection between school and family roles regarding the responsibilities of the student's school life (QUEIROZ, 2007).

Despite the complexity behind school dropout, this phenomenon manifests itself in different ways, such as: student leaving school and/or the educational system, dropout and future return to school, retention and student failure. However, what the education system understands as dropout is not the same from the student's point of view or even to the school they attended (LÜSCHER; DORE, 2011). Thus, these different perspectives on the subject make it difficult for school principals to propose actions to mitigate dropout.

In general, for the public education system to readmit a student after ten years of absence, can be considered a problem, even if the student or school has another view of the situation. Regardless of anything, the possible relationships between the perspectives of the school system, the school and the student should be very clear, in order to know what their main vision is (LÜSCHER; DORE, 2011).

There are a number of factors that influence dropout; among others, there are the psychological reasons inherent to cognitive and psycho-emotional factors and the sociocultural reasons referring to the students' social context, as well as family characteristics. However, there are also the most varied school factors (MENDES, 2013) and socioeconomic issue. Lüscher and Dore (2011) assert that the student's conviviality with other classmates, with teachers and even with the other members of the school community is a decisive factor for the young person to decide to dropout or continue in the educational institution, for example.

Characteristics of the school environment, such as peer behavior, school resources, physical structures, teacher relationships, and even pedagogical processes may favor dropout. Family circumstances (parental educational level, family income and family social structure) is also an important factor for the student's success or failure (LÜSCHER; DORE, 2011). Another significant family-related factor that contributes to school dropout is the quality of the student's relationship with their parents.

According to Camargo and Rios (2018), most of the young people who have left

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school are in urban areas, needing to be inserted into the labor market and, therefore, make this decision. The motivations for this dropout are diverse, but Sousa *et al.* (2011) claim that research and studies conducted to analyze school dropout address two theories: external and internal situations to the school institution. External situations are related to work, social inequalities, family relationships and drugs. Internal situations are associated with the school itself, including the teacher.

Although there is an obligation of High School studies for young people, Lopes and Santos (2015) point out that the primordiality of work to help with family income coupled with a very tiring workload affect students' performance in relation to studies. In addition, students with a lower socioeconomic status have lower income, thus becoming more willing to drop out. In addition, Mendes (2013) claims that the student's lack of motivation interferes with their learning process. With the absence of a certain disposition, the student ceases to invest in performing tasks with the minimum quality, resulting in a deficient training to exercise citizenship and to feel fulfilled as a person.

Another reason for dropping out, according to Lopes and Santos (2015), is the involvement with illicit activities. The entry into crime and violence is also highlighted by the authors, but we cannot ignore that issues such as overcrowded classrooms, too much content (and also quite uninteresting), poorly prepared teachers, parents who put aside the learning of their children, lack of time to perform school activities (SOUSA *et al.*, 2011), among others, are decisive factors for school dropout in High School.

It is worth mentioning that, in addition to the poor quality of education, failure, lack of interest on the part of the student, school bureaucracy, teasing by classmates also encourage the student to drop out of school before the completion of High School. On this subject, Mendes (2013) denounces that 75% of the students think that the main problem of this level of education is the disinterested students. This scenario is worrying because, according to Sousa *et al.* (2011), normally, students who are considering dropping out do so without any communication to their parents (or guardians), especially when they are of legal age. These authors express the idea that the educational institution bears a great responsibility for the success or failure of students, highlighting those who belong to the lower social classes of the population. It happens that, many times, "[...] the school disregards the cultural capital of its students from the poor class, being the teacher blamed for the student's dropout and failure" (SOUSA *et al.*, 2011, p. 28, our translation).

Moreover, studies indicate that successive failures are a phenomenon that aggravates the interruption of school studies. As a result, "[...] dropout should be seen as a process and not just as a punctual moment in the student's life" (MENDES, 2013, p. 263). To this author, school dropout is the final stage of a cumulative and tense school performance.

Trombini, Olegrário and Laroque (2017) explain that the problem that causes school dropout is not the student's fault, or family's or teacher's, specifically. They therefore suggest that consideration should be given to what is actually being done at the educational institution. The authors also point out that, although the subject has been under discussion for some time in many schools, the subject needs to be rethought, as each year the number of

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students who leave High School only rises, with increasing failure rates, thus characterizing school failure.

