

CHALLENGES OF THE CONTINUOUS PROGRESSION SYSTEM IN THE SÃO PAULO
STATE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

*DESAFIOS DO REGIME DE PROGRESSÃO CONTINUADA NA REDE PÚBLICA ESTADUAL
PAULISTA*

*RETOS DEL SISTEMA DE PROGRESIÓN CONTINUA EN LA RED PÚBLICA DEL ESTADO
PAULISTA*



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ABSTRACT: The objective of this article is to discuss the Continuous Progression regime in the São Paulo state public school system, by means of qualitative research, bibliographic and documentary survey. Covering 44 documents from 1995 to 2017, the following were highlighted: Bill 251/2007, which provided for the end of Continuous Progression in the state of SP; Supplementary Law 41/2008, which instituted the Bonus for Results (BR) and Bill 857/2015, which proposed the end of "Automatic Approval". The analysis of quantitative data from IBGE showed that there was an increase in the school failure rate between 1999 and 2016, invalidating the claim that the Continuous Progression regime had become the practice of Automatic Promotion. However, the absence of participation in the discussion of the proposal, continuing education for teachers, investment in appropriate materials, discussions about the policy in initial teacher training courses, etc., undermined the implementation of the educational policy.

KEYWORDS: Public Policies in Education. Evaluation of Education. Quality of Education. Elementary Education. Continuous Progression.

RESUMO: O objetivo desse artigo é discutir o regime de Progressão Continuada na rede pública estadual paulista, por meio de investigação qualitativa, levantamento bibliográfico e documental. Abrangendo 44 documentos de 1995 a 2017, destacaram-se: o Projeto de Lei 251/2007, que dispôs sobre o fim da Progressão Continuada no estado de SP; a Lei Complementar 41/2008, que instituiu a Bonificação por Resultados (BR) e o Projeto de Lei 857/2015, que propôs o fim da "Aprovação Automática". A análise de dados quantitativos do IBGE demonstrou que houve um aumento no índice de reprovação escolar entre 1999 e 2016, invalidando a afirmação de que o regime de Progressão Continuada teria se convertido na prática da Promoção Automática. Já a ausência de participação na discussão da proposta, formação continuada para os docentes, investimento em materiais adequados, discussões sobre a política nos cursos de formação inicial de professores etc., prejudicaram a concretização da política educacional.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Políticas Públicas em Educação. Avaliação da Educação. Qualidade da Educação. Ensino Fundamental. Progressão Continuada.

RESUMEN: El objetivo de este artículo es discutir el régimen de Progresión Continua en el sistema público de enseñanza del estado de São Paulo, a través de investigación cualitativa, bibliográfica y documental. Abarcando 44 documentos de 1995 a 2017, se destacan: el Proyecto de Ley 251/2007, que dispuso el fin de la Progresión Continuada en el estado de SP; la Ley Complementaria 41/2008, que estableció la Bonificación por Resultados (BR) y el Proyecto de Ley 857/2015, que propuso el fin de la "Aprobación Automática". El análisis de los datos cuantitativos del IBGE mostró que hubo un aumento en la tasa de fracaso escolar entre 1999 y 2016, lo que invalida la afirmación de que el régimen de Progresión Continua se habría convertido en la práctica de la Promoción Automática. Sin embargo, la ausencia de participación en la discusión de la propuesta, formación continua de los profesores, inversión en materiales adecuados, discusiones sobre la política en los cursos de formación inicial de los profesores, etc., perjudicó la implementación de la política educativa.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Políticas Públicas en Educación. Evaluación de la Educación. Calidad de la Educación. Educación Básica. Progresión Continua.

Introduction

Some ideas from previous decades remain rooted in society's ideas, including the common sense that failing is “giving the student a new chance to learn the following year”, even after countless studies have demonstrated how this can be harmful to the development process of students.

In an attempt to counter these ideas, several authors such as: Barreto and Mitulis (2001), Freitas (2004), Bertagna (2008) and Mainardes (2009), point to learning cycles as a contribution to progressive education. They argue that offering a longer period of time to learn content, previously compressed within a single year, would grant students an expansion in the learning period, in order to respect the different processes of individual development and the possibility of progressing in school.

In this sense, the Continuous Progression regime along with the cycles are of great importance, since the first proposes not to break from one academic year to the next, with the exception of the end of cycles – academic blocks, generally of three years –, which they must respect the stages of students' development, as learning occurs progressively and in a non-linear way for students; the second proposes that teaching should no longer be organized in a fragmented way, as under the graded system, where there was the option of retention at the end of each year, but considering a longer period of time, enabling the training of students. In this way, school learning time is taken as a focus and with respect for the development of students.

To deepen the understanding of Continued Progression, having the São Paulo state public network as a context, research was carried out through qualitative investigation with bibliographic and documentary research. 44 documents were analyzed, found in the period between 1995 and 2017, which dealt with the Continuous Progression regime in the São Paulo state public network; among them, two Bills that attempted to remove the Continuous Progression regime in the same education network: PL 251/2007 (SÃO PAULO, 2007) and PL 857/2015 (SÃO PAULO, 2015).

The topics most covered in the documents analyzed were: school evaluation, evaluation systems, school organization, student reinforcement and recovery programs, organization of curricula and other school documents, such as: the Pedagogical Political Project (PPP) and the school regulations. However, in this article, the focus was on documents relating to attempts to abolish educational policy.

