SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH SOCIAL DISADVANTAGES: STRATEGIES THAT WORK[1]

Podpora žáků se sociálním znevýhodněním: Strategie, které fungují

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Abstract: *Supporting socially disadvantaged students is crucial for fostering inclusive education, yet it often receives insufficient attention (OECD, 2023). Since 2021, over 400 schools in the Czech Republic have implemented the „Promotion of Equal Opportunities" project to address this issue. This study evaluated the impact of interventions on 640 students across 32 elementary schools, focusing on those who showed improvements in grades, attendance, or behaviour within one year. Key interventions included experiential learning, motivational activities, tutoring, financial support, and parental engagement. Effective support roles included school psychologists, career counselors, teacher assistants, school special education teachers, tandem teachers, and social pedagogues. The findings underscore successful strategies for enhancing outcomes for disadvantaged students, providing valuable insights for future funding and program development.*
Keywords: *socially disadvantaged students, inclusive education, support measures, socioeconomic status (SES).*

Abstrakt*: Podpora sociálně znevýhodněných žáků je pro inkluzivní vzdělávání zásadní, přesto se jí často nevěnuje dostatečná pozornost (OECD, 2023). V České republice od roku 2021 realizuje více než 400 škol projekt „Podpora rovných příležitostí" na podporu uvedené cílové skupiny žáků. Výzkum hodnotil dopad intervencí na 640 žáků ve 32 základních školách se zaměřením na ty, kteří si během jednoho roku zlepšili známky, docházku nebo chování. Klíčové intervence zahrnovaly zážitkové učení, motivační aktivity, doučování, finanční podporu a spolupráci s rodiči. Efektivní podpůrnou roli hráli školní psychologové, kariéroví poradci, asistenti pedagoga, koordinátoři ŠVP, tandemoví učitelé a sociální pedagogové. Zjištění poukazují na úspěšné strategie pro zlepšení výsledků znevýhodněných žáků a jsou vodítkem pro jejich budoucí financování a rozvoj.*
Klíčová slova: *žáci se sociálním znevýhodněním, inkluzivní vzdělávání, podpůrná opatření, SES.*

Introduction

In line with the increasing heterogeneity of modern society, inclusive education has emerged as one of the key concepts of the 21st century. Inclusion in education is defined as a process of developing practices and measures that address the diverse needs of all learners to the fullest extent possible

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(UNESCO, 2009). The foundational principle of inclusive education is succinctly summarized by UNESCO (2017, p. 12): „*The central message is simple: every learner matters and matters equally*."

Inclusive education approaches emphasize social and cultural diversity while systematically identifying and eliminating barriers to accessing education (Soriano, Watkins, & Ebersold, 2017). Historically, these approaches have primarily focused on the education of students with disabilities. However, students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds have been largely overlooked. According to a recent OECD report (2023a), most of the monitored countries have made limited progress in creating favorable conditions for the education of socially disadvantaged students.

Social disadvantages can significantly impact the outcomes of education systems. In the Czech Republic, for instance, students' academic performance is strongly influenced by their social background. This is evident in PISA test results, which reveal that, on average, 15 % of the variation in students' performance can be attributed to differences in cultural and social background. In the Czech Republic, this figure is notably higher, with 22 % of the variation explained by family background. Only three other countries—Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia—exhibit a stronger dependence of student performance on family background (OECD, 2023b; Czech School Inspectorate, 2023).

Students with Social Disadvantages and Their Education in the Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic's educational system, students with social disadvantages are classified as part of the broader category of students with special educational needs. According to the current version of the Education Act, a student with special educational needs is defined as *a „person who requires the provision of support measures to fulfill his or her educational potential or to claim or utilize his or her rights on an equal basis with others"* (Act No. 561/2004 Coll., § 16). A student's social disadvantage can arise from various factors. One significant cause is poverty, which impacts one in five families with children in the Czech Republic (EAPN CR, 2023). Recent sociological research indicates that approximately 25% of families with children face expenses equal to or exceeding their income (PAQ, online, 2024-09-12). As a result, even modest payments associated with a child's education can create significant barriers to accessing education for these families.

