**Education in Germany**

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The [Evangelical Seminaries of Maulbronn and Blaubeuren](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical_Seminaries_of_Maulbronn_and_Blaubeuren) (picture showing church and courtyard) form a combined [Gymnasium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gymnasium_(Germany)) and [boarding school](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boarding_school)

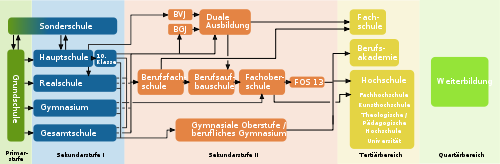
The responsibility for the **German education system** lies primarily with the [states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/States_of_Germany) (*Länder*) while the federal government plays only a minor role. Optional [Kindergarten](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kindergarten) ([nursery school](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nursery_school)) education is provided for all children between three and six years of age, after which school attendance is [compulsory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compulsory_education), in most cases for 11 to 12 years. The system varies throughout Germany because each state (*Land*) decides its own educational policies. Most children, however, first attend Grundschule from the age of six to ten or 12.

German [secondary education](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secondary_education) includes five types of school. The [Gymnasium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gymnasium_(Germany)) is designed to prepare pupils for university education and finishes with the final examination [*Abitur*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abitur), after grade 12 or 13. The [*Realschule*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realschule) has a broader range of emphasis for intermediate pupils and finishes with the final examination [Mittlere Reife](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mittlere_Reife), after grade 10; the [Hauptschule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hauptschule) prepares pupils for vocational education and finishes with the final examination [Hauptschulabschluss](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hauptschulabschluss), after grade 9 or 10 and the [*Realschulabschluss*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realschulabschluss) after grade 10. There are two types of grade 10: one is the higher level called type 10b and the lower level is called type 10a; only the higher level type 10b can lead to the [*Realschule*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realschule) and this finishes with the final examination [*Mittlere Reife*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mittlere_Reife) after grade 10b. This new path of achieving the *Realschulabschluss* at a vocationally-oriented secondary school was changed by the statutory school regulations in 1981 - with a one-year qualifying period. During the one-year qualifying period of the change to the new regulations, pupils could continue with class 10 to fulfil the statutory period of education. After 1982, the new path was compulsory, as explained above. Other than this, there is the [*Gesamtschule*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comprehensive_school), which combines the approaches. There are also [*Förderschulen/Sonderschulen*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_School). One in 21 pupils attends a *Förderschule*. Nevertheless the [*Förderschulen/Sonderschulen*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_School) can also lead, in special circumstances, to a [*Hauptschulabschluss*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hauptschulabschluss) of both type 10a or type 10b, the latter of which is the [*Realschulabschluss*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realschulabschluss). Most German children only attend school in the morning. There are usually no provision for serving lunch. The amount of extracurricular activities is determined individually by each school and varies greatly.

Many of Germany's hundred or so institutions of higher learning charge little or no tuition by international comparison. Students usually must prove through examinations that they are qualified.

In order to enter university, students are, as a rule, required to have passed the *Abitur* examination; since 2009, however, those with a [*Meisterbrief*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meisterbrief) (master craftman's diploma) have also been able to apply. Those wishing to attend a "[university of applied sciences](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fachhochschule)" must, as a rule, have *Abitur,* Fachhochschulreife *or a* Meisterbrief*. Lacking those qualifications, pupils are eligible to enter a university or university of applied sciences if they can present additional proof that they will be able to keep up with their fellow students (see:* [Begabtenprüfung](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Begabtenpr%C3%BCfung) *and* [Hochbegabtenstudium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hochbegabtenstudium)*)*

A special system of apprenticeship called *Duale Ausbildung* allows pupils on vocational courses to do in-service training in a company as well as at a state school.



Education system in Germany

**History**

**Prussian era (1814–1871)**

Historically, the [Lutheran](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lutheran) denomination had a strong influence on German culture, including its education. [Martin Luther](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther) advocated compulsory schooling so that all people would independently be able to read and interpret the Bible. This concept became a model for schools throughout Germany.

During the 18th century, the [Kingdom of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prussia) was among the first countries in the world to introduce free and generally compulsory primary education, consisting of an eight-year course of basic education, [*Volksschule*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volksschule). It provided not only the skills needed in an early industrialized world (reading, writing, and arithmetic), but also a strict education in ethics, duty, discipline and obedience. Children of affluent parents often went on to attend preparatory private schools for an additional four years, but the general population had virtually no access to secondary education.

In 1810, after the [Napoleonic wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleonic_wars), Prussia introduced state certification requirements for teachers, which significantly raised the standard of teaching. The final examination, *Abitur*, was introduced in 1788, implemented in all Prussian secondary schools by 1812 and extended to all of Germany in 1871. The state also established teacher training colleges for prospective teachers in the common or elementary grades.

**German Empire (1871–1918)**



Gymnasium pupils in 1904

When the [German Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Empire) was formed in 1871, the school system became more centralized. In 1872, Prussia recognized the first separate secondary schools for girls. As learned professions demanded well-educated young people, more secondary schools were established, and the state claimed the sole right to set standards and to supervise the newly established schools.

Four different types of secondary schools developed:

* A nine-year classical [*Gymnasium*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gymnasium_(Germany)) (focusing on Latin and Greek or Hebrew, plus one modern language);
* A nine-year *Realgymnasium* (focusing on Latin, modern languages, science and mathematics);
* A six-year *Realschule* (without university entrance qualification, but with the option of becoming a trainee in one of the modern industrial, [office](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Office) or technical jobs); and
* A nine-year *Oberrealschule* (focusing on modern languages, science and mathematics).

By the turn of the 20th century, the four types of schools had achieved equal rank and privilege, although they did not have equal prestige.

**Weimar Republic (1919–1933)**



A pupil standing up to answer the teacher's question in 1961. On the wall the Christian cross can be seen. This was common in a classroom at that time

After [World War I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I), the [Weimar Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weimar_Republic) established a free, universal 4-year elementary school (*Grundschule*). Most pupils continued at these schools for another 4-year course. Those who were able to pay a small fee went on to a *Mittelschule* that provided a more challenging curriculum for an additional one or two years. Upon passing a rigorous entrance exam after year four, pupils could also enter one of the four types of secondary school.

During the [Nazi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazism) era (1933–1945), [indoctrination](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indoctrination) of Nazi ideologies was added to the education program; however, the basic education system remained unchanged. See also: [Nazi university](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_university).

**East Germany (1945-1990)**

Main article: [Education in East Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_East_Germany)

The [German Democratic Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Democratic_Republic) (East Germany) started its own standardized education system in the 1960s. The East German equivalent of both primary and secondary schools was the [Polytechnic Secondary School](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polytechnic_Secondary_School) (*Polytechnische Oberschule*), which all students attended for 10 years, from the ages of 6 to 16. At the end of the 10th year, an exit examination was set. Depending upon the results, a pupil could choose to come out of education or undertake an apprenticeship for an additional two years, followed by an *Abitur*. Those who performed very well and displayed loyalty to the ruling party could change to the *Erweiterte Oberschule* (extended high school), where they could take their *Abitur* examinations after 12 school years. Although this system was abolished in the early 1990s after reunification, it continues to influence school life in the eastern German states.

**West Germany (1945–Present)**



Pupils of the Gymnasium Nonnenwerth, an all-girls school in 1960

After [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II), the [Allied powers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allied_powers) ([Soviet Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union), [France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France), [Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom), and the [USA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USA)) ensured that Nazi ideology was eliminated from the curriculum. They installed educational systems in their respective occupation zones that reflected their own ideas. When West Germany gained partial independence in 1949, its new constitution ([Grundgesetz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grundgesetz)) granted educational autonomy to the state ([Länder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%C3%A4nder)) governments. This led to widely varying school systems, often making it difficult for children to continue schooling whilst moving between states.

More recently, multi-state agreements ensure that basic requirements are universally met by all state school systems. Thus, all children are required to attend one type of school on a full-time basis (i.e. five or six days a week) from the age of 6 to the age of 16. A pupil may change schools in the case of exceptionally good (or exceptionally poor) ability. Graduation certificates from one state are recognized by all the other states. Qualified teachers are able to apply for posts in any of the states.

**Overview**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Grade** | **Age** | **School level (Berlin)** | **School level (Rest of Germany)** |
| 1 | 6/7 | primary | primary |
| 2 | 7/8 |
| 3 | 8/9 |
| 4 | 9/10 |
| 5 | 10/11 | secondary, part I |
| 6 | 11/12 |
| 7 | 12/13 | secondary, part I |
| 8 | 13/14 |
| 9 | 14/15 |
| 10 | 15/16 |
| 11 | 16/17 | secondary, part II | secondary, part II |
| 12 | 17/18 |
| (13) | (18/19) |

In Germany, education is the responsibility of the states ([*Länder*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/States_of_Germany)) and part of their constitutional sovereignty (*Kulturhoheit der Länder*). Teachers are employed by the Ministry of Education for the state and usually have a job for life after a certain period ([verbeamtet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beamter)) (which, however, is not comparable in timeframe nor competitiveness to the typical tenure track, e.g. at universities in the US). This practice depends on the state and is currently changing. A parents' council is elected to voice the parents' views to the school's administration. Each class elects one or two "Klassensprecher" (class presidents, if two are elected usually one is male and the other female), the class presidents meet several times a year as the "Schülerrat" (students' council). A team of school presidents is also elected by the pupils each year, their main purpose is organizing school parties, sports tournaments and the like for their fellow students. The local town is responsible for the school building and employs the janitorial and secretarial staff. For an average school of 600 – 800 students, there may be two janitors and one secretary. School administration is the responsibility of the teachers, who receive a reduction in their teaching hours if they participate.