Another problem posed by Mendes (2013) is that, sometimes, school dropout is seen by each member that makes up the school community differently. In this sense, the author claims that, on the one hand, in the view of the school principal, dropout is due to the absence of student incentives, as they tend to associate learning with students' professional needs. On the other hand, from the perspective of pedagogical coordination, school dropout occurs mainly due to poor student performance, given that, when the student encounters a low grade, he/she becomes unmotivated, to the point of wanting to dropout of school. This is because the student finds him/herself unable to retrieve the worked content, as well as the grades to be approved. In turn, to teachers, dropout is related to the economic and social conditions of family and student (MENDES, 2013).

However, there are other conceptions that help explain dropout. According to Rumberger (2006 *apud* MENDES, 2013), for example, the resources that the school institution offers or ceases to offer may influence both the engagement and economic performance, as well as contribute to the student's disengagement and dropout process. According to Diniz and Quaresma (2016), the traditional format of High School added to the administrative, institutional and physical structure of the school corroborates the decision of the young to abandon their studies in full school period. To these authors, there is a need to obtain a quality education that makes the student able to exercise citizenship.

Diversified and attractive classes, qualification and appreciation of professionals involved in teaching, increasing financial investments and expansion of socialization moments can make the student realize that the knowledge obtained in the classroom is useful in their daily life outside the classroom (DINIZ; QUARESMA, 2016). In addition, "[...] even with all government measures that come to school, the group of school principals should seek to establish educational strategies and practices and to care about their students' learning, especially to reduce dropout and failure rates" (TROMBINI; OLEGRÁRIO; LAROQUE, 2017, p. 146, our translation). Therefore, it is essential to use different languages with students due to the complexity of exchanging ideas and experiences in order to propose effective solutions and expand the importance of each student within school life.

Methodological procedures

Given the objectives of this research, we opted for the qualitative approach because this method has been providing, for several decades, major contributions to the advancement of knowledge in education. The participants of the research were seven school principals of public schools of SEDUC-SP, whose choice of these schools was based on a previous analysis of the flow (relationship between promotion, abandonment and dropout) of 2018 of the total schools of the Board of Education from the state capital. Three schools with low dropout and abandonment rates and four with high dropout and abandonment rates were selected.

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Data were obtained through a semi-structured script that guided the interview, which did not prevent other issues inherent to the subject from being addressed during the interview. Although the original research proposed five questions, the results of three of them are presented in this paper. The answers, obtained between February and March 2019, were organized, classified and categorized, considering their similarity from the perspective of Content Analysis (BARDIN, 2004). The names attributed to the categories as well as their definitions were chosen from the central idea of the answers presented and the theoretical basis adopted in the work (CAMARGO; RIOS, 2018; LOPES; SANTOS, 2015; MENDES, 2013; LÜSCHER; DORE, 2011).

To ensure confidentiality about the participants' identities, the letter "P" was used for principals and a number to differentiate them. All principals felt comfortable during the interviews, allowing them to express their perception about the research theme, as they were guaranteed anonymity.

Creating categories

Assuming that categorization refers to placing each element in a group common to it (BARDIN, 2004), in this research the categories are linked to the grouping of questions during the interview, which bring very similar answers. However, in this text, given its dimension, we present below only three categories out of five, namely: reasons for dropping out of school; school dropout in High School: a challenge for the school principal; and public education policies and school dropout.

Category 1: Reasons for dropping out of school

In this category, the questioning and perceptions of school principals about school dropout in High School and the factors that possibly cause school dropout were grouped. To this end, the following question was asked: "According to the 2017 School Census, some schools have difficulty dealing with the issue of student retention in school, as many of them end up dropping out and, therefore, do not complete High School. In your opinion, why do you think this has been happening so often and what the main factors driving this phenomenon would be?".

The answers obtained allowed us to explore one of the main reasons that promote dropout, namely: entering the labor market, either by the student's own will or by family need, as can be seen in this statement, for example:

> The High School student has other goals besides schooling. He prefers to go to the job market, look for courses and then he gets more involved with the course and forgets basic education even though this course is not enough without basic education. But the family has no such awareness. Incidentally, neither the family nor the student has either; so that's the big problem (P1).