Thus, this article aims to point out some challenges faced in the implementation of the Continued Progression regime in the São Paulo state public network, especially the two Bills

251/2007 and 857/2015 (SÃO PAULO, 2007, 2015) that proposed the its dismissal, relating it to something necessary to reverse problems found in the educational sphere.

Trajectory of the continued progression regime in the São Paulo state public network: paths to its dismissal?

From the Deliberation of the State Education Council (CEE-SP) 09/1997 (SÃO PAULO, 1997), the Continuous Progression regime was implemented in the São Paulo state public network, providing for a school reorganization with new forms of student assessment, with longer time for learning, which should consider the development cycles of students, contrary to what happened in the graded system, since this: “[...] resulted in new educational problems, which over time became major obstacles in the Brazilian educational system, starting to accumulate high rates of failure and school dropout” (SILVA, 2015, p. 18, our translation).

Silva (2015) clarifies that the cycles came as a policy of non-failure, given the problems encountered in the field of education and, as Mainardes (2009, p. 11, our translation) highlights, is:

[...] a form of organizing schooling that aims to overcome the graduated school model, organized in annual series and which classifies students throughout the schooling process. With this new form of organization, the years of compulsory education are divided into cycles of 2, 3 or 4 years. Failure is only possible at the end of each cycle and, in some experiences, it is completely eliminated and replaced by other forms of student progression.

Thus, when the Continuous Progression regime was implemented in the São Paulo state public network, Elementary Education was organized into two cycles, one from the 1st to the 4th grade and the other, from the 5th to the 8th grade (a period after 2009, when the nine-year education and the change in nomenclature from grade to year). However, in practice, these blocks were brought together due to the reorganization of state schools, not necessarily respecting the students' development cycles, which led to a serialization within the cycles.

One of the objectives considered regarding the reorganization of teaching in cycles and based on Continued Progression, according to the official documents analyzed, was the reduction of dropout and consequent social exclusion of the neediest students in the school, as well as the regulation of school flow, since the continuous failure of several students culminated in overcrowded and heterogeneous classrooms, with students of different ages, making it impossible to open new places. However, Rocha (2013, p. 9, our translation) warns that:

Even when educational policies are outlined with the aim of minimizing the obstacles faced, the focus is generally placed on just one of their facets, often the economic one, translated into an attempt to reduce the numbers relating to issues of school flow or optimization of resources.

In this way, documentary research was carried out, covering 44 official documents, including: laws, decrees, resolutions, among others, which dealt with the Continuous Progression regime and issues related to the topic. The table below presents the documents researched and their respective dates of approval, approval or publication:

Table 1 – Documents searched (SP)

	DOCUMENT	DATE
1	SEE Decree no. 40,473/95. Establishes the State Public Schools Reorganization Program (SÃO PAULO, 1995).	Published in DOE on 11/22/95.
2	Resolution SE no. 27, of March 29, 1996. Provides for the School Performance Assessment System of the State of São Paulo (SÃO PAULO, 1996).	In force from the date of its publication (03/29/1996).
3	SE Resolution of May 13, 1996. Approves CEE Opinion No. 170/96, which authorizes the Department of Education to implement the Elementary School Reorganization Project – Acceleration Classes (SÃO PAULO, 1996a).	Approves CEE Opinion nº 170/96 on 05/13/1996.
4	Resolution SE no. 77/96. Provides for Acceleration Classes in the State Education Network (SÃO PAULO, 1996b).	DOE 07/04/96, Section I, p. 7.
5	CEE Deliberation no. 11/96. Provides for requests for reconsideration and appeals regarding the final results of evaluation of students in the 1st and 2nd grade education system in the State of São Paulo, regular and supplementary, public and private (SÃO PAULO, 1996c).	Approved on 12/11/96.
6	CEE indication no. 12/96. About evaluation and resources (SÃO PAULO, 1996d).	Approved on 12/11/96.
7	EEC opinion no. 315/97. Consultation on Resolution SE no. 235/87 (CEE Deliberation nº 11/96) (SÃO PAULO, 1997).	DOE 07/03/97, Section I, p. 10.
8	CEE Deliberation no. 08/1997. Provides for the adequacy of the CEE to Article 21 of Federal Law no. 9,394, of December 20, 1996 (SÃO PAULO, 1997a).	Approved on 07/29/97 (published in DOE 08/01/97).
9	CEE Deliberation no. 09/1997. Establishes the Continuous Progression in Elementary Education regime in the education system of the State of São Paulo (SÃO PAULO, 1997b).	Approved by Res. SE 04/08/97 – DOE 05/08/97, Section I, p. 12-13.
10	CEE indication no. 08/97. Continuous Progression Regime (SÃO PAULO, 1997c).	Approved by Res. SE 04/08/97 – DOE 05/08/97, Section I, p. 12-13.
11	CEE indication no. 13/97. Guidelines for preparing the Regulations for Schools in the State of São Paulo (SÃO PAULO, 1997d).	DOE 09/30/1997, Section I, p. 11.