Church and state are separated in Germany. Compulsory school prayers and compulsory attendance at religious services are against the constitution. In 1995, it was ruled that the Christian cross was not allowed in classrooms, as it violates the religious freedom of non-Christian students. The cross is allowed if none of the pupils objects, but must be removed in the event of an objection. Some German states have banned teachers from wearing headscarves.

**Preschool**



A German Kindergarten class.

The German preschool is known as a *Kindergarten* (plural *Kindergärten*) or *Kita*, short for ***Ki****nder****ta****gesstätte* (meaning "children's daycare center"). Children between the ages of 3 and 6 attend *Kindergärten*, which are not part of the school system. They are often run by city or town administrations, churches, or registered societies, many of which follow a certain educational approach as represented, e.g., by [Montessori](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montessori) or [Reggio Emilia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reggio_Emilia_approach) or "Berliner Bildungsprogramm", etc. [Forest kindergartens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forest_kindergarten) are well established. Attending a *Kindergarten* is neither mandatory nor free of charge, but can be partly or wholly funded, depending on the local authority and the income of the parents. All caretakers in Kita or Kindergarten must have a three year qualified education, or are under special supervision during training.

*Kindergärten* can be open from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. or longer and may also house a *Kinderkrippe*, meaning crèche, for children between the ages of eight weeks and three years, and possibly an afternoon *Hort* (often associated with a primary school) for school-age children aged 6 to 10 who spend the time after their lessons there. Alongside nurseries, there are day-care nurses (called *Tagesmutter*, plural *Tagesmütter* – the formal, gender-neutral form is *Tagespflegeperson(en)*) working independently from any pre-school institution in individual homes and looking after only three to five children typically up to three years of age. These nurses are supported and supervised by local authorities.

The term *Vorschule*, meaning ‘pre-school’, is used both for educational efforts in *Kindergärten* and for a mandatory class that is usually connected to a primary school. Both systems are handled differently in each [German state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/States_of_Germany). The *Schulkindergarten* is a type of Vorschule.

**Primary education**

Parents looking for a suitable school for their child have a wide choice of elementary schools:

* State school. State schools do not charge tuition fees. The majority of pupils attend state schools in their neighborhood. Schools in affluent areas tend to be better than those in deprived areas. Once children reach school age, many middle class and working class families move away from deprived areas.
* or, alternatively
  + [Waldorf School](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waldorf_School) (206 schools in 2007)
  + [Montessori method](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montessori_method) school (272)
  + Freie Alternativschule (Free Alternative Schools) (85)
  + [Protestant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical_Church_in_Germany) (63) or [Catholic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholic_Church) (114) [parochial schools](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parochial_school)

**Secondary education**

After children have completed their primary education (at 10 years of age, 12 in Berlin and Brandenburg), there are four options for secondary schooling:

* [*Hauptschule*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hauptschule) (the least academic, much like a modernized [*Volksschule*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volksschule) [elementary school]) until grade nine (with [Hauptschulabschluss](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hauptschulabschluss) and in some cases Mittlere Reife = Realschulabschuss as exit exam); in some States of Germany the Hauptschule does not exist and pupils are mainstreamed into a [Mittelschule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mittelschule) or [Regionale Schule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regionale_Schule) instead.
* [*Realschule*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realschule) until grade ten (with [Mittlere Reife](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mittlere_Reife) (Realschulabschluss) as exit exam);
* [*Gymnasium*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gymnasium_(Germany)) (grammar school) until grade 12 or 13 (with *Abitur* as exit exam, qualifying for university); and
* [*Gesamtschule*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comprehensive_school) (comprehensive school)
* After successfully passing through any of the above schools, pupils can start a career with an apprenticeship in the [*Berufsschule*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berufsschule) (vocational school). The *Berufsschule* is normally attended twice a week during a two, three, or three-and-a-half year [apprenticeship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apprenticeship); the other days are spent working at a company. This is intended to provide a knowledge of theory and practice. The company is obliged to accept the apprentice on its apprenticeship scheme. After this, the apprentice is registered on a list at the [*Industrie- und Handelskammer*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chamber_of_commerce) *IHK* (chamber of industry and commerce). During the apprenticeship, the apprentice is a part-time salaried employee of the company. After passing the Berufsschule and the exit exams of the IHK, a certificate is awarded and the young person is ready for a career up to a low management level. In some areas, the schemes teach certain skills that are a legal requirement (special positions in a bank, legal assistants).

Some special areas provide different paths. After attending any of the above schools and gaining a leaving certificate (Hauptschulabschluss) - Mittlere Reife (FOR) or Mittlere Reife, (Realschulabschuss from a Realschule); or Abitur from a [Gymnasium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gymnasium_(Germany)) or a [Gesamtschule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comprehensive_school), school leavers can start a career with an apprenticeship at a [Berufsschule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berufsschule) (vocational school). Here the student is registered with certain bodies, e.g. [associations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voluntary_association) such as the German Bar Association Deutsche Rechtsanwaltskammer GBA (board of directors). During the apprenticeship, the young person is a part-time salaried employee of the institution, bank, physician or attorney’s office. After leaving the Berufsfachschule and passing the exit examinations set by the German Bar Association or other relevant associations, the apprentice receives a certificate and is ready for a career at all levels except in positions which require a specific higher degree, such as a doctorate. In some areas, the apprenticeship scheme teaches skills that are required by law, including certain positions in a bank or those as legal assistants. The 16 states have exclusive responsibility in the field of education and professional education. The federal parliament and the federal government can influence the educational system only by financial aid to the states. There are many different school systems, but in each state the starting point is always the Grundschule (elementary school) for a period of four years; or six years in the case of Berlin and Brandenburg.

*Percentage of jobholders holding* [*Hauptschulabschluss*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hauptschulabschluss)*,* [*Realschulabschluss*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realschulabschluss) *or Abitur in Germany*:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **1970** | **1982** | **1991** | **2000** |
| [**Hauptschulabschluss**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hauptschulabschluss) | 87,7 % | 79,3 % | 66,5 % | 54,9 % |
| [**Realschulabschluss**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realschulabschluss) | 10,9 % | 17,7 % | 27 % | 34,1 % |
| [**Abitur**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abitur) | 1,4 % | 3 % | 6,5 % | 11 % |



The monument in Rostock depicting a teacher and a student honors teachers

Grades 5 and 6 form an orientation phase (*Orientierungsstufe*) during which pupils, their parents and teachers decide which of the above-mentioned paths the pupils should follow. In all states except [Berlin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin) and [Brandenburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brandenburg), this orientation phase is embedded into the program of the secondary schools. The decision for a secondary school influences the pupil's future, but during this phase changes can be made more easily. In practice this rarely comes to bear because teachers are afraid of sending pupils to more academic schools whereas parents are afraid of sending their children to less academic schools. In Berlin and Brandenburg, the orientation is embedded into that of the elementary schools.

Teachers give a so-called *educational (path) recommendation* (*Bildungs(gang)empfehlung*) based on scholastic achievements in the main subjects (mathematics, German, natural sciences, foreign language) and classroom behavior, with details and legal implications differing from state to state: in some German states, those wishing to apply for a Gymnasium or Realschule need such a recommendation stating that the pupil is likely to make a successful transition to that type of school; in other cases anybody may apply. In Berlin 30% - 35% of Gymnasium places are allocated by lottery. A pupil's performance at primary school is immaterial.

The eastern states Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia combine Hauptschule and Realschule as *Sekundarschule*, *Mittelschule* and *Regelschule* respectively. All German states have *Gymnasium* as one possibility for the more able children, and all states - except [Saxony](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saxony) - have some *Gesamtschulen*, but in different forms. The states of Berlin and Hamburg have only two types of schools: comprehensive schools and Gymnasium (see: [Education in Berlin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Berlin) and [Education in Hamburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Hamburg)).

Learning a foreign language is compulsory throughout Germany in secondary schools and often this language is English. However, it is not always the first foreign language; pupils at *Gymnasium* are sometimes required to learn Latin as their first foreign language or may choose between languages. The list of available foreign languages as well as the hours of compulsory foreign language studies differ from state to state. French, Spanish, ancient Greek, and Latin are most frequently taken as foreign language. Many schools also offer voluntary study groups for the learning of other languages. In some states, foreign language education starts in the *Grundschule* (primary school). For example, in [North Rhine-Westphalia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Rhine-Westphalia), English is starting in the third year of elementary school; [Brandenburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brandenburg) starts with either English or Polish; and [Baden-Württemberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baden-W%C3%BCrttemberg) starts with English or French in the first year.