Often, the student does not go to the job market because of the family's need or desire, but because he/she sees opportunities according to his/her momentary life goal. Because parents often lack the insight to keep a young person in school, they direct them to the job market early. However, still regarding the insertion of the student who goes to High School, in the labor market, a second research participant made the following comment: "The student leaves [the school] because he has to support a family. In our community, we find that a lot. He is solely responsible sometimes, financially for the family, so he needs to start working and, because of that, he leaves school" (P2).

Performing a more punctual analysis of this statement, we note that this school principal understands the problem and, to some extent, the reason why the student drops out of school to be able to work and thus help his family financially. Roughly speaking, this type of problem occurs most often with students in urban areas of large cities (CAMARGO; RIOS, 2018).

A second school principal endorsed that this problem is common in High School, given that he made the following comment: "[...] it is because of the choice of work over the school that is the main cause of dropout. They start studying and working, but they can't stand it; and then they give up on the way, midway through High School" (P4). Assuming that, in general, a professional works around eight hours a day and, in addition, it takes up to four hours on the way home, work and school, it becomes quite difficult for the student to reconcile work and school as they usually comes to school exhausted, preventing him/her from concentrating on classes.

Therefore, despite the fact that the legislation requires young people to complete High School, their socioeconomic conditions lead them to prioritize work over studies, leading them to dropout. This is due, among other things, to the difficulty of reconciling a high workload with studies (LOPES; SANTOS, 2015).

It is also worth noting that the economic situation experienced by Brazilians in recent years, as well as the high unemployment rates, besides taking students out of schools, lead them to informal employment, because:

> One of the major reasons [school dropout], even at the end of the course, is the issue of work. Informal work that they do and can't handle... after coming to school. The boy, a way of saying, because there are also girls who work [...]. I, there in Oswaldo Cruz square, the other day, I went to have dinner, it was about 9 pm, I was coming back and I found a boy selling candies there in that square, he was our student! A 15 year old boy (P6).

Lately, young people and the streets have had a fairly close relationship. Students find urban spaces more interesting than school content. This is because "[...] the school is not attractive to the student, so he/she ends up dropping out of the school; he/she has no interest in the school; has no sense of belonging with the school and this is fundamental" (P5). This same school principal stated that the low attractiveness of the classes also favors the dropout of the High School student. However, there are other factors that foster dropout, such as the geographical location of the school, for example:

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> We are in a school that is considered a transition school due to its location. So we have a very large percentage of students who do not live in the region and this is a hindrance. Here, in particular, we have a lot of problems about this, parents come to work here in the region and want to bring their children to stay close, study here, but when the father leaves his job and returns to his home neighborhood, the father takes the [young] child away from school, this is quite common here [...] (P6).

This view was corroborated by a second school principal who commented on the subject: "Many students move and then leave school, they move out of town, others drop out because they live with their grandmother or grandpa, 'they have no father nor mother', so they decide to stop studying and leave school" (P7).

In summary, school dropout causes the age-grade distortion to be increasing and, thus, favors the increase of the functional illiteracy index. This is serious as it makes life even harder for these young people who end up not getting a well-paid job. Therefore, principals need to be aware that although these age-grade distortion rates are not the highest among Latin American parents (KRAWCZYK, 2011), unattractive schools tend to favor dropout and therefore the increase of these indicators.

Category 2: High school dropout: a challenge for the school principal

Schools participating in the Full time Education Program (*Programa de Ensino Integral - PEI*) have low dropout rates in High School, including, in most schools participating in this program, this rate is zero. However, there is a high transfer rate to regular school for students to reconcile study and work.

In order to know the work strategies adopted by these principals to minimize the number of transfers and even avoid dropout, we found that the principals have a concern to make the student feel a sense of belonging to the school. For them, this premise is a powerful tool against dropping out, as pointed out in this statement:

> The word here is "presence pedagogy", from which the student feels a sense of belonging to the school; he/she realizes the importance of studying and knows that we prepare him/her for the outside world. [...]. So here we offer what we believe to be a differentiator that he/she does not find in any other school, such as the concern with learning (P1).

Although this statement allows us to infer that, to this principal, the school that is part of the Full time Education Program has a great differential and is more concerned with student learning when compared to other schools, there is no doubt that their attention to their Students is great. The idea is to make it clear to students that the school is not just a classroom, but a whole, a place for human development from an interdimensional perspective. This is important because the lack of student motivation may interfere with the learning process, so that they stop performing their tasks with quality, impairing their training for the full exercise of citizenship (MENDES, 2013).