Another significant cause of social disadvantage is a lack of proficiency in the language of instruction. According to statistics from the Ministry of Education, over 107,000 children and students from foreign families attended schools in the Czech Republic in 2023 (MEYS, online, cited 2024-09-10). These students are likely to face varying degrees of language barriers.

Social disadvantages can also stem from the placement of a child outside their original family, often accompanied by the trauma of neglect or the lack of emotional support in institutional care. This is not an uncommon occurrence in the Czech Republic. Official statistics from 2023 indicate that more than 6,000 children and adolescents were placed in institutions for institutional and protective care, while nearly 13,000 were growing up in foster care (MEYS, online, cited 2024-09-10; MLSA, 2024).

Despite statistics highlighting a significant number of students with social disadvantages, the Czech Republic lacked a comprehensive support system for these students until 2021. This changed with the launch of the „Promotion of Equal Opportunities" project in 2021.

"Promotion of Equal Opportunities" project

The „Promotion of Equal Opportunities" project (PROP) has been implemented in the Czech Republic since 2022. It is a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic and the National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic. The project is funded by the European Union under the Next Generation EU – National Recovery Plan initiative.

The project offers methodological support to over 400 primary and secondary schools that serve a higher-than-average number of socially disadvantaged students.

Participating schools can allocate project funding – determined by the school's size and the number of socially disadvantaged students – to implement targeted interventions during the project. Schools can choose between two types of interventions: ***Type A***, which provides funding for specific staff positions, and ***Type B***, which supports specific activities.[5]

For ***Type A interventions***, schools can select from the following positions:

A1: Teacher assistant for students with social disadvantages
A2: School special education teacher[6]
A3: School social pedagogue
A4: Career counselor
A5: School psychologist
A6: Inclusion coordinator
A7: Adaptation coordinator
A8: Educator for leisure activities
A9: Coordinator of the mentoring program for students
A10: Tandem teacher

In the category of ***Type B interventions***, schools choose from the following activities:

B1: Educational interventions or tutoring
B2: Educational interventions or tutoring during school holidays
B3: Educational interventions for early adaptation
B4: Psychosocial interventions and mental health support
B5: Case management services
B6: Motivational and adaptation activities
B7: Experiential learning programs
B8: Breakfast clubs

[5] Type C interventions focused on professional development and teacher training are included in the offerings; however, these were not part of our research.

[6] The literal translation of the Czech professional title could be also ‚school special pedagogue.'

B9: Events to promote cooperation with students‘ parents
B10: Direct student support

The number of interventions forms a school may implement depends on its size and the number of socially disadvantaged students. Generally, most schools utilize funding for multiple interventions from both categories.

Methodology

The primary aim of the research was to evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented interventions and identify which ones can be deemed truly effective in supporting the education of socially disadvantaged students. The research also focused on the following sub-objectives:

O1: To analyze the intensity of use and the impact of interventions across the overall sample of socially disadvantaged students.
O2: To identify which interventions are more frequently used by students who have improved their average final marks in the last school year.
O3: To determine which interventions are more commonly utilized by students whose absenteeism has decreased in the last school year.
O4: To identify which interventions are more widely adopted by students whose behavioral grades have improved in the last school year.

Fifty schools participating in the PROP were invited to take part in the research. Thirty-two elementary schools accepted the invitation and participated. In these schools, school counselors acting as evaluators were contacted and provided with data collection instructions, a structured spreadsheet for recording data, and an instructional video explaining the data entry process. Each evaluator was instructed to select 20 students from their school who were actively engaged in PROP activities during the 2023/2024 school year. For each selected student, the collaborating staff member was tasked with recording the following information:

(a) the students’ grades, behavioral assessments, and absenteeism results from the June 2023 final school report;
(b) the students’ grades, behavioral assessments, and absenteeism results from the June 2024 final school report;
(c) the frequency of support the student received from individual project staff during the 2023/2024 school year for Type A interventions;
(d) the level of impact that the student’s engagement in individual activities during the 2023/2024 school year had under Type B interventions.