12	CEE indication no. 22/97. Assessment and Continued Progression (SÃO PAULO, 1997e).	DOE 12/20/97, Section I, p. 18.
13	CEE Deliberation no. 10/97. Sets standards for drafting the Regulations for primary and secondary education establishments (SÃO PAULO, 1997f).	DOE 01/08/97, Section I, p. 10.
14	CEE indication no. 09/97. Guidelines for preparing school regulations in the state of São Paulo (SÃO PAULO, 1997g).	DOE 01/08/97, Section I, p. 10.
15	Resolution SE no. 04/98. Provides standards to be observed in the curriculum composition and school organization (SÃO PAULO, 1998).	DOE 01/17/98, Section I, p. 6.
16	EEC opinion no. 67/98. Basic Regulations for State Schools (SÃO PAULO, 1998a).	DOE 03/21/98, Section I, p. 20-22.
17	Joint CENP-COGSP-CEI instruction. Curricular Reorganization, Continuous Progression and Daily Journey of Students and Teachers (SÃO PAULO, 1998b).	DOE 02/13/98, Section I.
18	EEC opinion no. 425/98. Consultation on Continued Progression (SÃO PAULO, 1998c).	DOE 01//08/98, Section I, p. 17-18.
19	Guidelines for assessment and parameters for referring students to acceleration classes (SÃO PAULO, 1998d).	Government of the State of São Paulo/SEE/FDE, 1998
20	Teach for real! Assessment. Learn for real! Acceleration Classes (SÃO PAULO, 1998e).	Government of the State of São Paulo/SEE/FDE, 1998.
21	The construction of the pedagogical proposal Escola da Escola – The school with a new face – planning 2000 (SÃO PAULO, 2000).	Government of the State of São Paulo/SEE – 2000.
22	The organization of Education in the State network – guidance for schools (SÃO PAULO, 2000a).	Government of the State of São Paulo/SEE, 2000.
23	CEE Deliberation no. 61/06. Sets standards for the implementation of 9-year Elementary Education in the Education System of the State of São Paulo (SÃO PAULO, 2006).	DOE 12/01/06, Section I, p. 17.
24	Resolution SE no. 61/07. Provides for the recording of academic performance of students in State schools (SÃO PAULO, 2007).	Approved on 09/24/07.
25	Resolution SE no. 86/07. Establishes, for the year 2008, the “Read and Write” Program, in Cycle I of the State Elementary Schools of the Teaching Directorates of the Teaching Coordination of the Greater São Paulo Metropolitan Region (SÃO PAULO, 2007 b).	Approved on 12/19/07.
26	Bill 251/2007 Establishes the end of the Continuous Progression of approval of students from the public education network in the State (SÃO PAULO, 2007).	Published in the Assembly Gazette, page 20 on 04/13/2007.
27	Complementary Law no. 41/2008. Establishes Bonus for Results – BR, within the scope of the Department of Education. (SÃO PAULO, 2008).	Published in the Assembly Gazette, page 41 on 08/19/2008.
28	Resolution SE no. 76/08. Provides for the implementation of the Curricular Proposal of the State of São Paulo for	Approved on 11/07/08.

	Elementary and Secondary Education, in state schools (SÃO PAULO, 2008a).	
29	Resolution SE no. 86/08. Provides guidelines and procedures for meeting school demand in school units of the State Education Network (SÃO PAULO, 2008b).	Approved on 11/28/08.
30	Resolution SE no. 96/08. Extends the “Read and Write” Program to State Elementary Schools in the Interior (SÃO PAULO, 2008c).	Approved on 12/23/08.
31	Resolution SE no. 98/08. It establishes guidelines for the curricular organization of elementary and secondary education in state schools (SÃO PAULO, 2008d).	Approved on 12/23/08.
32	Resolution SE no. 66/09. Provides for the implementation of the provisions of Decree no. 54,553, of July 15, 2009, which establishes the State/Municipality Integration Program for the development of joint educational actions that provide an improvement in the quality of education in municipal public schools (SÃO PAULO, 2009).	Approved on 08/21/09.
33	Resolution SE no. 81/11. Establishes Guidelines for the curricular organization of elementary and secondary education in state schools (SÃO PAULO, 2011).	DOE of 12/22/2011, Section I, p. 23.
34	Resolution SE no. 46/12. Provides for in-service training for Basic Education I Teachers, and provides related measures (SÃO PAULO, 2012).	Approved on 04/25/12.
35	Resolution SE no. 68, of 09/27/2013. Establishes the Learning Support Project to meet the pedagogical demands of the final years of primary education and secondary education in the state public network, and provides related measures. (SÃO PAULO, 2013).	Published on 09/27/2013.
36	Resolution SE no. 74, dated 8-11- 2013. Provides for the reorganization of Elementary Education under a Continuous Progression Regime, offered by state public schools, and provides related measures (SÃO PAULO, 2013a).	Published on 11/8/2013.
37	Resolution SE 3, dated 16-1-2014. It amends provisions of Resolution SE 81, of 16-12-2011, which establishes guidelines for the curricular organization of elementary and secondary education in state schools (SÃO PAULO, 2014).	DOE of 1/25/2014 – Section I, page. 16.
38	Resolution SE no. 53/14. Provides for the reorganization of Elementary Education under a Continuous Progression Regime and the School Support Mechanisms for students in Elementary and Secondary Education in state schools (SÃO PAULO, 2014a).	Approved on 10/02/14.
39	Resolution SE 71, dated 29-12-2014. Provides for the Learning Support Project, established by Resolution SE 68, dated 27-9-2013 (SÃO PAULO, 2014b).	Published on 12/29/2014.
40	Resolution SE no. 73/14. Provides for the reorganization of Elementary Education under a Continuous Progression Regime and the School Support Mechanisms for Elementary and High School students in state schools (SÃO PAULO, 2014c).	Approved on 12/29/2014.