It is worth mentioning that many of these schools have an infrastructure differential, as well as they count on: "[...] teacher-tutor who closely follows the student's learning,

attendance, performance and, based on this process, guides and keeps parents informed about students' school life" (P3).

It is noteworthy that many school principals stated that, when parents are present in their children's school life, certainly the grades obtained in the assessments are higher and the probability of the student dropping out is much lower. To them, when there are incentives for studies that associate students' personal needs, the chances of dropping out are low.

To Lüscher and Dore (2011), the way students are treated by peers, teachers and other school agents is fundamental for their success and permanence in school. Therefore, school principals need to be aware of school practices and curriculum (TROMBINI; OLEGRÁRIO; LAROQUE, 2017).

The main action to prevent the student from evading school is their daily monitoring in the classroom. Thus, when his/her absence is detected, the management immediately communicates with the families, seeking to know what happened.

> We practically do daily monitoring, the student who is missing three times in a row receives a call, if they are underage [most are], contact is made with the guardian to know the reasons of the absences. Those who stay away longer, we ask to go back to school with the person responsible, to talk, to see what the problem is, to know if there is any adjustment to be made for him/her to complete the school year (P4).

Despite all this management effort to ensure that the student does not miss classes, this process is not always successful. Sometimes this contact does not have the expected return and, from this, the management ends up having to take more pragmatic attitudes, but always in accordance with the legislation.

> We have systematic monitoring, coordination during the collective pedagogical work class, talk to teachers who are also attentive to find out if there are students who are not attending classes. When this happens, we make the telephone contact first; no way, we make the formal contact; the student did not return, we forward to the Guardianship Council, although it does not have much result (P6).

We note, therefore, that the referral of the problem to the Guardian Council is only a formal action, because the return obtained is practically nil. This same school principal added that the Guardian Council is "[...] the one that could put pressure on the parents, but it takes time; sometimes the father is called in the year after the notification we made" (P6). On the same subject, another principal stated that,

> [...] when we cannot make [contact] with the student, it is with the family and, in the case of minors, the referral to the Guardianship Council. [But] no, it doesn't work. It's more for the sake of bureaucracy because the [student] return is most effective when we actually talk to the student and try to explain. But, so, when he is really gone, there is no longer contact with the student, this issue of the Guardianship Council, unfortunately, is a waste of time, we have no return; the information goes and dies there, stays there (P2).

These statements show that, contrary to current legislation, the Guardianship Council has not been working in partnership with schools and families to help minimize High School abandonment and dropout.

Category 3: Public education policies and dropout

Public education policies and government programs are indispensable for ending school dropout. As a result, we have observed that some governments create various measures to achieve this goal (TROMBINI; OLEGRÁRIO; LAROQUE, 2017). As these programs are not always effective, we seek to know the perceptions of school principals on the subject, because, in São Paulo, there are governmental initiatives in this regard, such as the "Who misses is missed" and the "Active Search" project. However, testimonials show that managers are more familiar with the first program.

In the "Who misses is missed" program, the school principal and his/her staff note the students' absences, identify the reasons and point out strategic actions to remedy the problem. Together with the collegiate bodies, such as the Students' Guild and the Parent-Teacher Association, they put into practice, in regular classes, diversified actions designed to stimulate student enthusiasm (SÃO PAULO, 2017).

However, to the school principals interviewed, the program "Who misses is missed" does not produce the expected results, because the problem of dropout is related to the student's family. In general, in the perception of the principals, there is no family commitment to the child's school life, as evidenced by this statement:

> The issue is not "in loco" school. So the issue is parent accountability, it's really family. From the moment the student is missing, because the time is lost. [...] because here we have cases of students who do not come to school because the father or the mother often misses the time. It is also a reality. Then we insist, keep calling and the student returns to the school environment. But he has no home care and does not consider education as a base, his life project. Then it starts to get too complicated. There is no appreciation of education outside the school environment (P3).

Similarly, a second school principal questions the effectiveness of this program. To him, despite the government's bold goals, the project "Who misses is missed" is not effective in reducing dropout (P2). We understand from the principal's speech that this program is practiced with that student who has excessive unexcused absences, simply because of unwillingness to attend school. This causes this young person to be promoted regardless of the recovery of lost knowledge.