Four-point scales were used to describe the importance of each intervention in a particular student‘s education:

„0“: The intervention did not affect the student.
„1“: The intervention was implemented only occasionally and/or had little impact.
„2“: The intervention was implemented quite frequently and/or had a moderate impact.

„3“: The intervention was implemented very frequently and/or had a significant impact on the student‘s education.[7]

Ratings for each project intervention were completed collaboratively by the evaluator and the teachers who implemented the intervention at the school.

Data collection took place in June and July 2024, followed by analysis from July to September of the same year. The analysis focused on abstracting and comparing data to evaluate the impact of the project activities on the education of the observed students, with particular emphasis on students whose year-on-year results demonstrated improvement.

The „support index“ was used to evaluate the level of impact of each intervention on the observed sample of students. This index was calculated by dividing the total score for a given intervention by the number of students in the observed group[8]. Two forms of index were used to compare the overall impact of the intervention on all students studied and the impact of the intervention

[7] Due to the varied nature of the interventions, three distinct yet comparable scales were used to assess their importance. A matching score of ‚0‘ indicated either that the school did not use the intervention in the project or that the intervention was available, but the student did not engage with it. Additionally, the scales differed...

For intervention A – staff positions – the scale was based on the frequency of support provided by the staff member. The operational definition for each scale level was established as follows:

1. The student received support from the staff member only occasionally, averaging less than 2 times per month.
2. The student received support from the staff member quite often, averaging 2 to 3 times per month.
3. The student received support from the staff member very often, averaging more than 3 times per month.

For intervention B – actions that occurred regularly, such as tutoring—the assessment was based on attendance frequency and learning progress. The operational definition for each scale level was established as follows:

1. The student attended only occasionally and irregularly, showing a slight shift in learning.
2. The student attended more frequently and fairly regularly, with a noticeable but not substantial shift in learning.
3. The student attended frequently and regularly, with a substantial positive shift in school skills.

For intervention B – actions that took place on a one-off basis, such as school events to promote student motivation – the assessment focused on participation and educational impact. The operational definition for each scale level was established as follows:

1. The student participated in the event, but their active involvement was minimal, resulting in a small impact on their education.
2. The student participated in the event and was actively involved in some areas, leading to a moderate impact on their education.
3. The student participated in the event and was actively involved most of the time, resulting in a significant impact on their education.

[8] Thus, for each selected instrument, the calculation of the index was as follows:

Support index = (0a + 1b + 2c + 3d) / n

a = number of students rated „0“
b = number of students rated „1“
c = number of students rated „2“
d = number of students rated „3“
n = number of students in the evaluated group

The resulting index indicates the impact rate of the intervention distributed across each student in the evaluated group.

on a selected group of students – specifically, those who improved their grades, improved their behavioral assessment or reduced their absences. The „overall support index" indicates the impact of the intervention on all students included in the study, while the „support index" reflects the impact of the intervention on a specific cohort of students. The purpose of this comparison is to identify which interventions were used more extensively to support students who showed improvement in any area.

Research Sample

The research sample consisted of students involved in project activities. In each school, the data collectors were instructed to record data for the twenty students who participated more extensively in project activities.

PROP primarily aims to support students facing social disadvantages. In terms of target group classification, the project distinguishes between four categories of students:

"**I":** Students without social disadvantage:" These students do not require any extra support.

"**II":** Students at risk of social disadvantage:" Additional support for these students is typically managed by the teacher during standard instruction.

"**III":** Students with social disadvantage and significant support needs:" For these students, the teacher must implement activities beyond normal teaching.

"**IV":** Students with social disadvantages and comprehensive support needs:" Extra support for these students usually requires the involvement of additional teaching support staff.

As the project aims to be as inclusive as possible, students without social disadvantages may also be involved in project activities. However, the nature of the research sample corresponds to the primary target group of the project.