It may be problematic in terms of school studies for families to move from one German [state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/States_of_Germany) to another because there are quite different curricula for almost every subject.

Adults who did not obtain a *Realschulabschluss* or *Abitur*, or reached its equivalent, have the option of attending evening classes at an [*Abendgymnasium*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abendgymnasium) or [*Abendrealschule*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abendrealschule).

**School organization**



Standard classroom at a secondary school in Germany in 1998



The choir of the Carl-von-Ossietzky-Gymnasium



The Witten-Annen Freiligrathschule, a Hauptschule



The [Kolleg St. Blasien](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kolleg_St._Blasien) resides in a former Benedictine monastery



Stella Matutina in [Feldkirch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feldkirch_(Hartheim))



The [Aloisiuskolleg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aloisiuskolleg)



Cadets of the German Navy taking exercises in front of one of the gyms of Germany's naval officers school, the Marineschule Mürwik

A few organizational central points are listed below. It should however be noted that due to the decentralized nature of the education system there are many more additional differences across the 16 states of Germany.

* Every state has its own school system
* Each age group of pupils (born roughly in the same year) forms one or more grades or classes ("Klassen") per school which remain the samefor elementary school (years 1 to 4), orientation school (if there are orientation schools in the state), orientation phase (at *Gymnasium* years 5 to 6), and secondary school (years 5 to 10 in "Realschulen" and "Hauptschulen"; years 5 to 11 (differences between states) in "Gymnasien") respectively. Changes are possible, though, when there is a choice of subjects, e.g. additional languages; Then classes are split (and newly merged) either temporarily or permanently.
* Most subjects are taught in the pupils' own classroom (imaginable as a "home room"); the pupils stay in their room while the teachers move from class to class. This is common throughout school up to year 11 (5 in Saxony, 7 in Brandenburg). Exceptions exist for PE, art, sciences, music and subjects which are taught in courses.
* Pupils usually sit at tables, not desks (usually two at one table), sometimes arranged in a semicircle or another geometric or functional shape. During exams in classrooms, the tables are sometimes arranged in columns with one pupil per table (if permitted by the room's capacities) in order to prevent cheating; at many schools, this is only the case for some exams in the two final years of school, i.e. some of the exams counting for the final grade on the high school diploma.
* There normally is no [school uniform](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/School_uniform) or [dress code](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dress_code). Many private schools have a simple dress code consisting of, for example, "no shorts, no sandals, no clothes with holes". Some schools are trying out school uniforms, but those are not as formal as seen in for example the UK. They mostly consist of a normal sweater/shirt and jeans of a certain color, sometimes with the school's symbol on it. It is however a common custom to design graduation class shirts for final examination in Gymnasium.
* School usually starts between 7.30 a.m. and 8:15 a.m. and can finish as early as 12; instruction in lower classes almost always ends before lunch. In higher grades, however, afternoon lessons are very common and periods may have longer gaps without teacher supervision between them. Ordinarily, afternoon classes are not offered every day and/or continuously until early evening, leaving pupils with large parts of their afternoons free of school; some schools (*Ganztagsschulen*), however, offer classes or mainly supervised activities throughout the afternoons in order to offer supervision of the pupils rather than an increase in teaching. Afternoon lessons can continue until 6 o'clock.
* Depending on school, there are breaks of 5 to 10 minutes after each period. There is no lunch break as school usually finishes before 1:30 for junior school. However, at schools that have "Nachmittagsunterricht" (= afternoon classes) ending after 1:30 there's sometimes a lunch break of 45 to 90 minutes, though many schools lack any special break in general. Some schools that have regular breaks of 5 minutes between periods have additional 15 or 20 minute breaks after the second and fourth period.
* In German state schools periods are exactly 45 minutes. Each subject is usually taught for two to three periods every week (main subjects like mathematics, German or foreign languages are taught for four to six periods) and usually no more than two periods consecutively. The beginning of every period and, usually, break is announced with an audible signal such as a bell.
* Exams (which are always supervised) are usually [essay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essay) based, rather than [multiple choice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiple_choice). As of 11th grade, exams usually consist of no more than three separate exercises. While most exams in the first grades of secondary schools usually span no more than 90 minutes, exams in 11th to 13th grade may span four periods or more (without breaks).
* At every type of school, pupils study one [foreign language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_language) (in most cases English) for at least five years. The study is, however, far more rigorous and literature oriented in Gymnasium. In *Gymnasium*, students can choose from a wider range of languages (mostly English, French, Russian (mostly in east German Bundesländer) or Latin) as the first language in 5th grade, and a second mandatory language in 7th grade. Some types of *Gymnasium* also require an additional third language (such as Spanish, Italian, Russian, Latin or Ancient Greek) or an alternative subject (usually based on one or two other subjects, e.g. English politics (English & politics), dietetics (biology) or media studies (arts & German) in 9th or 11th grade. Gymnasiums ordinarily offer further subjects starting at 11th grade, with some schools offering a fourth foreign language.
* A small number of schools have a *Raucherecke* (smokers' corner), a small area of the schoolyard where students over the age of eighteen are permitted to smoke in their breaks. Those special areas were banned in the states of [Berlin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin), [Hessen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hessen) and [Hamburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamburg), [Brandenburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brandenburg) at the beginning of the 2005-06 school year. ([Bavaria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bavaria), [Schleswig-Holstein](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schleswig-Holstein), [Lower Saxony](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lower_Saxony) 2006-07)). From now on schools in these states forbid smoking for pupils and teachers and offences at school will be punished. Some other states in Germany are planning to introduce similar laws.
* As state schools are public, smoking is universally prohibited inside the buildings. Smoking teachers are generally asked not to smoke while at or near school.
* Students over 14 years are permitted to leave the school compound during breaks at some schools. Teachers or school personnel tend to prevent younger pupils from leaving early and strangers from entering the compound without permission.
* Tidying up the classroom and schoolyard is often the task of the pupils. Unless a group of pupils volunteers, individuals are picked sequentially.
* Many schools have *AGs* or *Arbeitsgemeinschaften* (clubs) for afternoon activities such as sports, music or acting, but participation is not necessarily common. Some schools also have special mediators who are student volunteers trained to resolve conflicts between their classmates or younger pupils.
* Only few schools have actual sports teams that compete with other schools'. Even if the school has a sports team, students are not necessarily very aware of it.
* While student newspapers used to be very common until the late 20th century, many of them are now very short-lived, usually vanishing when the team graduates. Student newspapers are often financed mostly by advertisements.
* Usually schools don't have their own radio stations or TV channels. Larger universities often have a local student-run radio station, however.
* Although most German schools and state universities do not have classrooms equipped with a computer for every student, schools usually have at least one or two *computer rooms* and most universities offer a limited number of rooms with computers on every desk. State school computers are usually maintained by the same exclusive contractor in the entire city and updated slowly. Internet access is often provided by phone companies free of charge. Especially in schools the teachers' computer skills are often very low.
* At the end of their schooling, students usually undergo a cumulative written and oral examination (*Abitur* in *Gymnasiums* or *Abschlussprüfung* in *Realschulen* and *Hauptschulen*). Students leaving *Gymnasium* after 9th grade do have the leaving examination of the Hauptschule and after 10th grade do have the Mittlere Reife (leaving examination of the Realschule).
* After 10th grade *Gymnasium* students may quit school for at least one year of job education if they do not wish to continue. *Realschule* and *Hauptschule* students who have passed their *Abschlussprüfung* may decide to continue schooling at a *Gymnasium*, but are sometimes required to take additional courses in order to catch up.
* [Corporal punishment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporal_punishment) was banned 1973 in West Germany and 1949 in East Germany.
* Fourth grade (or sixth, depending on the state) is often quite stressful for students of lower performance and their families. Many feel tremendous pressure when trying to achieve placement in Gymnasium, or at least when attempting to avoid placement in Hauptschule. Germany is unique compared to other western countries in its early segregation of students based on academic achievement.

