

# **The Picture of Education System in Poland in years 1999 – 2017.**

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## **Abstract**

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Poland every person on the territory of Poland has the right to learn. Compulsory education in Poland starts at the age of six from the mandatory "0" class. Elementary school is compulsory, from the age of 7 to 18, but the status of compulsory institutions is only primary and secondary school (which currently are being put in one). Compulsory subjects at this stage include: Polish language, modern foreign language, mathematics, nature, history and society, music, visual arts, computer skills, education religion or ethics. Since 1999 until 2017 pupils attended to a three-year junior high school for young people aged 13-16. The training at this stage is general in the following subjects: Polish, two modern languages, music, visual arts, history, social studies, geography, biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, computer science, physical education, personal security. The Ministry of Education proposed to transform the existing structure of the school to include: 8-year primary school, 4-year general secondary school, 5-year technical school, 3-year first-cycle school, 3-year special education school, 2-year industry secondary school, post-secondary school. Pupils should finish education in the age of 19 or 20 for technical school.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Education system in Poland is an organizational structure ensuring in particular the implementation of the right to education through teaching, upbringing and care. Thanks to The Constitution of the Republic of Poland every person has the right to education and has an obligation to attend school until the age of 18. Education in public schools is free of charge (in a school year 2013/2014 95% polish pupils attended public schools providing free education). The system of education is centrally managed by two institutions – the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education whereas administration and management over kindergartens, primary and secondary schools are the responsibility of local authorities. Public authorities are obliged to provide access to education on a general and equal level and parents or legal guardians are obliged to guide the child through the education process; they are also entitled to choose whether a child will attend public or non-public school. Home education is legal in Poland but practiced by a very small group of people.

## 2 ORGANIZATIONAL UNITS

Presented below education system’s scheme has been valid until year 2017. This year Ministry of National Education introduces a new organizational structure for school units. The reform focuses on altering 3 years junior high school into 8 year primary school and 4 years general high school or 5 years technical high school. A child is obliged to start school in the age of 7 but it is possible to start education in the age of 6 if this is the will of parents/legal guardians.