The research sample included 640 students from 32 elementary schools, comprising 32 students without social disadvantage, 50 students at risk of social disadvantage, 199 students with social disadvantage and significant support needs, and 368 students with social disadvantage and comprehensive support needs. Students from all nine years of elementary education were represented in the sample. The fewest participants – 41 students – were from the first grade, while the most – 98 students – were from the sixth grade.

A relatively high number of students were diagnosed with some form of disability. Specifically, 155 students were diagnosed with specific learning disabilities; 89 students with behavioral disorders; 62 students with speech and language impairments; 39 students with intellectual disabilities; and 45 students with other disabilities. Additionally, in 96 cases, the students came from families where a different mother tongue was spoken."

Results

The first objective of the research was to describe the intensity of use and impact of interventions on the overall sample of students with social disadvantages."

Table 1 presents the Type A interventions – staff positions ranked by the overall support index from the most to the least important. The three positions with the greatest overall impact on the study group of students with social disadvantages were school social pedagogues, teaching assistants, and school special education teachers. While these roles are undoubtedly desirable and beneficial for educating students with social disadvantages, it is important to note that lower overall support index values for other positions do not necessarily indicate lower effectiveness. For instance, school psychologists may have a lower support index due to the significant shortage of qualified personnel in this field.

Table 1 Overall intensity of support for interventions A – staff positions (n = 640)

Ranking	Intervention	Intensity of support – assessment				Overall Support index
		0 – without support	1 – only occasionally	2 – quite frequently	3 – very frequently	
1.	A3 – School social pedagogue	350	105	79	106	0.91
2.	A1 – Teacher assistant for students with social disadvantage	373	76	83	108	0.88
3.	A2 – School special education teacher	421	94	44	81	0.66
4.	A8 – Leisure activities educator	520	32	34	54	0.41
5.	A6 – Inclusion coordinator	399	59	43	39	0.41
6.	A5 – School psychologist	533	39	22	46	0.35
7.	A4 – Career counselor	544	37	30	29	0.29
8.	A10 – Tandem teacher	555	28	47	10	0.24
9.	A7 – Adaptation coordinator	579	18	34	10	0.18
10.	A9 – Coordinator of the mentoring program for students	0	0	0	0	0.0

(Source: own compilation)

In intervention category B – activities, as shown in Table 2 – experiential learning programs, motivational and adaptive activities, and tutoring had the greatest impact on the education of students with social disadvantages. Additionally, it is worth noting the importance of an intervention termed ‚direct student support,' which allows school principals to fund essential learning aids or address other needs for these students, such as covering school club fees or school lunches.

Table 2 Overall intensity of support for interventions B – activities (n = 640)

Ranking	Intervention	Impact of support – assessment				Overall Support index
		0 – without impact	1 – small impact	2 – moderate impact	3 – highly significant impact	
1.	B7 – Experiential learning programs	221	105	120	194	1.26
2.	B10 – Direct student support	304	93	92	151	1.14
3.	B6 – Motivational, adaptation act.	303	117	107	113	1.05
4.	B1 – Educational intervention/ tutoring	327	103	125	85	0.95
5.	B4 – Psychosocial intervention, mental health support	429	76	78	57	0.63
6.	B9 – Events to promote cooperation with parents	456	72	86	26	0.50
7.	B8 – Breakfast clubs	551	15	44	30	0.30
8.	B3 – Educational intervention/early adaptation	580	30	21	9	0.15
9.	B2 – Educational intervention/ tutoring during school holidays	618	2	11	9	0.08
10.	B5 – Case management	618	10	5	7	0.06

(Source: own compilation)

The second objective of the research was to identify which interventions are utilized more extensively by students who improved their average final marks during the last school year.

The research sample consisted of 199 students whose average final marks improved between their evaluations in June 2023 and June 2024.