**School year**

The school year starts after the summer break (different from state to state, usually end/mid of August) and is divided into two terms. There are typically 12 weeks of holidays in addition to public holidays. Exact dates differ between states, but there are generally 6 weeks of summer and two weeks of Christmas holiday. The other holiday periods are given in spring (usually around [Easter Sunday](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter_Sunday)) and autumn (the former "harvest holiday", where farmers used to need their

**Model timetables**

Students have about 30-40 periods of 45 minutes each per week, but especially secondary schools today switch to 90 minutes lessons (*Block*) which count as two 'traditional' lessons. To manage classes that are taught three lessons per week there is still one 45 minute lesson each day, mostly between the first two blocks. There are about 12 compulsory subjects: two or three foreign languages (one to be taken for 9 years, another for at least 3 years), physics, biology, chemistry and usually civics/social studies (for at least 5, 7, 3, and 2 years, respectively), and mathematics, music, art, history, German, geography, PE and religious education/ethics for 9 years. A few afternoon activities are offered at German schools – mainly choir or orchestra, sometimes sports, drama or languages. Many of these are offered as semi-scholastic AG's (*Arbeitsgemeinschaften* – literally "working groups"), which are mentioned, but not officially graded in students' report cards. Other common extracurricular activities are organized as private clubs, which are very popular in Germany.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sample grade 10 Gymnasium timetable | | | | | |
| **Time** | **Monday** | **Tuesday** | **Wednesday** | **Thursday** | **Friday** |
| **07.30–08.15 am** | English | Physics | Biology | Physics | French (course) |
| **08.20–09.05 am** | History | English | Chemistry | Maths | Chemistry |
| **09.05–09.25 am** | *break* | | | | |
| **09.25–10.10 am** | Latin (course) | French (course) | Maths | Latin (course) | Maths |
| **10.15–11.00 am** | German | French (course) | Religious studies (course) | Latin (course) | German |
| **11.00–11.15 am** | *break* | | | | |
| **11.15–12.00 am–pm** | Music | Mathematics | P.E. | German | Biology |
| **12.05–12.50 pm** | Religious studies (course) | History | P.E. | English | Latin (course) |

This timetable reflects a school week at a normal 9-year Gymnasium in North Rhine-Westphalia (which should change to 8 years by 2013). There are three blocks of lessons where every "hour" takes 45 minutes. After each block, there is a break of 15–20 minutes, also after the 6th hour (the number of lessons changes from year to year, so it's possible that one would be in school until four o'clock). "Nebenfächer" (= minor fields of study) are taught two times a week, "Hauptfächer" (=major subjects) are taught three times. (Latin is taught four times a week because it is the newly started third language.)

In grades 11–13, 11–12, or 12–13 (depending on the school system), each student majors in two or three subjects ("Leistungskurse", "Grundkurse"/"Profilkurse"). These are usually taught five hours per week. The other subjects are usually taught three periods per week.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sample grade 12 Gymnasium timetable (Lower-Saxony) | | | | | |
| **Time** | **Monday** | **Tuesday** | **Wednesday** | **Thursday** | **Friday** |
| **08.00–08.45 am** | English | Religious studies | French | Physics | German |
| **08.50–09.35 am** | English | Religious studies | French | Physics | German |
| **09.55–10.40 am** | German | Geography/Social Studies (taught in English) | Mathematics | Geography/Social Studies (taught in English) | Mathematics |
| **10.45–11.30 am** | German | Geography/Social Studies (taught in English) | Mathematics | Geography/Social Studies (taught in English) | Mathematics |
| **11.50–12.35 pm** | Physics | Politics-Economy | History | English | French |
| **12.40–1.25 pm** | Physics | Politics-Economy | History | English | French |
| **1.40–2.25 pm** | Arts | "Seminarfach"+ | History |  | PE (different sports offered as courses) |
| **2.30–3.15 pm** | Arts | "Seminarfach"+ | History |  | PE (different sports offered as courses) |

+"Seminarfach" is a compulsory class in which each student is prepared to turn in his/her own research paper at the end of the semester. The class is supposed to train the students' scientific research skills that will be necessary in their later university life.

There are many differences in the 16 states of Germany and there are alternatives to this basic pattern, e.g. [*Waldorfschulen*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waldorf_School) or other private schools. Adults can also go back to evening school and take the *Abitur* exam.

**Public and private schools**

In 2006, six percent of German children attended private schools.

In [Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany), Article 7, Paragraph 4 of the [Grundgesetz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basic_Law_for_the_Federal_Republic_of_Germany), the [constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution) of Germany, guarantees the right to establish private schools. This article belongs to the first part of the German [basic law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basic_law), which defines [civil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_and_political_rights) and [human rights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights). A right which is guaranteed in this part of the Grundgesetz can only be suspended in a [state of emergency](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_of_emergency), if the respective article specifically states this possibility. That is not the case with this article. It is also not possible to abolish these rights. This unusual protection of private schools was implemented to protect them from a second [Gleichschaltung](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gleichschaltung) or similar event in the future.

*Ersatzschulen* are ordinary primary or secondary schools which are run by private individuals, private organizations or religious groups. These schools offer the same types of diplomas as in public schools. However, Ersatzschulen lack the freedom to operate completely outside government control. Teachers at Ersatzschulen are required to have at least the same qualifications as those at state schools; by the same token, their salaries are at least those of teachers at state schools. An Ersatzschule must have at least the same academic standards as those of a state school and Article 7, Paragraph 4 of the Grundgesetz, also forbids the segregation of pupils according to the means of their parents (the so called *Sondierungsverbot*). Therefore, most Ersatzschulen have very low tuition fees compared to those in most other [Western European](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Europe) countries; scholarships are also often available. However, it is not possible to finance these schools with such low tuition fees: accordingly all German Ersatzschulen are subsidized with public funds.

Furthermore, in some cases, the education of a pupil at a private school is funded by the so-called youth welfare office. This is often the case if a pupil is considered to be a child at risk: pupils who have learning disabilities, special emotional needs or come from broken homes fall into this category.

After allowing for the socio-economic status of the parents, children attending private schools are not as able as those at state schools. At the [Program for International Student Assessment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Programme_for_International_Student_Assessment) (PISA) for example, after allowing for socioeconomic class, pupils at private schools underperformed those at state schools. One has, however, to be careful interpreting that data: it may be that such pupils do not underperform because they attend a private school, but that they attend a private school because they underperform. Some private Realschulen and Gymnasien have lower entrance requirements than public Realschulen and Gymnasien.

**Special schools**



A special school for children with special emotional needs in Kötitz, Germany

Most German children with special needs attend a school called Förderschule or Sonderschule (special school) that serves only such children. There are several types of special schools in Germany such as:

* The "Sonderschule für Lernbehinderte" - a special school serving children who suffer from learning difficulties
* The "Schule mit dem Förderschwerpunkt Geistige Entwicklung" - a special school serving children who suffer from very severe learning difficulties
* The "Förderschule Schwerpunkt emotional und social Entwicklung" - a special school serving children who have special emotional needs

Only one in 21 German children attends a special school. Teachers at those schools are qualified professionals who have specialized in special-needs education while at college. Special schools often have a very favorable student-teacher ratio and facilities compared with other schools. Special schools have been criticized. It is argued that special education separates and discriminates against those who are disabled or different. Some special-needs children do not attend special schools, but are mainstreamed into a [Hauptschule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hauptschule) or [Gesamtschule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gesamtschule) (comprehensive school) and/or, in rare cases, into a Realschule or even a Gymnasium.

**Elite schools**



St. Afra is one of few specialist schools that serve only gifted children

There are very few specialist schools for gifted children. Also German schools do not IQ-test children and, as a result, most intellectually gifted children remain unaware that they fall into this category. The German psychologist, Detlef H. Rost, carried out a pioneer long-term study on gifted children called the Marburger Hochbegabtenprojekt. In 1987/1988 he tested 7000 third graders on the CFT 20, Culture Fair Intelligence Test III ([Cattell Culture Fair III](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cattell_Culture_Fair_III)). Those who scored at least two standard deviations above the mean were categorized as gifted. A total of 151 gifted subjects participated in the study alongside 136 controls. All participants in the study were tested blind with the result that they did not discover whether they were gifted or not. The study revealed that the gifted children did very well in school. The vast majority later attended a Gymnasium and achieved good grades. However, 15 percent, were classified as underachievers because they attended a [Realschule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realschule) (two cases) or a [Hauptschule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hauptschule) (one case), had repeated a grade (four cases) or had grades that put them in the lower half of their class (the rest of cases). The report also concluded that most gifted persons had high self-esteem and good psychological health. Rost said that he was not in favor of special schools for the gifted. Gifted children seemed to be served well by Germany's existing school system.

**Apprenticeship**



A Meisterbrief (master craftsman's certificate) from the Berliner Handwerkskammer (Berlin chamber of handicrafts), the motto on the certificate reads "Work is the ennoblement of the citizen; boon will be the reward for his labor



A master discusses a vacuum compressor with his apprentice and several other craftspersons

Germany has high standards in the education of craftspeople. Historically very few people attended college. In the 1950s for example, 80 percent had only Volksschule ("primary school")-Education of 6 or 7 years. Only 5 percent of youngsters entered college at this time and still less graduated. In the 1960s, 6 percent of youngsters entered college. In 1961 there were still 8,000 cities in which no youngsters received secondary education. However, this does not mean that Germany was a country of uneducated people. In fact, many of those who did not receive secondary education were highly skilled craftspeople and members of the upper middle class. Even though more people attend college today, a craftsperson is still highly valued in German society.