41	Resolution SE no. 27/15. Amends the provision of Resolution SE 73, of 12/29/2014, which provides for the reorganization of Elementary Education under a Continuous Progression Regime and the School Support Mechanisms for students in Elementary and Secondary Education in state schools (SÃO PAULO, 2015).	Approved on 05/26/15.
42	Bill no. 857/15. Provides for the end of “Automatic Approval” and provides guidelines for evaluating the learning process in secondary and elementary education in the State’s public education network (SÃO PAULO, 2015a).	Published on 05/27/15. Under ordinary processing.
43	Resolution SE, dated 11-7-2017. Approving, based on article 9 of Law 10,403, of 7/6/1971, Deliberation CEE 155/2017, which “Provides for the evaluation of Basic Education students, at elementary and secondary levels, in the State Education System of São Paulo and takes related measures” (SÃO PAULO, 2017).	Published on 7/11/2017.
44	CEE Deliberation 155/2017. Provides for the assessment of Basic Education students, at elementary and secondary levels, in the São Paulo State Education System and provides related measures (SÃO PAULO, 2017a).	07/12/17 Section I, São Paulo, p. 127.

Source: Barbosa (2020, p. 37)

In Table 1 it was observed that the official documents were published by 5 main bodies: the Legislative Assembly of the State of São Paulo, the collective: CENP-COGSP-CEI, the State Education Council, the State Secretariat of Education and the Secretariat Executive.

The Executive Secretariat formulated 21 documents, the State Education Council, 14, the State Education Secretariat, 5, and the CENP-COGSP-CEI collective, 1, the latter of which questioned the assumptions of the Continuous Progression regime after its implementation in the São Paulo state network, raising some uncertainties among educators.

The Legislative Assembly was responsible for three important documents in this context: Bill 251/2007, which provided for the end of Continued Progression in the state of SP, Complementary Law 41/2008, which established the Bonus for Results and the Project of Law 857/2015, which provided for the end of “Automatic Approval”, giving new guidelines to Elementary and Secondary Education.

Bill 251/2007 proposed the end of Continuous Progression in the approval system for students in the public education system in the state of São Paulo, suggesting that only students who managed to achieve the average (grade) obtained from the bimonthly tests should be approved (SÃO PAULO, 2007).

To justify its proposition, the document highlighted that: “The immense damage that the so-called “Continuous Progression” has been causing to the quality of secondary and fundamental education in the public educational network in the State of São Paulo is notorious”

(SÃO PAULO, 2007, p. 1, our translation), since, according to him, different research from institutions revealed that students in the public education system had unsatisfactory knowledge of concepts considered basic in their teaching stage (SÃO PAULO, 2007, p. 1).

The argument used by the Results Bonus proposal was that by meeting the goals, educators would be valued through the Results Bonus (SÃO PAULO, 2008, p. 1), given that: “Measuring and rewarding results, the starting from previously established objectives, was one of the strategies” (SÃO PAULO, 2008, p. 1, our translation).

Finally, it is worth highlighting that, similar to Bill 251/2007, 857/2015 proposed the reorganization of the assessment and promotion of students to subsequent grades/years, according to their performance in the bimonthly Portuguese Language and Mathematics tests, recovering principles from the 1988 Federal Constitution:

[...] Article 6 The evaluation of the student's performance will be continuous and cumulative, to be expressed in grades, through verification of knowledge learning and the development of skills in class and extra-class activities, demonstrated through bimonthly tests, of no minimum two subjects, Portuguese and Mathematics. Article 7 - The student will only receive approval to graduate or enroll in the next year of the course in which they are enrolled if they obtain, as an average of the tests administered, the average required in the respective disciplines [...] (SÃO PAULO, 2015, p. 3, our translation).

According to Barreto and Mitrulis (2001), from the reorganization of the school with the cycles, there was an attempt to overcome the fragmentation of the curriculum resulting from the serial system, seeking to ensure that the teacher and the school did not lose focus on the objectives foreseen for such a period of development, so that learning takes place in a more flexible way, helping to work with students at different paces.

According to Bertagna (2003, p. 79, our translation), the Continuous Progression regime together with the cycles attempted to change the reality of the selective and exclusionary school, enabling new forms of school organization and evaluation conception and, thus: “If previously approved- if/fails at the end of each grade, it is now expected that the school will find different ways of teaching that ensure students’ learning and their progress within and between cycles”.

However, studies demonstrate that the Continuous Progression regime was implemented in public Elementary Education networks in the state of São Paulo without changing the previous form of organization of schools, grouping the grades into cycles or blocks lasting more than a year and removing the possibility of students failing in this context. According to Biani (2007), such measures meant that the proposal was equated with automatic promotion, which

is approved regardless of student learning and to which educators and the school community opposed, legitimizing the previous system, with the annual retention of students.