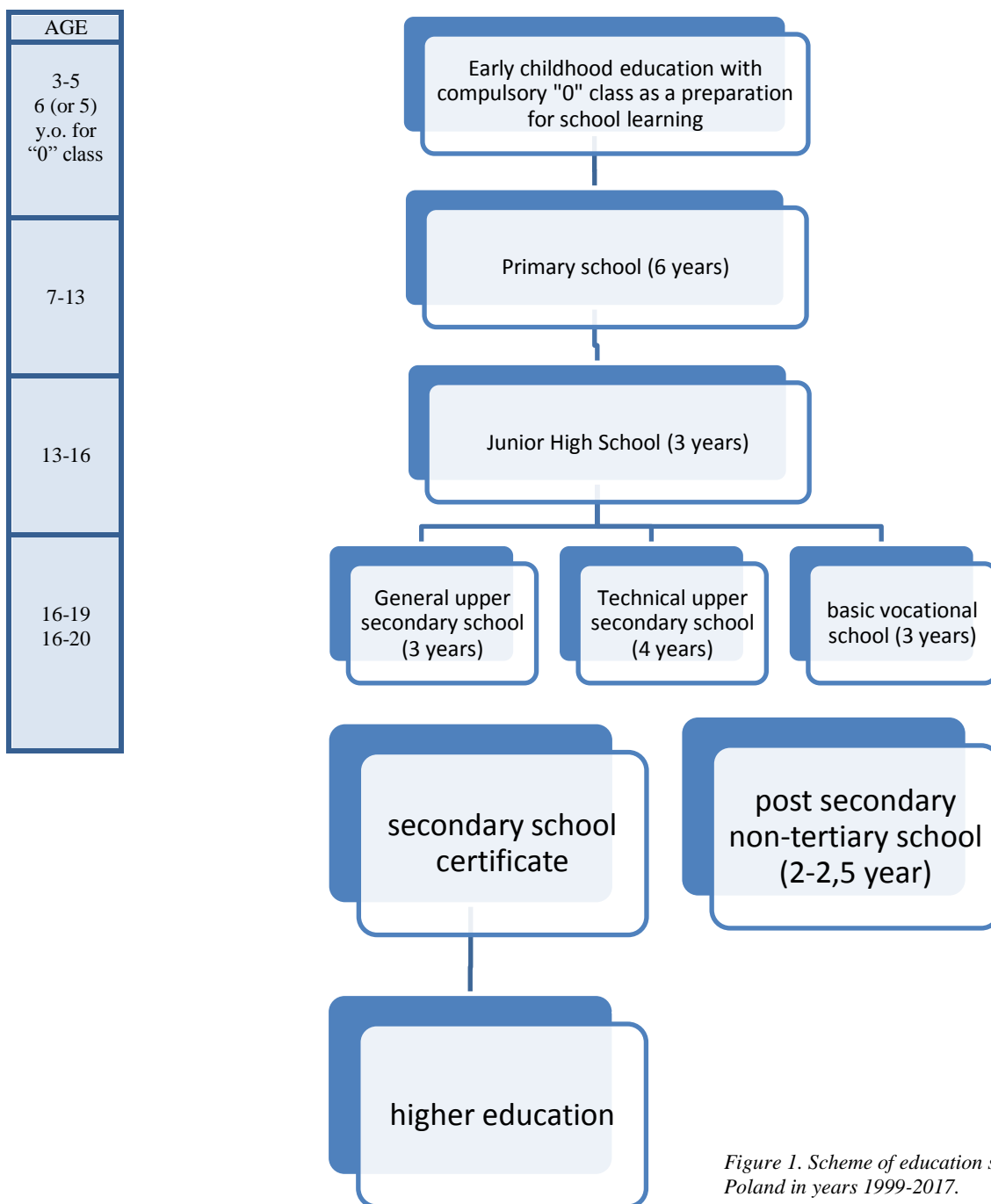


Figure 1. Scheme of education system in Poland in years 1999-2017.

Scheme of the Education System in Poland after the reform in 2017, first introduced in the school year 2016-2017.