Journeyman in traditional costume

Historically (prior to the 20th century) the relationship between a master craftsman and his apprentice was paternalistic. Apprentices were often very young when entrusted to a master craftsman by their parents. It was seen as the master's responsibility not only to teach the craft, but also to instill the virtues of a good craftsman. He was supposed to teach honor, loyalty, fair-mindedness, courtesy and compassion for the poor. He was also supposed to offer spiritual guidance, to ensure his apprentices fulfilled their religious duties and to teach them to "honor the Lord" (Jesus Christ) with their lives. The master craftsman who failed to do this would lose his reputation and would accordingly be dishonored - a very bad fate in those days. The apprenticeship ended with the so called Freisprechung (exculpation). The master announced in front of the trade heading that the apprentice had been virtuous and God-loving. The young person now had the right to call himself a "Geselle" (journeyman). He had two options: either to work for a master or to become a master himself. Working for another master had several disadvantages. One was that, in many cases, the journeyman who was not a master was not allowed to marry and found a family. Because the church disapproved of sex outside of marriage, he was obliged to become a master if he did not want to spend his life celibate. Accordingly, many of the so-called "Geselle" decided to go on a journey in order to become a master. This was called "Waltz" or [Journeyman years](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Journeyman_years).



A German roofer thatching a roof with reeds (he is wearing the traditional waistcoat and trousers of a craftsman)



Carpentry is one of the trades considered a craft in Germany

In those days, the crafts were called the "virtuous crafts" and the virtuousness of the craftspersons was greatly respected. For example, according to one source, a person should be greeted from *"the bricklayer craftspersons in the town, who live in respectability, die in respectability, who strive for respectability and who apply respectability to their actions"* In those days, the concept of the "virtuous crafts" stood in contrast to the concept of "academic freedom" as Brüdermann and Jost noticed.

Nowadays, the education of craftspersons has changed - in particular self-esteem and the concept of respectability. Yet even today, a craftsperson does sometimes refer to the "craftspersons codex of virtues" and the crafts sometimes may be referred to as the "virtuous crafts" and a craftsperson who gives a blessing at a roofing ceremony may, in many cases, remind of the "virtues of the crafts I am part of". Also certain virtues are ascribed to certain crafts. For example a person might be called "always on time like a bricklayer" to describe punctuality. On the other hand, "virtue" and "respectability", which in the past had been the center of the life of any craftsperson became less and less important for such education. Today, a young person who wants to start an apprenticeship must first find an "Ausbilder": this may be a master craftsperson, a master in the industrial sector (Industriemeister) or someone else with proof of suitable qualifications in the training of apprentices. The "Ausbilder" must also provide proof of no criminal record and proof of respectability. The Ausbilder has to be at least 24 years of age. The Ausbilder has several duties, such as 1) teach the craft, 2) teach the techniques, 3) instill character, 4) instill social skills. In some cases, the Ausbilder must also provide board and lodging. Agreement is reached on these points before the apprenticeship begins.

The apprentice will also receive payment for his work. According to §17 Berufsbildungsgesetz, a first year apprentice will be paid less than someone who has been an apprentice for longer. An Ausbilder who provides board and lodging may set this off against the payment made. In the past, many of those who applied for an apprenticeship had only primary school education. Nowadays, only those with secondary school education apply for apprenticeships because secondary school attendance has become compulsory. In some trades, it has even become difficult for those holding the [Hauptschulabschluss](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hauptschulabschluss) to find an apprenticeship because more and more pupils leave school with the [Realschulabschluss](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realschulabschluss) or [Abitur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abitur). The apprenticeship takes three years. During that time, the apprentice is trained by the Ausbilder and also attends a vocational school. This is called the "German model" or "[dual education system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dual_education_system)" ("Duale Ausbildung").

**Tertiary education**

See also: [List of universities in Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_universities_in_Germany)

**Application**



The [Humboldt University of Berlin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humboldt_University_of_Berlin) is the first modern university in the world.



The [University of Heidelberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Heidelberg) is the oldest university in Germany.

There are numerous ways to achieve admission to German colleges and universities. The most traditional route has always been graduation from a Gymnasium with the Abitur; however this has become less common over time. As of 2008, less than half of university freshmen in some German states had graduated from a Gymnasium. Even in Bavaria (a state with a policy of strengthening the Gymnasium) only 56 percent of freshmen had graduated from a Gymnasium. The rest were awarded the Abitur from another school or did not hold the Abitur certification at all. Any person with the prerequisite qualifications may apply for Fachhochschule or University in Germany, regardless of race, gender, religion or political opinion.

Students wishing to attend university in Germany must, as a rule, hold the Abitur or Fachabitur certification. Lacking this, they must present additional proof that they will be able to keep up with their fellow students. This may take the form of a test of cognitive functioning **or** evidence of passing the "Begabtenprüfung" ("Aptitude Test", consisting of a written and oral exam). In some cases, students that do not hold the Abitur may enter university even if they do not pass the aptitude or cognitive functioning tests if they 1) have received previous vocational training, and 2) have worked at least three years **and** passed the "Eingangsprüfung" (entrance exam). Such is the case, for example, in Hamburg.

High school diplomas received from states outside of Germany are, in many cases, not considered equivalent to an Abitur, but rather a [Realschulabschluss](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realschulabschluss) and therefore do not qualify the bearer for admission to a German university. However, it is still possible for such students to apply to a German university if they can provide proof of the requisite qualifications. For example, foreign students with a combined math and verbal score of 1300 on the [SAT](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SAT) or 28 on the [ACT](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ACT_(test)) may qualify for university admission.

Students who wish to attend a [Fachhochschule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fachhochschule) must hold the Abitur **or** the [Fachhochschulreife](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fachhochschulreife&action=edit&redlink=1) **or** other evidence that they will be able to keep up with their fellow students.

**Admission**

There are several quotas ensuring that the university admission process in Germany is fair.

* at least 2 percent of the students at any university must be so called "Härtefälle" cases (hardship cases or disadvantaged students). A student may be counted as a hardship case if 1) he or she suffers from an severe illness or disability or 2) he or she is socially disadvantaged (or from a disadvantaged family) or 3) he or she is of partial German ancestry born outside of Germany ("Spätaussiedler") and attended a university in the country of origin. Other conditions may also qualify a student as a hardship case; hardship cases are granted preferential treatment and admission
* 20 percent of available admission slots must be granted to students who graduated from school in the top 20% of their class (as determined by GPA)
* 20 percent of slots must be granted to students who have been on the waiting list the longest
* The other admission slots may be awarded at the university's discretion. Criteria universities commonly apply are: 1) grade point average (used most often), 2) personal character as evaluated in interviews, 3) personal character as evidenced through essays or letters, and 4) performance on entrance exams.

According to German law universities are not permitted to discriminate against or grant preferential treatment to persons on basis of race, ethnic group, gender, or social class **unless** in the "hardship cases", which must be granted preferential treatment.

**Tuition fees**

Most colleges are state-funded. In 2010, five of the 16 states of Germany charged tuition fees at state-funded colleges, while in 11 states tuition was provided free of charge. There are no university-sponsored scholarships in Germany, but a number of private and public institutions award scholarships, usually to cover living costs and books. Moreover, there is a law ([*BAFöG*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BAF%C3%B6G) or *Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz*) which ensures that needy people can get up to 650€ per month for 4–5 years if they or their parents cannot afford all the costs involved with studying. Part (typically half) of this money is an interest-free loan which has to be repaid. Many universities planning to introduce tuition fees have announced their intention to use part of the refunded money to create scholarship programs, although the exact details are mostly vague.

**Student Population**

Since the end of [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II), the number of young people entering university has more than tripled, but university attendance is still lower than that of many other European nations. This is partly because of the [dual education system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dual_education_system), with its strong emphasis on [apprenticeships](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apprenticeship) (see also [German model](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_model)) and because many jobs which do require a college degree in other countries (such as nursing) require only a qualification from a school (such as Krankenschwesternschule), which does not count as college.

The rate of college graduates varies by Bundesland. It is the highest in [Berlin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin) and the lowest in [Schleswig-Holstein](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schleswig-Holstein).

While the organizational structure claims to go back to the university reforms introduced by [Wilhelm von Humboldt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_von_Humboldt) in the early 19th century([Humboldt University of Berlin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humboldt_University_of_Berlin)), it has been criticized by some (including the German-born, former [Stanford University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford_University) president [Gerhard Casper](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerhard_Casper)) for having an unbalanced focus, more on education and less on research, and the lack of independence from state intervention. Indeed many of today's German public universities bear less resemblance to the original Humboldt vision than, for example, a typical US institution.



Handball-Mixed-Tournament at the 4th Eurokonstantia, the international sports tournament at the university sports center in Konstanz in 2009

German university students largely choose their own program of study and professors choose their own subjects for research and teaching. This elective system often results in students spending many years at university before graduating, and is currently under review. There are no fixed classes of students who study together and graduate together. Students change universities according to their interests and the strengths of each university. Sometimes students attend two, three or more different universities in the course of their studies. This mobility means that at German universities there is a freedom and individuality unknown in the USA, the UK, or France. While the overall mobility is high, the number of west Germans entering universities in the former east is low, whereas many students from the former east matriculate in west German institutions, raising doubts about the status of the "[inner reunification](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inner_reunification)" of the two parts of the country. The weekly [Die Zeit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die_Zeit) dubbed the former East as the "despised paradise".