Biani (2007, p. 10, our translation) points out that the teachers' resistance was, in part, due to the fact that they did not participate in the discussions that originated the official document that established the Continuous Progression regime in the public education network and, also, that the subsidies for implementing the proposal were not made available, as promised. That way:

The criticism from teaching professionals is related to the fact that “everything was imposed” in an authoritarian manner by the Department of Education, with them - the teachers - being “those most interested in the subject”, ignored in the decision-making process. However, they would have the obligation to comply with orders and be responsible for the results, although they claim that there was no investment in their teacher training and that the material and pedagogical conditions in which they work were not modified to meet the proposal.

Regarding the school community's request for the return of the graded system and classification assessment, Jeffrey (2011, p. 15-16, our translation) highlights some challenges encountered in implementing the educational policy:

[...] teaching resistance to the proposal; lack of understanding of the measure; strengthening the idea of automatic promotion; the difficulty of structuring pedagogical work for heterogeneous groups; teacher training disconnected from the guiding principles of the cycle proposal; and educational problems presented in everyday school life, among other aspects analyzed [...].

Freitas (2004, p. 10, emphasis added, our translation) indicates that the fragmented configuration of serial teaching remained even after the implementation of the Continuous Progression regime in schools; on the other hand, it regulated the issue of failure at the end of each grade, adding to the school's control through external assessments:

It simply limited the power of failure that formal assessment had at the end of each grade, introduced parallel remediation, and attempted to “manage” the educational system more closely with system assessments and greater school control. Here, the question, therefore, is not to choose between *continued progression or series* but to *evaluate with the power to fail or not* [...].

However, Bertagna (2003) highlights that, in addition to the political intentions underlying the proposal, doubts regarding the Continuous Progression regime may have been an obstacle to its implementation, which he pointed out as promising, innovative, but in the way it was implemented in schools of the São Paulo state public network, ended up separating itself

from its original ideas, by focusing on the approval/fail discussion, disregarding other important problems in the context of the reorganization of school time and assessment in education.

Among the documents selected and analyzed, two stood out: PL 251/2007 (SÃO PAULO, 2007), which appeared ten years after the implementation of the regime in the public network, and PL 857/2015 (SÃO PAULO, 2015), both with the proposal to abolish Continuous Progression and return to the graded system with the possibility of failing students annually.

PL 251/2007: movements towards the deconstruction of Continued Progression

PL 251/2007 proposed to remove Continued Progression in the public education network in the state of São Paulo, allowing students to pass the established cycles, according to learning in Portuguese and Mathematics, observed through bimonthly assessments (SÃO PAULO, 2007, p. 1).

The same document made indications regarding reinforcement in Portuguese Language and Mathematics subjects for students who did not achieve the expected performance in the assessments and, at the same time, used the difficulties of not learning to justify the objective of removing the Continuous Progression regime in public schools in the São Paulo network (SÃO PAULO, 2007, p. 1).

Such emphasis on reinforcing the learning of these specific contents was also due to the concern that the state public network should ensure, at a minimum, basic knowledge in Portuguese and Mathematics, which are essential in the curricula and which are aligned with the student assessment state system (SARESP) and, thus, the document recovers and legitimizes school failure, by pointing out that it should not be considered a punishment, but a way of repairing the student's learning, since: “[...] Continued Progression creates, in many cases, a surrealistic situation: the school pretends to teach and the student pretends to learn” (SÃO PAULO, 2007, p. 2, our translation).

However, the document did not specify which research it was based on and added that teachers would be working in conditions unfavorable to good teaching, and that the PL did not intend to demonstrate nostalgia for an outdated school context, but aimed to: “[...] repair mistakes, mechanisms that, despite their noble goals, proved to be flawed in practical terms” (SÃO PAULO, 2007, p. 2, our translation). According to the text of the PL, the proposal was to establish a minimum concept in Portuguese Language and Mathematics assessments so that students could advance to the next grade/year, returning to the idea of a classificatory assessment of the grade system (SÃO PAULO, 2007, p. 2).

In this context, there was a vote on Bill 251/2007 (SÃO PAULO, 2007) in three state commissions (SP), which presented favorable opinions for the approval of the PL: the Constitution and Justice Commission (Opinion 589 of 2012), the Education and Culture Committee (Opinion 590 of 2012) and the Finance, Budget and Planning Committee (Opinion 589 of 2012), demonstrating that they agree with the assumptions of deputy Baleia Rossi (PMDB), author of the project, as demonstrated in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2 – Voting on PL 251/2007 in the Committees

Date	Legislative	Result/Voting	Reporter	Commission
11/21/2007	589/2012	Favorable	Ana Perugini	Constitution and Justice
11/23/2011	590/2012	Favorable	Jorge Caruso	Education and Culture
03/21/2012	591/2012	Favorable	Orlando Balçone	Finance, Budget and Planning

Source: São Paulo (2007)

Table 3 – Regarding the processing of Bill 251/2007

Bill 251/2007	Legislative Number: 251/2007
Summary: Establishes the end of the Continuous Progression for approval of students in the public education network in the State.	Publication date: 04/13/2007
Regime: Ordinary Procedure	Author: Baleia Rossi
Indexers: student, approval, evaluation, discipline, education, primary education, secondary education, school, mathematics, Portuguese, continued progression (regime), quality.	Current stage: Ready for Agenda Last progress 12/04/2018 - Bill 857/2015 attached.

Source: São Paulo (2007)

Furthermore, it was observed that the author of Bill 251/2007, José Américo, was re-elected in his next term, demonstrating a possible dissatisfaction on the part of the electorate with the school context at the time, who, supporting his proposal, re-elected him.

