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NEWS REPORT

Country:	Hungary
Title:	Roma pupils face difficulties and uncertainties after segregated school closes in Csobánka
Date:	28 September 2016
Expert:	Kádár, András
<u>Context</u>	
Issue at stake:	After Roma-only school is closed down in small town, schools of neighbouring town deny enrolment and the central state body responsible for the management of schools takes action with significant delay
Ground of discrimination:	race/ethnic origin
Source:	miscellaneous
Field:	education
Applicable law:	N/A

Content

Development: Csobánka is a small town of 3000 not far from Budapest. The number of school-aged children is over 300, but parents who could afford to do so, started to enrol their children into other schools in neighbouring settlements in the 1990's. As a result, only children of marginalised, disadvantaged almost exclusively Roma families remained in the town's only school, which regularly achieved worse than the national average scores at competence tests and where the physical conditions had severely deteriorated in the past years. In May 2016, it was decided that the school be closed at the end of the 2015/16 academic year. There are plans to open a denominational school in the town, but that will not start to admit children before September 2017.

This development put the 37 children still going to the Csobánka school in a very difficult situation, due to strong political resistance from the local council of the neighbouring town Pomáz, which fervently objected to the placement of the Csobánka pupils into any of the three schools operating in Pomáz. (It is the task of KLIK – the central state agency responsible for the operation of schools – to decide about the placement of the pupils in such cases.) The mayor and 9 municipal council members of Pomáz wrote a letter to Zoltán Balog, Minister responsible for education demanding that no pupils from Csobánka would be placed in Pomáz, as in Csobánka, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils is very high, which can cause problems to the children of Pomáz, and it would be unfair to guarantee the education of Csobánka residents from the taxes of people living in Pomáz. 2500 Pomáz residents also signed a letter of protest against the placement of the children from Csobánka in the town's schools. Csobánka parents expressed their suspicion that anti-Roma sentiments also played a role in the protests, and they were afraid that they would not be able to find a school for their children, and worried that even if they could, they would not be able to pay the costs of taking their children to school in neighbouring towns.

On 23 July, KLIK issued a press release stating that all 37 pupils would be placed in due time, and the additional transportation costs would be paid by KLIK. On 23 August, the daily paper Magyar Nemzet published an article claiming that places had been found for all the concerned children. However, on the next day, the municipal council sent an open letter to the head of KLIK, expressing the council's protest against the fact that despite previous promises Csobánka children would be placed in Pomáz schools. According to information from Csobánka parents, this letter achieved the desired purpose, as before its publication 15 out of the 37 children (mainly those up to 4th class) were supposed to go to Pomáz schools, but finally, only 6 children got official notification that they were admitted into one of the three Pomáz schools, all other pupils had to enrol to schools in Szentendre, which is further away from Csobánka. One mother has complained that her child with disability gets developmental treatment in Pomáz, and it will be close to impossible for her to manage the transportation of the two children if her older child must attend a school in Szentendre. She tried to request admission to the Pomáz schools, but she was rejected everywhere (schools are only obliged to admit children from schooling areas other than theirs, if KLIK designates them for that particular child, in all other cases they are free to reject pupils from other schooling areas). A father complained that two of his three children were placed in one of the Szentendre schools, but the third one was placed in another one, again making life rather difficult for the family.

Key points of analysis: The case provides a good example of the difficulties of desegregation when it is carried out in an ad hoc manner, without careful planning and communication with all the concerned stakeholders, and how such measures can cause difficulties to the children and parents of disadvantaged families.

Internet link source: <http://abcug.hu/senkinek-nem-kellenek-csobankai-maradek-gyerekek-2/> and <http://abcug.hu/az-en-gyerekem-majd-elsejen-beesik-az-iskolapadba/>.