Upon leaving school, students may choose to go on to university; however, most male students will have to serve nine months of [military](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conscription_in_Germany) or alternative service ([*Zivildienst*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zivildienst)) beforehand.

While at *Gymnasium* a pupil cannot take courses leading to university credits. This might have to do with the fact that the credit system is thus far unknown in Germany, although it is being introduced with the [Bologna process](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bologna_process) that is intended to unify education and degrees for all [EU](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EU) states. What counts at the end of schooling are certificates ("Scheine") issued by teachers proving that the required courses (and/or exams) were successfully taken. Exceptionally, pupils might not receive certificates for courses they had attend before officially matriculating at the university (i.e. while at *Gymnasium*), although their attendance may sometimes be counted as such. Usually there are few required specific courses, rather students choose from a more or less broad range of classes in their field of interest, while this varies greatly depending upon the choice of subject. Once a pupil has acquired the prescribed number of such certificates and can (if a *Magister* student) verify regular attendance at a minimum number of optional courses, the pupil can decide to register for the final examinations. In many cases, the grades of those certificates are discarded and the final diploma grade consists only of the grades of the final exams and master thesis. This can potentially impair motivation to achieve excellence, although most try to aim for higher scores in order to comply with requirements for [BAFöG](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BAF%C3%B6G) or scholarships.

At *Gymnasium*, pupils are under strict observation by teachers, and their attendance at all courses is checked regularly. At German universities, however, class attendance is only checked for courses in which the student requires a certificate, and attendance checks are usually a lot more liberal (usually a signature or initials are considered proof of attendance, even if the signing is not supervised) and sporadic, although repeated failure to attend a course without a proper excuse (i.e. sick note) usually results in a failure to get a certificate. Life at German universities may seem anonymous and highly individual at first, but most students find a group of fellow students with common interests in their first year, and then often take courses together and remain in this group up to the final examinations.

While there are curricula for the first two or three years in the sciences, in the liberal arts, every student selects lectures and seminars (usually admission to the *Zwischenprüfung* requires three certificates, which may each be earned in one of several different seminars), and takes the exams at the end of the study period. Each student decides when the time has come to take the final exam. Some take the minimum 4 years, most take 5–6 years, some may even spend 10 years at university (often because they changed subjects several times). After 13 years at school plus maybe 1 year in the armed forces, graduates may sometimes be almost 30 years old when they apply for their first real job, although most will have had a number of part-time jobs or temporary employments between semesters.

If they have successfully studied at university for two years (after a *Zwischenprüfung*/*Vordiplom*), students can transfer to other countries for graduate studies. Usually they finish studies after 4–6 years with a degree called the [*Diplom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diplom) (in the sciences) or [*Magister*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magister) (in the arts), which is equivalent to a M.Sc. or M.A., or a [*Magister Artium*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magister_Artium).

A special kind of degree is the [*Staatsexamen*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Staatsexamen). This is a government licensing examination that future doctors, teachers, lawyers, judges, public prosecutors and pharmacists are required to pass to be allowed to work in their profession. Students usually study at university for 4–8 years before they take the first Staatsexamen. Afterwards teachers and jurists go on to work in their future jobs for two years, before they are able to take the second Staatsexamen, which tests their practical abilities. The first Staatsexamen is equivalent to a M.Sc., M.A, LL.M. or LL.B.

**Fachhochschule**

However, there is another type of post-*Abitur* university training in Germany: the [*Fachhochschulen*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fachhochschule) (Universities of Applied Science), which offer degrees similar to those at a traditional university, but often concentrate on applied science (as the English name suggests). At a traditional university, it is an important to study "why" a method is scientifically right: however, this is less important at Universities of Applied Science. Here the emphasis is placed on what systems and methods exist, where they come from, their advantages and disadvantages, how to use them in practice and when are they should be used and when not. Students start their courses together and graduate (more or less) together and there is little choice in their schedule (but this must not be at several studies). To get on-the-job experience, [internship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internship) semesters are a mandatory part of studying at a Fachhochschule. Therefore the students at U-o-A-S are better trained in transferring learned knowledge and skills into practice while students of traditional universities are better trained in method developing. But as professors at U-o-A-S have done their doctorate at traditional universities, and such universities are have regard to the importance of practice, both types are coming closer and closer. It is nowadays more a differentiation between practice orientation and theoretical orientation of science.

After about 4–5 years (depending on how a student arranges the courses taken, and whether courses have to be repeated) a *Fachhochschule* student has a complete education and can go right into working life. *Fachhochschule* graduates traditionally received a title that starting with "Dipl." (Diploma) and ends with "(FH)", e.g. "Dipl. Ing. (FH)" for a graduate engineer from a *Fachhochschule*. The FH Diploma is roughly equivalent to a Bachelor degree. An FH Diploma does not usually qualify the holder for a Ph.D. program directly—many universities require an additional entrance exam or participation in theoretical classes from FH candidates. The last point is based on history. When FHs or U-o-A-S were set up, the professors were mainly teachers from higher schools but did not hold a doctorate. This has completely changed since the end of the eighties, but professors of traditional universities still regard themselves as "the real professors", which indeed is no longer true. Due to the Bologna process, bachelor and master degrees are being introduced to traditional universities and universities of applied sciences in the same way.

All courses at the roughly 250 traditional universities and universities of applied sciences used to be free - like any school in Germany. One might also say the government offered a full scholarship to everyone. However, students that took longer than the *Regelstudienzeit* ("regular length of studies", a statistically calculated average that is the minimum amount of time necessary to successfully graduate) did have to pay *Langzeitstudiengebühren* ("long-time study fees") of about 500 EUR per semester, in a number of states. Today there are a few private institutions (especially business schools) that charge tuition fees, but they do not enjoy the same high recognition and high standards as public universities. Another negative impact of private institutions in Germany is that they usually offer only one (or a few) subjects - a situation that results in their failure to achieve high recognition in international competition.

A student has to pay for board and lodging plus books. Above a certain age, student health insurance (50 EUR per month) is compulsory, and there are always other service charges (40-100 EUR per semester). Students often enjoy very cheap public transport (*Semesterticket*) in and around the university town. Inexpensive accommodation is available from the *Studentenwerk*, an independent non-profit organization partially funded by the state. This may cost 150 EUR per month, without food. Otherwise an apartment can cost 500 EUR, but often three to five students share an apartment. Food is about 100 EUR (figures for 2002). Many banks provide free accounts to students up to a certain age (usually around 25).

The [German Constitutional Court](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Constitutional_Court) recently ruled that a federal law prohibiting tuition fees is unconstitutional, on the grounds that education is the sole responsibility of the states. Following this ruling many state legislatures have passed laws that allow, but do not officially force, universities to demand tuition up to a limit, usually €500. In 2010 tuition fees at state funded universities existed in five States of Germany. In preparation to comply with several local laws aiming to give universities more liberty in their decisions but requiring them to be more economical (effectively privatizing them), many universities hastily decided to introduce the fees, usually without any exceptions other than a bare minimum. As a direct result, student demonstrations in the scale of 100 to 10000 participants are frequent in the affected cities, most notably [Frankfurt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankfurt) in [Hesse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hesse), where the state officially considered introducing universal tuition fees in the €1500 range.

Most students will move to the university town if it is far away. Getting across Germany from Flensburg to Konstanz takes a full day (1000 km or 620 miles). But, as mentioned above, there is no university-provided student housing on campus in Germany, since most campuses are scattered all over the city for historical reasons. Traditionally, university students rented a private room in town, which was their home away from home. This is no longer the standard, but one still finds this situation. One third to one half of the students works to make a little extra money, often resulting in a longer stay at university.

Figures for Germany are roughly:

* 1,000,000 new students at all schools put together for one year
* 400,000 *Abitur* graduations
* 30,000 doctoral dissertations per year
* 1000 [habilitations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habilitation) per year (possible way to qualify as a professor)

**Degrees**

Recently, changes relating to the so-called Bologna Agreement have started to come into effect to install a more internationally acknowledged system, which includes new course structures - the (hitherto unknown) Bachelor degree and the Master degree - and ECTS credits.

In the majority of subjects, students can only study for Bachelor, as "Diplom", or "Magister" courses do not accept new enrollments, and are available to “Diplom" students who are in their final year. (These student are under a limit unlike before.)

The bachelor/master system has been under a lot of criticism especially by students, as the curriculum are often accused of just the same courses as under the old system squeezed into the 3 years that most Bachelor courses are in Germany, or that they only cover the curriculum to the previous "Vordiplom" an examination taken at about half point of the course.

In either case a major complaint is the workload, and the lack of compatibility within subjects not only throughout Europe or the World but also within Germany, or even within Universities. This leaves many students unable to go for a year abroad as they don't have time because of time limited modules and the lack of compatibility of courses.