Because of this, some principals choose to create their own methods to minimize the problem of dropout because they do not believe in the government proposal.

> I am not depending on the outside; this is where the problem is, so this is where we will solve it. Until they put this project there Who Misses is missed [negative sign]. They [Board of Education] are calling the guild a lot for participation because the guild also ends up causing students to mobilize the school for certain situations. To know, to make us live here, we don't even think about what happens outside (P5).

Still, SEDUC-SP has been showing that the project brings good results. According to the State Department of Education, this program made 60% of students with excess absences return to school to complete the school year. This makes the state of São Paulo to have one of the lowest rates of absenteeism in Brazilian schools (SÃO PAULO, 2017). However, due to

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the lack of effective results, answering the question made during the interview, some principals do not agree with this point of view and suggest other referrals, as the following school principal points out:

> I strongly believe that if schools had a Social Worker it would help a lot. Well, there are many [students] who cannot reconcile work and school. They also have family reasons, housing reasons, live far away, come to work in the center, then study at a school in the center, then get tired to leave. So I think guidance from a Social Worker would greatly help students to organize their lives. We try to do that, but we are not professionals at it (P4).

What management points out here is that by itself it cannot solve all the problems of the school, because its demands are many, and these projects are created by office technicians who are unaware of the school reality. As a suggestion, the school principal proposes the attendance of a specialist in situations of social vulnerability. However, there are also those who believe that teachers have been able to solve the problem, but this requires consistency between the number of teachers and the demands of the school.

> [...] we believe that suddenly, if there were more teachers, including even a support teacher in the classroom, I think it would be an interesting public policy to implement. Because the teacher, often in a room with 40 students, which is the expected number of students in High School, cannot give individualized attention to this student who has a lag that demotivates and even causes him to drop out of school. So, I think it would be interesting to point out that the presence of a qualified person ... and within the same shift, because this issue of doing a recovery work in the late hours... we find it very difficult for the student to come back in the late hours (P2).

The concern of this school principal is centered on the teaching conditions, which ends up hindering the teaching work. He considers that the teacher's difficulty in giving attention to all students in a more individualized way is a factor that can contribute to the dropout. An alternative would be the proposition of a support teacher who was already part of this school system, but was suspended and returned in 2019, in the second semester.

Tutoring has been one of the measures schools use as a strategy to minimize student failure, but these interventions are limited because of infrastructure and specific funding conditions that interfere with student attendance and permanence (REAL *et al*., 2019).

In summary, with a view to school dropout, some managers tend to apply actions in line with government programs, but the success of their initiatives has encountered some barriers in a very chaotic and constrained scenario.

Final considerations

This research shows that the challenges faced by school managers to minimize dropout in High School are increasing, as the need to enter the job market makes the student put studies as low priority. This happens, among other things, because the socioeconomic conditions of these young people force them to choose between completing High School and finding a job, corroborating the results of other research (CAMARGO; RIOS, 2018).

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As ensuring student permanence in school is part of the school management goals of SEDUC-SP, school teams undertake actions to contain dropout in High School. Roughly speaking, these actions have different focuses, such as student motivation, teacher qualification, each student's discrepancy and specificity, content recovery and strengthening the teacher-student relationship in accordance with the reality and needs of students of each school. However, among the seven schools investigated, five of them had specific actions on school flow, including in this set of dropout actions.

Schools, whose actions have not focused on reducing dropout, have had the biggest problems with High School abandonment and dropout in recent years. In addition, in these schools, principals were less concerned with implementing more flow-oriented actions, either because they did not believe in government projects, or because they shifted responsibility for dropout to other school professionals, such as the principal assistant or coordinating teacher.

In view of the above, despite the obligation of High School, under the current legislation term, the socioeconomic conditions of most young people make them end up prioritizing their work over the continuation of studies in High School leading them to dropout and even school abandonment. We understand that this problem must be addressed through both public policies and more specific actions of school management, as the completion of High School, besides being a key factor for ensuring employability, enables the pursuit of studies at higher level, and what is more important, "[...] the improvement of the student as a human person, including the ethical formation and the development of intellectual autonomy and critical thinking" (BRASIL, 1996, p. 18, our translation).

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Notes

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