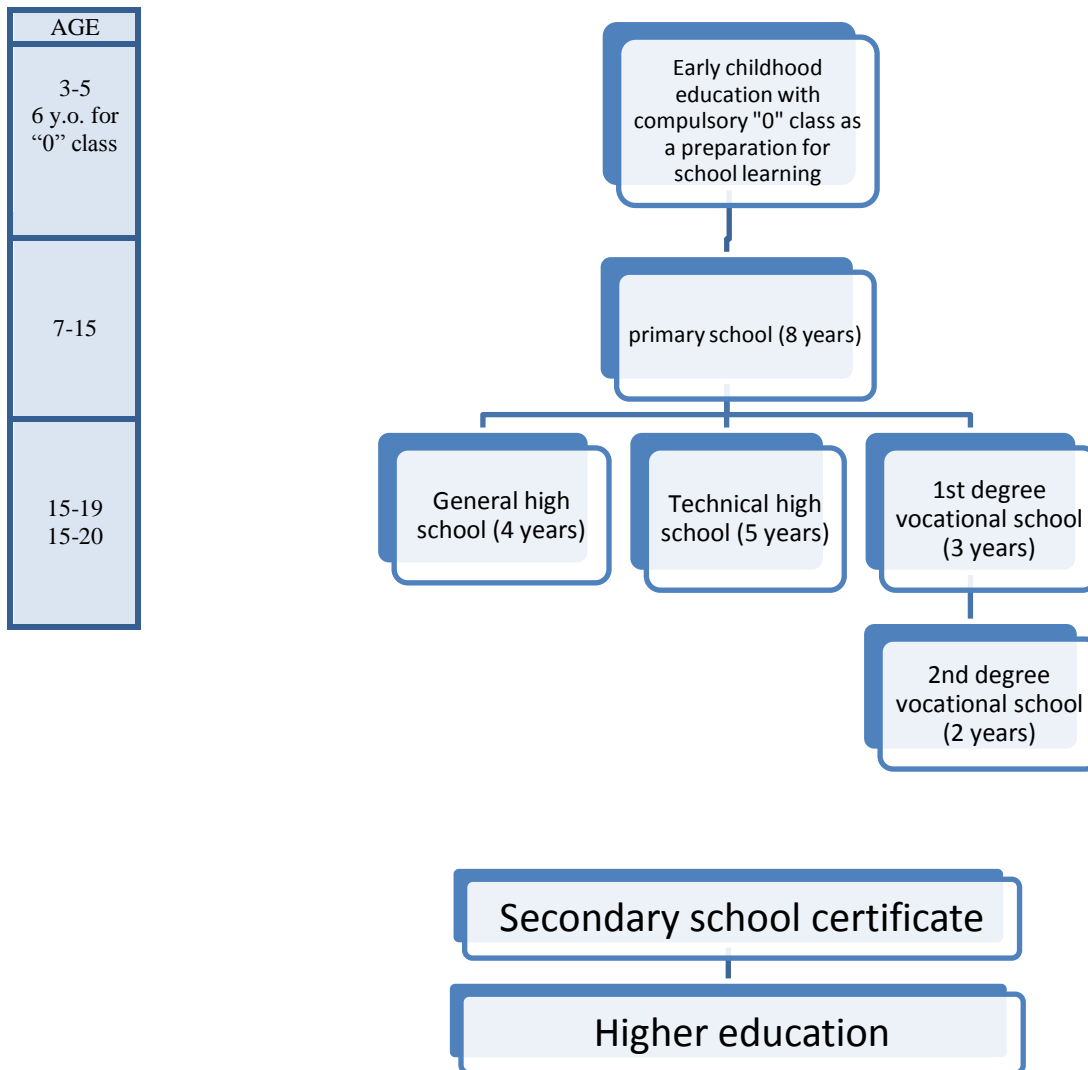


Figure 2. Scheme of education system in Poland introduced in the school year 2017/2018.

### 3 ORGANIZATION

School year begins on 1<sup>st</sup> September for all type of schools (1<sup>st</sup> October for universities) and finishes in June. There are also Christmas holidays (23<sup>rd</sup> of December – 2<sup>nd</sup> January) and winter break (2 weeks in January/February). Studying is divided for 2 semesters. Subjects are

spread over five weekdays (Saturday and Sunday are free from school). The main criterion for class composition is age.

Assesment of the educational activities starting with the grade IV of the primary school are set in degrees according to the following scale:

- 6 – perfect
- 5 – very good
- 4 – good
- 3 – satisfactory
- 2 – acceptable
- 1 – insufficient

Assessment is carried out on the basis of regular written and oral tests. Annual classification of behavior: exemplary, very good, good, correct, inadequate and reprehensible. For classes I-III a descriptive assesment is compulsory.

#### **4 PRIMARY SCHOOL**

According to the education reform from year 1999 (valid until 2017) primary school lasted 6 years and was divided for 2 stages: grades I-III and IV-VI. In the first stage - in grades I - III for children aged 7-10 - early school education is implemented. At the request of parents (legal guardians), a 6-year-old child may also be admitted to primary school. Classes take place in the form of early school education, ie. without the division into subjects, and their conduction is entrusted to one teacher-tutor, although foreign language learning, music education, plastic education, physical education and computer classes can be entrusted to a teacher-specialist.

In grades IV-VI teaching is divided for separate subjects with separate curricula taught by specialist teachers. Compulsory subjects realized at this stage include: Polish language, modern foreign language, mathematics, nature, history and society, music, art, practical and technical classes, computer classes, physical education. There are 2 subjects wherethe decision to participate in classes is a matter for parents, these are religion and upbringing for the family – however, school should provide ethics classes for children who do not participate in those classes.

#### **5 JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

The reform of the education system in 1999 introduced a three-year junior high school as a new type of school for young people aged 13-16. Before the year 1999 the education system included 8 years primary school and 4 years high school/5 years technical high school/3 years vocational school. The education at this stage is general and covers following subjects: Polish, two modern languages, mathematics, social studies, geography, biology, chemistry, physics, music, visual arts, history, computer science, physical education, security education, technical classes, lessons with class tutor. Similarly like in primary school depending on the wishes of the parents, a junior high school student can participate in religious or ethics classes and upbringing in the family.

Education in junior high school ends with a junior high school exam, which usually takes place in April and is attended by third grade students. The examination consists of three parts: humanistic, mathematics-science and foreign language. Taking the exam is a condition of completing a medium school, but does not specify the minimum score the examiner should achieve to pass the exam. However, the result of the exam is one of the criteria taken into account when recruiting to high school.

## **6 NON-COMPULSORY EDUCATION**

High school, technical high school and vocational school are not compulsory educational units but they are attended by majority of students because of the compulsory education up to 18 years old. General high school lasts 3 years and continues the education from junior high school with the same subjects but on an extended level. Classes are profiled (ie. language class, biological-chemical class) in order to prepare a pupil for passing matriculation examination with a good results in subjects which will be important in recruitment for studies.

Pupils of technical high school finish school after passing the competence test to receive a diploma authorizing to perform a specific occupation (eg. technician). In this type of school there is also a possibility to pass high school exam and receive a high school certificate which is a mandatory document to apply for a university. In vocational schools there is no such possibility but instead pupils receive a professional diploma and are able to start a career right after graduation.