Another aspect that deserves to be highlighted and, contradictorily, conspired against the purposes of a more formative evaluation encouraged by the Continuous Progression regime was, together with the evaluation system of the state of São Paulo (SARESP) as mentioned, was the institution of the Bonus for Results – BR, in August 2008, through Complementary Bill

41/2008 (SÃO PAULO, 2008), which determined the linking of student performance in external assessments to the Results Bonus.

During the period, Governor José Serra sent President Luís Inácio da Silva (Lula) a message with the deliberation of the Legislative Assembly of the State of São Paulo in relation to Complementary Law Project 41/2008 (SÃO PAULO, 2008, p. 1).

In the document, it was considered that, if there were goals, it would be a reason for educators to make more effort, giving teachers motivation, since the lack of clear objectives to achieve would have caused these actors to become complacent, and the bonus would be a form of incentive, with a view to improving the quality of education, providing a bonus of up to 20% in the salary of educators in schools that reached pre-determined goals (SÃO PAULO, 2008, p. 2).

With the creation of the Bonus for Results, competition between schools across Brazil was stimulated, as only educators whose student results in external assessments had stood out among the best in the state network (SP) would receive the bonus and disregarded continuous assessment throughout the school process with a prevalence in learning, contained in the proposal for the Continuous Progression regime, to focus on achieving BR goals, this being another obstacle to the implementation of Continuous Progression, favoring the speech in favor of its dismissal.

However, despite the purpose of revoking Continued Progression after ten years of its implementation in the São Paulo state public network, and even though the opinions of the committees in which the Bill was voted on have corroborated the dismissal of the regime, the last movement of the procedures of Bill 251/2007 (SÃO PAULO, 2007) was its annexation to another document with the same proposal, PL 857/2015 (SÃO PAULO, 2007), at the end of 2018, remaining without a defined response.

PL 857/2015: strengthening the proposal to dismiss the Continued Progression regime

After 8 years of the first attempt to dismiss the Continued Progression regime in São Paulo, PL 857/2015, authored by state deputy José Américo (PT- Workers' Party), proposed the reorganization of school evaluation, based on the performance of students, which should be verified through bimonthly tests, with an emphasis on Portuguese Language and Mathematics (SÃO PAULO, 2015, p. 3).

Attributing responsibility for problems in education to Continuous Progression, PL 857/2015 (SÃO PAULO, 2015) justified the purpose of extinguishing the regime in the São Paulo state public network, taxing it with “automatic approval”:

The high rate of school repetition, professional discouragement of the teaching staff, lack of student interest, indiscipline, chronic problems in the Brazilian educational system, have always been the central focus of educators committed to improving the quality of teaching and the application of access and permanence of children and young people in public schools. Secondary education is the last stage of basic education, a cycle that also incorporates early childhood education and elementary education. Thus, in order to identify the main problems that affect the quality and coverage of secondary and elementary education in Brazil, the immense damage that the so-called “Continuous Progression” has been generating in the public educational network in Brazil is evident (SÃO PAULO, 2015, p. 5, our translation).

To justify the dismissal of Continuous Progression, PL 857/2015 (SÃO PAULO, 2015) pointed out that the regime had caused several damages to education, where:

[...] continued progression does not improve teaching conditions in schools; does not improve student learning; does not increase academic performance; there is a blatant lack of interest on the part of students in the content taught; increase in indiscipline problems at school, causing greater teacher satisfaction at work, **resulting in even greater reduction of the age/grade gap between students** and the worst and most serious, the maintenance of this “automatic approval” process, has resulted in students moving from one grade to another without any mastery of the content taught! (SÃO PAULO, 2015, emphasis added, our translation).

One of the arguments used to justify such damage to education was the reduction in the age/grade gap³ of students, however, if the age/grade gap reduced, it is considered a gain in favor of the Continuous Progression regime and not the opposite, there being a ambiguity in the proposal and justification of PL 857/2015 (SÃO PAULO, 2015).

As can be seen from the table below, PL 857/2015 (SÃO PAULO, 2015) also received approval on 11/28/2018 from the Justice and Writing Committee, with its last move being annexation to PL 251/ 2007 (SÃO PAULO, 2007), which also provided for the dismissal of the Continued Progression regime, however, both continue to be just projects, as their approvals in the Commissions did not mean their implementation in the São Paulo public education network, in which the regime remains current.

³A student can be considered to be behind in their age/grade when they are in a grade/year that is incompatible with their age, or which, according to their age group, they should have already passed.

Table 4 – Voting on the approval of PL 857/2015

Bill 857/2015	Deliberate
Summary: Provides for the end of “ Automatic Approval ” and provides guidelines for evaluating the learning process in secondary and elementary education in the State's public education network.	
Deliberation: Approved the quota of Deputy Celso Nascimento, proposing the addition of PL 857/2015 to PL 251/2007	
Wishes:	
Antonio Salim Curiati - PP	In favor of the rapporteur's vote
Célia Leão - PSDB	In favor of the rapporteur's vote
Celso Nascimento - PSC	In favor of the rapporteur's vote
Edmir Chedid - DEM	In favor of the rapporteur's vote
Geraldo Cruz - PT	In favor of the rapporteur's vote
Gilmaci Santos - REPUBLICANS	In favor of the rapporteur's vote
João Caraméz - PSB	In favor of the rapporteur's vote
Marcos Zerbini - PSDB	In favor of the rapporteur's vote
Marta Costa - PSD	In favor of the rapporteur's vote

Source: São Paulo (2015)

Therefore, there was no dismissal of the Continuous Progression regime in the São Paulo state network and the two Bills that proposed it are still in progress. Furthermore, the studies carried out demonstrated that the lack of participation of teachers in proposing work with Continued Progression and in discussing the legislation that supports it in initial and continuing teacher training courses, and in other spaces, considering its relevance, made its implementation difficult and continue to be obstacles to its implementation to this day, as the proposal has been in place for more than two decades and, in general, is still poorly understood.