For these students, the resulting index of support was compared to the overall index of support, which represented the performance of all students included in the study. The purpose of this comparison was to determine which interventions were used significantly more by students who improved their average final marks. As shown in Table 3, the three forms of interventions in Category A – staff positions – were utilized significantly more often by students whose averages improved. Specifically, this included support from teaching assistants, school psychologists, and tandem teachers. The data suggest that

these three positions are more likely to have a positive effect on improving marks for socially disadvantaged students.

Table 3 Intensity of support for students with improved average final marks; interventions in category A – staff positions (n = 199)

Ranking	Intervention	Intensity of support – assessment				Support index	Overall support index
		0 – without support	1 – only occasionally	2 – quite frequently	3 – very frequently		
1.	A1 – Teacher assistant for students with social disadvantage	112	27	21	39	**0.93 ↑**	0.88
2.	A3 – School social pedagogue	113	35	21	30	0.84	0.91
3.	A2 – School special education teacher	120	45	8	26	0.70	0.66
4.	A5 – School psychologist	146	21	11	21	**0.53 ↑**	0.35
5.	A8 – Leisure activities educator	166	11	10	12	0.34	0.41
6.	A6 – Inclusion coordinator	160	18	14	7	0.34	0.41
7.	A4 – Career counselor	168	12	8	11	0.31	0.29
8.	A10 – Tandem teacher	168	5	21	5	**0.31 ↑**	0.24
9.	A7 – Adaptation coordinator	189	3	4	3	0.10	0.18
10.	A9 – Coordinator of the mentoring program for students	199	0	0	0	0.00	0.00

(Source: own compilation)

In Category B – activities – a significantly higher support index was found for four interventions. Specifically, these interventions included experiential learning programs, direct student support, educational intervention/tutoring, and events to promote cooperation with students' parents. The results suggest that these activities can contribute to improvements in students' average final marks.

Table 4 Intensity of support for students with improved average final marks; interventions in category B – activities (n = 199)

Ranking	Intervention	Impact of support – assessment				Support index	Overall support index
		0 – without impact	1 – only a small impact	2 – moderate impact	3 – highly significant impact		
1.	B7 –Experiential learning programs	74	24	42	59	**1.43 ↑**	1.26
2.	B10 – Direct student support	88	31	29	51	**1.22 ↑**	1.14
3.	B1 – Educational intervention/tutoring	91	34	42	32	**1.08 ↑**	0.95
4.	B6 – Motivational, adaptation activities	99	35	31	34	1.00	1.05
5.	B4 – Psychosocial intervention, mental health support	132	27	21	19	0.63	0.63
6.	B9 – Events to promote cooperation with parents	140	19	22	18	**0.59 ↑**	0.50
7.	B8 – Breakfast clubs	175	0	10	14	0.31	0.30
8.	B2 – Educational intervention/tutoring during school holidays	192	0	2	5	0.10	0.08
9.	B5 – Case management	192	2	2	3	0.08	0.06
10.	B3 – Educational intervention/early adaptation	195	1	2	1	0.04	0.15

(Source: own compilation)

The third research objective was to determine which interventions were more frequently utilized by students whose absenteeism had decreased. Among the 272 students who had a lower absence rate in the 2023/2024 academic year compared to the 2022/2023 academic year, three positions in Category A had a higher support index rate: the school special education teacher, school psychologist, and careers adviser. The results suggest that these three positions may positively impact reducing absenteeism among socially disadvantaged students.

Table 5 Intensity of support for students with decreased absenteeism; interventions in category A – staff positions (n = 272)

Ranking	Intervention	Intensity of support – assessment				Support index	Overall support index
		0 – without support	1 – only occasionally	2 – quite frequently	3 – very frequently		
1.	A1 – Teacher assistant for students with social disadvantage	154	38	40	40	0.88	0.88
2.	A3 – School social pedagogue	155	46	30	41	0.84	0.91
3.	A2 – School special education teacher	158	51	26	37	**0.79 ↑**	0.66
4.	A8 – Leisure activities educator	213	19	18	22	0.44	0.41
5.	A6 – Inclusion coordinator	209	26	22	15	0.42	0.41
6.	A5 – School psychologist	219	18	12	23	**0.41 ↑**	0.35
7.	A4 – Career counselor	224	19	15	14	**0.33 ↑**	0.29
8.	A10 – Tandem teacher	233	16	17	6	0.25	0.24
9.	A7 – Adaptation coordinator	243	8	18	3	0.19	0.18
10.	A9 – Coordinator of the mentoring program for students	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0

