Paper 2/6 - Studying specific school based measures tackling early school leaving. A case study in Flanders/Belgium

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In Flanders (Belgium) early school leaving is high on the political and educational agenda. Important social inequalities are apparent, mainly related to students' socio-economic and immigration background: 40% of the early school leavers are boys with a lower educated mother, not-Dutch as a home language and an immigration background while only 4/% of the girls with a higher educated mother, Dutch as a home language and without an immigration background are identified as ESL'er (Van Landeghem, De Fraine, Gielen, & Van Damme, 2013). Research shows that the amount of school changes can be a very important predictor for early school leaving (E. Lee & T. Burkam, 2000). During our fieldwork, we found that teachers, principals and other school staff stress the very big flow of students changing schools during the school year which makes it hard for the school staff to implement a (long term) intra-muros measure which can be a very important step to tackle early school leaving. On the one hand, students change schools voluntary because they feel they have the 'right' to change schools as many times as they want which causes a constantly changing school population, the so called school (s)hoppers. On the other hand, students are very often 'forced' to leave the school as a result of certification and/or suspension policies within the school. These youngsters are often seen as 'dumped' by their old school into their new school. Both voluntary and involuntary school changes can have negative impacts on the implementation of intramuros measures in the former as well as in the new school. Based upon our qualitative fieldwork in five Antwerp schools in order to evaluate the intra-muros measures undertaken by the school to tackle early school leaving, we found a recurrent issue of intra-muros measures decreasing the effectiveness of other intra-muros measures (against early school leaving). This presentation will focus on the conflicting relationship between intra-muros school regulations and will also focus on the perceptions of school staff about this phenomenon.