However, as highlighted previously, there was a contribution from educational policy to reducing the age/grade distortion, however, in common sense there remains the understanding that Continued Progression has become automatic approval, which can be questioned based on data on the failure and evasion rates, which persist, since if the statement that the regime turned into automatic promotion were true, retentions would not occur, with exceptions in which these are provided for by law, such as, for example, in cases of non-attendance/low school attendance.

Therefore, as for the Continuous Progression regime, as indicated in the aforementioned PL, having been equated to automatic promotion, the numbers reveal another (opposite)

relationship: data from the Ministry of Education/National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (MEC/INEP) and School Census indicate that failures continued to increase, from 3.6% in 1999 in Elementary Education to 3.7% in 2016 in state public schools in São Paulo.

On the other hand, contrary to what was proposed by PL 857/2015 (SÃO PAULO, 2015), and also, according to MEC/INEP and School Census, approval rates increased from 91.6% to 95.6 % in Elementary Education between 1999 and 2016 (with variations in the period), but do not total 100%. Regarding the school dropout rates of Elementary School students in the state of São Paulo between 1999 and 2016, and according to the MEC/INEP and School Census, there was also a decrease from 4.8% (1999) to 0.7% (2016).

In general, approvals increased for Elementary Education and the same occurred with failures. Abandonment rates, in turn, decreased. However, even though it cannot be denied or affirmed that the Continued Progression regime was responsible for improving such indices, such advances in education are notable, especially in relation to age/grade distortion, universalization policies and, in a certain way, school retention, instigated by proposals such as Continued Progression, which favored the continuation of students in school institutions, among others.

Thus, PL 857/2015 (SÃO PAULO, 2015) had its last movement on 11/28/2018, being voted on by the Constitution, Justice and Writing Committee, and despite having received the favorable vote of all deputies present, currently remains in progress, without a definitive opinion.

Regarding the inconsistencies found between the original proposal of the regime and the one that held in state public schools, Silva (2015, p. 125, our translation) points out that:

As a result of these notes, we affirm that although we have a new proposal, the school remains structurally old, as it inherited the entire inflexible structure of the past in order to not allow a break with the graduated school model.

Thus, it is also necessary to change the conception of the role of evaluation that educators have, as they insist on ideas arising from the old grade system, so that progressive proposals such as the Continuous Progression regime are successful, since, after all, they are mainly responsible for implementing proposals for education.

In this scenario, to fulfill the duty of an educator, one must be aware that it will often be necessary to go against the interests of the hegemonic class, as has occurred other times in the history of Brazil, since, according to Ribeiro (2007, p. 201-202, our translation):

[...] those (school educators or not) who are really concerned with the results presented by such an expanded organization, that is, concerned to the point of no longer being able to live with them without actually engaging in the arduous, long and even risky process, it is certain, that it leads to solutions appropriate to our time and, therefore, adequate both quantitatively and qualitatively to popular interests, will end up: Feeling the need for an understanding not only of the effects, but of the causes and the most fundamental cause of such problems; Be interested in making an effort to understand the extent of the origin and development of such problems; Conclude with me that adequate solutions to the problems faced in school education require a rigorous understanding of their economic roots, as well as an organized collective reaction aimed at the destruction of a type of economic, political and social structure, that is, of society, and the construction of a new type; This reaction is an expression of a consistent political commitment to educational-school concerns.

Freitas (2018, p. 128-129, our translation) also highlights the urgency of changes in the conception of society and public education, which remain selective and exclusionary, and indicates: “[...] another educational proposal based on another conception of society and education, with the intention of providing equal conditions for all”.

For Hoffmann (2005, p. 10, our translation): “Any innovative practices will develop in error if they are not based on a deep reflection on concepts of assessment/education”, therefore, it is necessary to be in constant reflection on the educational process.

Enabling students to remain in school alone is not enough to ensure that they have a quality education. Bertagna (2003, p. 436, our translation) points out the risks of continued progression when it becomes automatic approval:

[...] Continued progression when becoming automatic or mass approval may not mean, as intended, “more or better” concern with the students' learning pace, but perhaps just marking the differences between these paces of learning. And this differentiation becomes all the more dangerous as it approaches intuitive or subjective judgments because it hides in the discourse of democratization and access to opportunities, the logic of maintaining educational and social inequalities.

Therefore, it is necessary to fight for quality education for all and ensure that proposed laws and other official documents are respected and fulfilled and, for this, in addition to collection and inspection, it is necessary to invest public money in public schools, in continued training of teachers, in appropriate teaching materials, among other basic demands for any education that aims to be progressive.