(Source: own compilation)

In Category B – activities, students with reduced absenteeism demonstrated a significantly higher support index for five forms of intervention. As shown in Table 6, these interventions included: experiential learning programs, direct student support, educational intervention/tutoring, psychosocial intervention and mental health support, and events promoting cooperation with students' parents. The research results indicate a positive effect of all these interventions on reducing absenteeism among students facing social disadvantages.

Table 6 Intensity of support for students with reduced absenteeism – interventions in category B – activities (n = 272)

Ranking	Intervention	Impact of support – assessment				Support index	Overall support index
		0 – without impact	1 – only a small impact	2 – moderate impact	3 – highly significant impact		
1.	B7 – Experiential learning programs	89	43	58	82	**1.49 ↑**	1.26
2.	B10 – Direct student support	121	46	35	70	**1.20 ↑**	1.14
3.	B6 – Motivational, adaptation activities	117	54	57	44	1.10	1.05
4.	B1 – Educational intervention/ tutoring	127	42	62	41	**1.06 ↑**	0.95
5.	B4 – Psychosocial intervention, mental health support	174	38	31	29	**0.69 ↑**	0.63
6.	B9 – Events to promote cooperation with parents	183	34	36	19	**0.60 ↑**	0.50
7.	B8 – Breakfast clubs	235	7	15	15	0.30	0.30
8.	B3 – Educational intervention/early adaptation	251	11	8	2	0.12	0.15
9.	B2 – Educational intervention/ tutoring during school holidays	262	0	6	4	0.09	0.08
10.	B5 – Case management	263	5	2	2	0.06	0.06

(Source: own compilation)

The fourth research objective focused on identifying interventions that were used more extensively with students who showed improved behavioral assessments 9. As shown in Table 7, in Category A – Personal Support, students who improved their behavioral assessments demonstrated a higher support index in three project roles: school psychologist, inclusion coordinator, and career counselor. Therefore, the research data suggests that the efforts of these three professionals, in particular, could positively impact the behavior of students facing social disadvantages.

[9] When comparing the June 2023 report card to the June 2024 report card, the behavior grade either improved, or the student no longer received a negative reprimand and/or received a written commendation for positive behavior.

Table 7 Intensity of support for students who improved in behavioral assessments – instruments in category A – staff positions (n = 83)

Ranking	Intervention	Intensity of support – assessment				Support index	Overall support index
		0 – without support	1 – only occasionally	2 – quite frequently	3 – very frequently		
1.	A1 – Teacher assistant for students with social disadvantage	51	9	8	15	0.84	0.88
2.	A3 – School social pedagogue	50	13	10	10	0.76	0.91
3.	A5 – School psychologist	55	10	7	11	**0.69 ↑**	0.35
4.	A2 – School special education teacher	55	11	7	10	0.66	0.66
5.	A6 – Inclusion coordinator	58	8	10	7	**0.59 ↑**	0.41
6.	A4 – Career counselor	62	8	6	7	**0.49 ↑**	0.29
7.	A8 – Leisure activities educator	66	5	9	4	0.42	0.41
8.	A7 – Adaptation coordinator	73	5	4	1	0.19	0.18
9.	A10 – Tandem teacher	77	1	4	1	0.14	0.24
10.	A9 – Coordinator of the mentoring program for students	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0

(Source: own compilation)

In Category B – activities, higher support index values for students with improving behavioral assessments were noted for three forms of intervention: educational intervention/tutoring, psychosocial intervention and mental health support, and events that promote cooperation with students' parents. The research results suggest that these three forms of intervention could positively affect the improvement of behavioral evaluations for students facing social disadvantages.