In addition, there are the courses leading to *Staatsexamen* (state examinations), e. g. for lawyers and teachers, that qualify for entry into German civil service, but which are not recognized elsewhere as an academic degree (although the courses are sometimes identical). Some "Diplom" courses still prevail.

On the whole, German universities are internationally recognized and perform well (although worse than American or British universities) in international [university rankings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_rankings). For example, Germany has, taken en masse, the third best result in the [QS World University Rankings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/QS_World_University_Rankings) 2011.

**Contemporary issues**



German states that have banned teachers from wearing headscarves (red)

After much public debate about Germany's perceived low international ranking in [Program for International Student Assessment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Programme_for_International_Student_Assessment) (PISA), some things are beginning to change. There has been a trend towards a less ideological discussion on how to develop schools. These are some of the new trends:

* Establishing federal standards on quality of teaching
* More practical orientation in teacher training
* Transfer of some responsibility from the Ministry of Education to local school

Since 1990s, a few changes have already been taking place in many schools:

* Introduction of [bilingual education](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bilingual_education) in some subjects
* Experimentation with different styles of teaching
* Equipping all schools with computers and Internet access
* Creation of local school philosophy and teaching goals ("Schulprogramm"), to be evaluated regularly
* Reduction of *Gymnasium* school years (*Abitur* after grade 12) and introduction of afternoon periods as in many other western countries

**Gesamtschulen vs. streaming**

There has been a public debate about [streaming](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tracking_(education)) students by ability. Opponents of streaming by ability claim that streaming is unfair and have pointed out that countries that performed very well in PISA, such as Finland, do not stream by ability. Proponents of streaming have pointed out that German comprehensive schools ranked below other German schools on PISA and that children from the lower socio-economic groups attending comprehensive schools fare worse in PISA than middle-class students attending the same schools.

**Determinants of academic attainment**

A generation ago the person least likely to attend a Gymnasium was a "catholic working class girl from the rural parts of Germany". Nowadays however the person least likely to attend a Gymnasium is a "minority youngster from the ghetto", who is "the son of immigrants"

The influence of social class on educational achievement is much greater in western Germany than it is in [eastern Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Germany) (former GDR). In western Germany the child of an academic is 7.26 times as likely as the child of a skilled worker to attend a Gymnasium, while in eastern Germany a child from an academic background is only 2.78 times as likely as a working class child to attend a Gymnasium. The reasons for this are unclear. Some people have the opinion that immigrants were to blame for this because more uneducated immigrant families lived in western Germany than in eastern Germany. This assumption however could not be confirmed. The difference between eastern and western Germany was even stronger when only ethnic German children were studied.

Social class differences in educational achievement are much more marked in Germany's big cities than they are in the rural parts of Germany. In cities with more than 300,000 inhabitants, children of academics are 14.36 times as likely as children of skilled workers to attend Gymnasium.

**IQ**

IQ is a very good predictor of educational attainment in Germany. The correlation between IQ and secondary school leaving certificate ([Hauptschulabschluss](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hauptschulabschluss), [Realschulabschluss](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realschulabschluss), [Abitur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abitur)) is r=0,7. Even when social class of a student’s family is controlled for IQ still is still positively associated with years of schooling. Of course, that could mean the opposite, that education level is a good predictor of IQ.

According to an older study students needed a minimum IQ of 115 (one standard deviation above the mean on the test used) in order to be able to benefit from attending a Gymnasium and they needed an IQ of at least 125 in order to be able to benefit from German University (not to be confused with the [Fachhochschule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fachhochschule), the required IQ is lower in that case). However this might have changed and the requirements might be lower today, since more students attend Gymnasien and universities.

**Gender**

Educational achievement varies more in German males than it does in German females: boys are more likely to attend special education schools but also more likely to be postgraduate students; 63% of pupils attending special education programs for the academically challenged are male. Males are less likely to meet the state-wide performance targets, more likely to drop out of school and more likely to be classified emotionally disturbed. 86% of the pupils receiving special training because of emotional disturbance are male. Research shows a class-effect: native middle-class males perform as well as middle-class females in terms of educational achievement but lower-class males and immigrant males lag behind lower-class females and immigrant females. A lack of male role models contributes to a low academic achievement in the case of lower-class males . On the other hand 58% of all postgraduate students and 84% of all German college professors were male in 2010.

**Socioeconomic factors**

See also: [German Gymnasium: Great Equalizer or Breeding Ground of Privilege?](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty_in_Germany), [Gymnasium\_(Germany)#.22Great\_Equalizer.22\_or\_.22Breeding\_Ground\_of\_Privilege.22.3F](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gymnasium_(Germany)#.22Great_Equalizer.22_or_.22Breeding_Ground_of_Privilege.22.3F), and [Academic achievement among different groups in Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic_achievement_among_different_groups_in_Germany)



The [Rütli School](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%C3%BCtli_School), [Berlin-Neukölln](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neuk%C3%B6lln) is believed to be one of Germany's worst schools. It has become a symbol of violence, despair and unequal opportunities



The [Schule Schloss Salem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schule_Schloss_Salem) is considered as one of the most prestigious elite schools in Germany, but many think schools like this serve only the rich.

Children from poor immigrant or working class families are less likely to succeed in school than children from middle or upper-class backgrounds. This disadvantage for the financially challenged of Germany is greater than in any other industrialized nation. However, the true reasons stretch beyond economic ones. The poor also tend to be less educated. After allowing for parental education, money does not play a major role in children's academic outcomes.

Immigrant children and youths, mostly of lower-class background, are the fastest-growing segment of the German population. So their prospects bear heavily on the well-being of the country. More than 30% of Germans aged 15 years and younger have at least one parent born abroad. In the big cities, 60% of children aged 5 years and younger have at least one parent born abroad. Immigrant children academically underperform their peers. Immigrants have tended to be less educated than native Germans. After controlling for parental education, ethnic group does not play a role in children's academic outcomes.

Immigrants from China and Vietnam perform exceptionally well. In eastern Germany, Vietnamese and Chinese of lower-class backgrounds outperform students from European backgrounds despite the fact that in most cases their parents are poorer and less educated than the parents of their European-born peers. Teachers in eastern Germany have also been shown to be more motivated than teachers in western Germany. That might be another reason for this Asian achievement.

**Studies**

ELEMENT-study Multiple Regression Analysis

**Factors determinating mathematical performance in 6th-graders attending a Berlin primary school**

| **Variable** | **Beta (strength of influence)** |
| --- | --- |
| mathematical performance in 4th grade | 0,540 |
| general cognitive ability | 0,236 |
| parents hold the [Abitur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abitur) (as compared to children of parents without school diploma) | 0,144 |
| parents hold the [Mittlere Reife](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mittlere_Reife) (as compared to children of parents without school diploma) | 0,096 |
| Number of books present in the child's home | 0,055 |
| male gender | no influence could be found |
| German is spoken in the child's home | no influence could be found |
| parents hold the Hauptschulabschluss (as compared to children of parents without school diploma) | no influence could be found |

The ELEMENT study dealt with determinants of academic achievement in Berlin. It was carried out in Berlin, where some of the pupils started at a Gymnasium after the 4th grade, while others stayed in primary school until 6th grade and started at different schools after the 6th grade. Factors correlated with academic achievement tend to be intercorrelated (that means that they are also correlated with other factors that determine academic achievement). The number of books owned by a pupil's parents, for example, is correlated with the parents' education. Because of this [Multiple Regression Analysis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regression_analysis) was used. Multiple Regression allows us to understand the influence of one variable when the other variables are held fixed.

It was revealed by the study that the most important variable determining mathematical performance in the 6th grade was mathematical performance in the 4th grade. Children who have a head start in the 4th grade keep it until the 6th grade. It was also revealed by the study that some variables were immaterial. If a language other than German is spoken in the home that was correlated with poor mathematical performance in other studies. However [correlation does not imply causation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Correlation_does_not_imply_causation) and the ELEMENT-study revealed that if other factors were taken into account for the language spoken at home, this had no effect on mathematical performance.

ELEMENT-long term study of the development of mathematical ability

**Development in mathematical ability of children attending a Berlin primary school by parents' education**

| education of parents | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **mathematical ability by 4th grade** | **mathematical ability by 6th grade** |
| no school diploma | 89,7 | 105,4 |
| [Hauptschulabschluss](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hauptschulabschluss) or similar diploma | 91,1 | 108,2 |
| [Mittlere Reife](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mittlere_Reife) or similar diploma | 94,8 | 112,8 |
| [Abitur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abitur) | 101,0 | 120,8 |

**Development in mathematical ability of children attending a Berlin Gymnasium by parents education**

| education of parents | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **mathematical ability by 4th grade (while still in primary school)** | **mathematical ability by 6th grade (Gymnasium)** |
| no school diploma | 104,2 | 123,3 |
| [Hauptschulabschluss](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hauptschulabschluss) or similar diploma | 111,0 | 128,8 |
| [Mittlere Reife](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mittlere_Reife) or similar diploma | 111,6 | 131,3 |
| [Abitur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abitur) | 114,5 | 135,2 |

The aim of another ELEMENT-study was to monitor the development of general mathematical ability. The findings of the study can be seen in the table. One finding is that those admitted to a Gymnasium after the fourth grade had showed better mathematical ability than those who stayed in primary school, ab initio. That was true for all social classes. Another finding was that children of all social classes did better in the sixth grade when they were at a Gymnasium. By the end of the sixth grade, those attending a Gymnasium were two years ahead of those attending a primary school. Did the Gymnasium boost students ability? There are different opinions about this. Some argue that this is the cases and even after testing performance in grade four, those who were admitted to a Gymnasium outperformed their peers who were not at grade six. That was also the interpretation of Prof. Dr. Dr. Lehman, who did the study. He stated: *The findings indicate that the Gymnasium help students of all social classes reach their full mathematical potential*.