Final remarks

The comparison of Continued Progression with automatic promotion may have occurred as a result of the implementation of the regime in the São Paulo state public network having distanced itself from its original proposal, present in the official document that established it, due to several factors, among them, the absence of educators in discussions about this, the lack of investment in appropriate materials, as well as in continuing teacher training, among others, as previously mentioned. In the historical period studied, the proposal contained for a formative evaluation in process was being diluted in favor of evaluation by results, strongly leveraged by SARESP and the Bonus for Results policy, which, in a certain way, was misconfiguring the proposal of another conception of educational assessment, added to the reduction, as a result of different political actions to correct, the age/grade distortion in the state, which Continuous Progression also provided the opportunity for collaboration in this sense.

Furthermore, it was observed that the idea of extinguishing Continued Progression in the São Paulo state public network, due to the negative image of the regime, throughout its trajectory, was reinforced by the common sense that failing would be a good thing for the student, an idea expressed when the authors of the two Bills 251/2007 (SÃO PAULO, 2007) and 857/2015 (SÃO PAULO, 2015), which proposed his dismissal, were elected/re-elected deputies.

As for legislation, there was a large number of official documents drawn up from the 1990s onwards, in an attempt to clarify doubts and ambiguities regarding the work with Continued Progression. However, there was difficulty in adjusting the proposals for education to the speeches present in the official documents, since these highlighted the importance of progressive projects, such as the Continued Progression regime, but insisted on validating evaluation methods that were inconsistent with Continued Progression and the cycles, intensified by the institution of the state's External Assessment System (large scale), SARESP, IDESP⁴ and Bonus. These limited the proposal and led the state network to a logic contrary to the idea of evaluation indicated in the documents referring to the beginning of its implementation, which favored evaluation and process evaluation practices, later referring the evaluation more to its results, through the establishment of goals and quantitative indices. Therefore, this ended up promoting competition between schools, contrary to what was initially

⁴ The Education Development Index of the State of São Paulo is an indicator of the quality of the stages of the initial years (1st to 5th Years) and final years (6th to 9th Years) of Elementary and High School. In the quality assessment of schools carried out by IDESP, two complementary criteria are considered: the performance of students in the SARESP exams and the school flow (SÃO PAULO, 2019).

thought with the Continuous Progression regime, which included respect for the rhythm and individuality of students and their development.

In this context, the evaluation proved to be a problem in the alignment of legislation, since divergent proposals were available, compromising the achievement of the objective that should be the main one, quality education for all. In any case, one cannot deny the importance that the Continued Progression regime had for education, considered its precursor aspect in combating problems such as school failure and dropout in the state of São Paulo.

However, the deconstruction of the idea of punitive, exclusionary and classificatory assessment was necessary, where it was no longer enough to conclude that the student who did not learn the content necessary for a certain stage should repeat the year/grade, but it was up to the teacher to review their work and rethink new ways of teaching and evaluating, aiming at the progress of everyone and not just the students who had the easiest time studying. The State, in turn, should provide the necessary demands to carry out the work in this new configuration of teaching and initial and continuous training of its professionals, but in the historical course it ended up aligning itself with another idea and conception of evaluation, linked to the logic of market and production of quantitative results.

Deliberation CEE 09/1997 (SÃO PAULO, 1997) also highlighted that the organization of the school should be changed to better meet the demands of students in the context of the Continuous Progression regime. However, teachers resisted the changes foreseen in the document and the investment in material, training, pedagogical resources, among others, aimed at implementing the regime, were insufficient, as it was unable to be implemented as planned.

At this juncture, the reconfiguration of education based on the Continuous Progression regime required a collective effort from educators, schools and the State, which did not occur, and ended up making the implementation of the Continuous Progression regime proposal unfeasible. The same document predicted the importance of the presence of teachers in discussions focused on the new policy, however, the participation of teachers in training occurred through a small sample of educators taking courses offered by CENPEC in 1998, which, at the time, was considered positive response from participants, however, with limited places, instead of broad training on the proposal, resulting in many people misunderstanding the legislation.

In this scenario, whenever new projects for education are thought of, it is necessary to include everyone who is part of the school context, parents, teachers, educators, management

and the school community, as they are the ones who validate or invalidate any proposal, as they are directly or indirectly linked to the school.

Furthermore, it is necessary that initial teacher training courses address policies that, such as the Continuous Progression regime, are still in force in educational networks, just as there is a need for continued training in schools, during collective work hours of teachers, with the aim of combating resistance from those who are not yet interested in discussing this topic.

Thus, another relevant aspect raised in this context was that everyone involved in the educational process should be committed to it, since, without their support, the expected objectives would not be achieved, where:

[...] the official guidelines and information produced by bodies such as SEE-SP, even prescribing changes in pedagogical work and school routines, in the specific case of the continued progression regime, have still failed to mobilize teachers and, consequently, change these aspects, due to the fact that these professionals are unaware of the measure adopted, the conceptions and the guiding foundations, being led to different interpretations, resistance, distancing or estrangement from the process that involves it (JEFFREY, 2011, p. 19, our translation).

It is necessary, therefore, to reiterate that exclusion (whether through failure or evasion), the selection and classification of students based on their academic performance is not the solution to improving the quality of education, because “sadly”, when they persist, they end up for camouflaging (or highlighting) educational and social inequality, preventing the guarantee of the human right of children, young people and adults to quality public education and, mainly, the right to learning.

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