Table 8 Intensity of support for students who improved in behavior assessment: interventions category B – activities (n = 83)

Ranking	Intervention	Impact of support – assessment				Support index	Overall support index
		0 – without impact	1 – only a small impact	2 – moderate impact	3 – highly significant impact		
1.	B7 – Experiential learning programs	36	10	12	25	1.31	1.26
2.	B10 – Direct student support	38	15	13	17	1.11	1.14
3.	B1 – Educational intervention/ tutoring	37	18	12	16	**1.08 ↑**	0.95
4.	B6 – Motivational, adaptation activities	48	12	10	13	0.86	1.05
5.	B4 – Psychosocial intervention, mental health support	53	12	8	10	**0.70 ↑**	0.63
6.	B9 – Events to promote cooperation with parents	60	7	9	7	**0.55 ↑**	0.50
7.	B8 – Breakfast clubs	75	1	3	4	0.23	0.30
8.	B5 – Case management	81	0	0	2	0.07	0.06
9.	B3 – Educational intervention/early adaptation	81	0	0	2	0.02	0.15
10.	B2 – Educational intervention/ tutoring during school holidays	81	0	1	1	0.06	0.08

(Source: own compilation)

Conclusion

In summary, the last two tables present the key results of the survey: they indicate which forms of intervention were utilized most intensively and which were more commonly employed by students who demonstrated improvement.

The ranking of interventions by intensity of support, as presented in Table 9, identifies essential strategies for educating students with social disadvantages. The high ranking of experiential learning and motivational activities highlights the substantial need for non-traditional educational methods that foster more active engagement among students. Furthermore, there is a need for increased funding to directly support students and provide vital tutoring services. In terms of staff support, the roles of school social pedagogues, teaching assistants, and school special education teacher are essential for the success of students facing social disadvantages.

Table 9 Overall intensity of support for surveyed interventions in both categories

Ranking	Intervention	Overall support index
1.	B7 – Experiential learning programs	1.26
2.	B10 – Direct student support	1.14
3.	B6 – Motivational, adaptation activities	1.05
4.	B1 – Educational intervention/tutoring	0.95
5.	A3 – School social pedagogue	0.91
6.	A1 – Teacher assistant for students with social disadvantage	0.88
7.	A2 – School special education teacher	0.66
8.	B4 – Psychosocial intervention, mental health support	0.63
9.	B9 – Events to promote cooperation with parents of students	0.50
10.	A8 – Leisure activities educator	0.41

(Source: own compilation)

Table 10 summarizes the areas of positive impact for interventions that demonstrated a higher support index, specifically those that were more frequently utilized by students who experienced positive changes in academic performance, behavior, and school attendance.

The research results indicate a positive effect across multiple areas when school psychologists and career counselors are employed. Additionally, at least one surveyed area showed a positive impact from employing teaching assistants, school special education teachers, tandem teachers, and inclusion coordinators. The findings also indicate a positive effect in all three areas for tutoring and for activities designed to foster cooperation between the school and students‘ families. Moreover, in at least two of the three areas studied, the research highlights the positive impact of psychosocial interventions, experiential learning programs, and direct support for students.

Table 10 Areas of positive impact for surveyed interventions in both categories

Interventions with higher support index (compared to overall support index)	Area of positive impact		
	improvement of final marks	decrease in absences	improvement of behavior assessment
A1 – Teacher assistant for students with social disadvantage	X		
A2 – School special education teachers		X	
A4 – Career counselor		X	X
A5 – School psychologist	X	X	X
A6 – Inclusion coordinator			X
A10 – Tandem teacher	X		
B1 – Educational intervention/tutoring	X	X	X
B4 – Psychosocial intervention, mental health support		X	X
B7 – Experiential learning programs	X	X	
B9 – Events to promote cooperation with parents	X	X	X
B10 – Direct student support	X	X	

(Source: own compilation)

Discussion

There is no research available in the field of educational studies that directly compares the uptake and effectiveness of different interventions for socially disadvantaged students. However, there is a body of research that confirms the effectiveness of individual interventions, consistent with the data presented above.