## **7 AFTER THE REFORM OF EDUCATION (2017)**

According to Ministry of National Education changes introduced in year 1999 were not successful. Before the year 1999 the school structure consisted of 8 year primary school and 4 years high school/5 years technical high school/3 years vocational school, therefore the reform from 2017 is a return to previous system (with a different structure of vocational school). Junior high schools were supposed to be a preliminary part to education in high school as a first degree of secondary education. However, in reality they rather stayed in strong relationship with primary schools. The assumption of equalizing educational opportunities by junior high school was not realized. The introduction, and further education effects of junior high schools has been negatively assessed by society.

In the previous model(1999-2017) the high school lost its general function. In practice it has been shortened to 2 years and became a preparation course for the matriculation exam. After first year of general education in all subjects (continuation from junior high school), pupils focused mostly on extended subjects chosen by them. The concentration of hours on selected 2-4 extended subjects has caused the secondary school to lose the character of the general school. To keep the general character of schools, new integrated subjects had been introduced eg. pupil focused on science subjects had to attend "history and society" subject but this idea also failed due to a disorder of facts and chronology in curricula. Even the most interesting cross-sectional topics didn't bring expected effects if on earlier stage of teaching the student did not acquire basic knowledge in an orderly manner. Therefore it is necessary to lengthen the education in high school to 4 years, and thus extinction of middle schools has to be done.

Vocational schools are not appealing for pupils and they produce the biggest number of unemployed graduates among all types of high schools – completely against the assumptions of ‘vocational school’. The reform of this type of school is necessary – it has to be adapted to the real needs of the economy and labor market.

## 8 CONCLUSION

Education in Poland is compulsory for children aged 7-18 and the country has to provide equal access to education for all. Major changes in Polish education system happened in years 1999 and 2017. In the years prior to 1999, the first stage of education in Poland was eight years of elementary school, and after graduation it was possible to apply for admission to high school or vocational school so in terms of school structure the reform from 2017 is a return to the education system prior to the year 1999. The reforms concern structure of school and methods of education and according to Ministry of National Education the reform from a year 2017 is needed because the previous one has failed in its assumptions. The most important changes are:

- 8 years primary school including early childhood education in grades I-IV (before school year 2017/2018 it was 6 years of primary school with early childhood education in grades I-III). Education in grades V-VIII will apply junior high school level of education.
- 4 years of high school, 5 years of technical high school or 3 + 2 years of vocational school instead of 3 years of high school, 4 years of technical high school and 3 years of vocational school.
- Vocational school: first degree for 3 years and second degree for 2 years compulsory for some professions finished with profession diploma and optional matricular exam certificate. Before it was 3 years of vocational school with obsolete curriculum focused on profession subjects therefore without a possibility to pass matricular exam.
- The first year of the new core curriculum is set to start in elementary school in 2017/2018. Classes I and VII will be conducted according to the new curriculum
- As part of the reform announced by the Ministry of National Education, a three-year transitional period has been announced.

According to the Ministry and the team working on the amendment of the law, changes are needed because of:

- demographic decline in Poland; number of primary school pupils in the year 2016 is 12% less than in 2005. Thus, the number of middle school students has decreased steadily since the school year 2005/2006, decreasing by about 33%. in the school year 2016/2017. Without urgent changes, this situation would lead to difficulties with the financing of junior high schools.
- Unsatisfactory diagnosis of the current state of general high schools and vocational schools; high school has lost its general character and vocational school is not interesting for students because of low level of teaching and lack of adherence to the realities of the market.
- Bad influence of frequent change of environment on child's development. In the age of 13 a child enters a new school with new friends and teachers. It is definitely a stressful and difficult experience in this sensitive age of adolescence. The reform aims

on lengthening the period of education before the important life change so the children change school when they are emotionally ready.

Since the introduction of the reform in 1999, junior high school is an often discussed topic. They are negatively evaluated by teachers (both from junior high schools and high school), parents and pupils themselves who graduated from junior high schools. Most of it is related to the last point mentioned above – children in the age of adolescence should not be separated from both younger and older groups of pupils. It is difficult process to change the environment and adjust to a new group. The change of environment in that age strenghtens the desire to show off among peers and encourage acts of rebellion. Children are torn between the stage of being a child and an adult and it is uncommonly difficult. It is believed that the reform of education from 2017 may bring good results in child's development.

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