For example, the positive impact of teaching assistants has been demonstrated as an important support mechanism, particularly in schools with a higher representation of socially disadvantaged students (Hemelt, Ladd, & Clifton, 2021). Specifically, for students from minority cultures, teaching assistants with cultural knowledge can help bridge barriers between the school and the students' families (Armour, Warren, & Miller, 2016), as well as contribute to the well-being of students (Svoboda et al., 2022). Similarly, tandem teachers are also recognized as contributing positively to the development of inclusive education (Wilson, & Blednick, 2011).

Similarly, the positive contribution of school counselors has been documented, particularly for adolescent students from socioeconomically disadvantaged family backgrounds (West, Moate, & McKinney, 2024). The involvement of guidance counselors is especially important for promoting

collaboration between the school and students‘ families (Amatea, & West-Olatunji, 2007). The effectiveness of guidance counselors‘ involvement depends on their adequate training regarding the impact of poverty and social disadvantage on students‘ education (Bluhm, 2023). Volfová et al. (2023) emphasize the positive impact of long-term individualized career counseling on preventing early school leaving.

In the area of activities, research findings consistent with this study also demonstrate the effective use of tutoring programs for students from socially disadvantaged communities (Tolbert, & Maxson, 2015; Grigoroiu et al., 2024; Dietrichson et al., 2017). The positive effects of tutoring have also been shown for socially disadvantaged students from refugee families (Dumenden, 2011).

Partial studies also confirm the positive effects of experiential learning programs for socially disadvantaged students, such as collaborations with local universities (Fleming, & Grace, 2015) or long-term participation in an opera (Coulangeon, & Fougère, 2022).

The positive impacts of direct financial support for the education of students with social disadvantages, as illustrated in the study presented above, are supported by international comparisons of student outcomes. For example, PISA data indicates that countries like the UK, where free lunches are provided at the start of school, as well as Estonia and Finland, where free lunches are available throughout primary schooling, exhibit low levels of inequality and high levels of educational achievement among students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (OECD, 2023b; Median, 2017).

Implications for Practice

The main implications and recommendations arising from the research, both for schools and for the education system as a whole, are:

A) In schools with a higher number of students facing social disadvantages, it is essential to encourage and develop roles that facilitate individualized teaching. The positions of teaching assistants and tandem teachers are particularly important in this context.

B) School counseling should be further developed in schools that educate students with social disadvantages. Effective roles in this context include school special education teachers, social pedagogues, school psychologists, career counselors, and inclusion coordinators. Some of these positions may be partially interchangeable, so having all roles in every school is not necessary. In smaller schools, for instance, the school special education teacher can also manage the responsibilities of the inclusion coordinator, and the social pedagogue can conduct career counseling.

C) In schools serving students with social disadvantages, it is essential to support activities that address their specific needs. This includes tutoring, experiential and motivational activities, psychosocial support initiatives, and programs that promote collaboration between the school and students‘ parents.

D) The state should provide increased funding to schools that educate students with social disadvantages. This funding would enable schools to offer

direct support to students, such as purchasing supplies, paying for lunches, and covering other essential school-related expenses.

At the international level, it should also be added that many countries do not have the conditions in place to identify the educational needs of students with social disadvantages (OECD, 2023) – thus, as part of the implication of the research results, it would be useful to further disseminate proven models for the identification of students with social disadvantages (Němec, & Kourkzi, 2023).

Limitations and Future Directions

The main limitation of the research is that data is only available for activities that schools have implemented to a greater extent. Some potentially beneficial activities – such as case management or breakfast clubs – could not be evaluated in the research because only a few schools selected these activities for their projects, and the necessary data was not available. In this context, it would be appropriate to follow up with qualitative research focused on evaluating the effectiveness of these less commonly used forms of intervention.

Another limitation was the data processing, which only monitored changes in students' results within a single school year. In the future, a longitudinal study examining the effects of supportive interventions for students with social disadvantages, and monitoring changes over a longer time horizon, would certainly be appropriate.

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