Others however, who have reanalyzed the data, claimed that those attending a Gymnasium were different ab initio and could not properly be compared to those attending a primary school. The data is of high political relevance as those who are in favor of the tripartite system and those who are in favor of comprehensive schools both use it to proof their point. Those, who are in favor of comprehensive schools, claim that the data shows that the primary schools which resembles a comprehensive schools boost children's ability, while those in favor of the tripartite system argue that the data shows the Gymnasium boost students ability.

**Children at risk**

Children whose families receive welfare, children whose parents dropped out of school, children of teenage parents, children raised by a lone parent, children raised in crime-ridden inner-city neighborhoods, children who have multiple young siblings, and children who live in overcrowded substandard apartments are at risk of poor educational achievement in Germany. Often these factors go together, making it very hard for children to overcome the odds. A number of measures have been assessed to help those children reach their full potential.

**Kindergarten**



A forest kindergarten in [Düsseldorf](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C3%BCsseldorf)

Kindergarten has been shown to improve school readiness in children at risk. Children attending a kindergarten were less likely to have impaired speech or impaired motor development. Only 50% of children whose parents did not graduate from school are ready for school at age six. If such children were enrolled in a high-quality three-year Kindergarten program, 87% were ready for school at age six. Thus Kindergarten helps to overcome unequal opportunities.

**Home visits and assistance**

Families whose children are at risk for low academic achievement may be visited by trained professionals. They offer a wide variety of services that relate to each child's and each family's background and needs. Such professionals may visit pregnant low-income women and talk with them about positive health-related behaviors, such as following a healthy diet or refraining from the use of alcohol or tobacco while pregnant. Positive health-related behavior may have a major impact on children's school performance.

Home visitors may provide information on childcare and social services, help parents in crisis and model problem-solving skills. They may help implement the preschool/school curriculum at home or provide a curriculum of educational games designed to improve language, development and cognitive skills. In most cases, such support is offered to families on a voluntary basis. Families who are eligible for the program may decide for themselves whether or not they want to participate. There are no penalties if they decide against it or against continuing with the program.

**Working class pupils**

In Germany most children are streamed by ability into different schools after fourth grade. The [Progress in International Reading Literacy Study](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progress_in_International_Reading_Literacy_Study) revealed that working class children needed better reading abilities than middle-class children to be nominated for the [Gymnasium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gymnasium_(Germany)). After allowing for reading abilities, odds to be nominated to Gymnasium for upper middle-class children were still 2.63 times better than for working-class children.

| Points needed to be nominated for Gymnasium | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Teachers nominating child for Gymnasium** | **Parents wanting child to attend Gymnasium** |
| children from upper-middle class backgrounds | 537 | 498 |
| children from lower-middle class backgrounds | 569 | 559 |
| children of parents holding pink collar jobs | 582 | 578 |
| children of self-employed parents | 580 | 556 |
| children from upper working class backgrounds | 592 | 583 |
| children from lower working class backgrounds | 614 | 606 |

Affirmative Action

Germany's [*Left Party*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Left_(Germany)) brought up the discussion about [affirmative action](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affirmative_action). According to Stefan Zillich, quotas should be "a possibility" to help working class children who did not do well in school gain access to a Gymnasium. Headmasters of Gymnasien have objected, saying that this type of policy would "be a disservice" to poor children, that they would not be able to academically keep up with their classmates and that they would not feel welcome at a Gymnasium. Wolfgang Harnischfeger, headmaster of a well-known Berlin Gymnasium, stated: "It can be noticed in children as young as kindergarten-age, that children take after their parents. They emulate their language, their way of dressing, their way of spending their freetime. Children from [Neukölln](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neuk%C3%B6lln) (a poor neighborhood) would not feel good about themselves if they had to attend that type of school that mainly serves pupils from social classes different from their own. They will not be able to integrate. Every field-day, every school party will show that very soon." He also said that "this kind of policy would weaken the Gymnasium" and that this would be dangerous, because "German society could not afford to do without the truly educated adults the Gymnasium produces". Stefan Zillich has answered to this, saying that "German society cannot afford having only so few adults who were truly educated". While affirmative action laws were not passed (status: January 2010) sought after schools have been guaranteed the right to employ their own quotas since the 1970s (see below).

Other quotas

A prominent example for a heavily oversubscribed school that chose to establish a quota is the [Laborschule Bielefeld](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laborschule_Bielefeld), which chose to establish a working class quota. It was decided that 50 percent of the pupils should come from working class backgrounds. Also the school chose to guarantee children from single parent families and children from immigrant families preferential treatment. The school tried to persuade working class parents to enroll their children, but they were not successful. In 2005 only 1.6 percent of the children had a father who was an unskilled worker and only 3.2 percent had a father who was a skilled worker. In 2009 a representative of the school said that the school still had the goal of enrolling as many working class and immigrant children as possible and that it was decided children from those backgrounds could be guaranteed a slot if they chose to enroll. The school, however, was successful in enrolling children from single parent families. Nearly 45 percent of its pupils come from a family headed by a single female.

Berlin's Gymnasium Lottery

In 2009 the [Berlin Senate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Senate) decided that Berlin's gymnasium schools should no longer be allowed to pick all of their students. It was ruled that while they would be able to pick 70% to 65% of their students, the other places were to be allocated by lottery. Every child is able to enter the lottery, no matter how he or she performed in primary school. It is hoped that this policy will increase the number of working class students attending a gymnasium. [The Left](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Left_(Germany)) proposed that Berlin *gymnasiums* should no longer be allowed to expel students who perform poorly, so that students who won a gymnasium place in the lottery have a higher chance of graduating from that school. It is not clear yet whether Berlin's senate will decide in favor of [The Left](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Left_(Germany))'s proposal.

**International comparison**

Recent [PISA student assessments](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Programme_for_International_Student_Assessment) demonstrated serious weaknesses in German pupils' performance. In the test of 43 countries in the year 2000, Germany ranked 21st in reading and 20th in both [mathematics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mathematics) and the [natural sciences](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_sciences), prompting calls for reform. In 2006, German schoolchildren improved their position compared to previous years, being ranked (statistically) significantly above average (rank 13) in science skills and statistically not significantly above or below average in mathematical skills (rank 20) and reading skills (rank 18).

The PISA Examination also found big differences in achievement between students attending different types of German schools. According to Jan-Martin-Wiadra: *Conservatives prized the success of the Gymnasium, for them the finest school form in the world – indeed, it is by far the number one in the PISA league table. But what they prefer to forget is that this success came at the cost of a catastrophe in the Hauptschulen.*

Some German teachers' representatives and a number of scientists disputed the PISA findings. Claiming among other things that the questions have been ill-translated, that the samples drawn in some countries were not representative, that Germans (most of whom had never done a multiple choice tests in their lives before) were discriminated against by the multiple choice questions, that the PISA-questions had no curricular validity and that the PISA was "in fact an IQ-test", which according to them showed that [dysgenic fertility](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dysgenics) was taking place in Germany.

The [Program for International Student Assessment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Programme_for_International_Student_Assessment), coordinated by the [OECD](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OECD), assesses the skills of 15-year-olds in OECD countries and a number of partner countries. In 2006, German schoolchildren improved their position compared to previous years, being ranked (statistically) significantly above average (rank 13) in science skills and statistically not significantly above or below average in mathematical skills (rank 20) and reading skills (rank 18). The socio-economic gradient was very high in Germany, the pupils' performance in Germany being more dependent on socio-economic factors than in most other countries.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **performance on** [**PISA**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PISA) **2003 (points earned) by school attended and social class** | | | | |
| **type school** | **social class „very low“** | **social class „low“** | **social class „high“** | **social class „very high“** |
| [Hauptschule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hauptschule) | 400 | 429 | 436 | 450 |
| Gesamtschule | 438 | 469 | 489 | 515 |
| [Realschule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realschule) | 482 | 504 | 528 | 526 |
| [Gymnasium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gymnasium_(Germany)) | 578 | 581 | 587 | 602 |
| PISA 2003 – Der Bildungsstand der Jugendlichen in Deutschland – Ergebnisse des 2. internationalen Vergleiches. | | | | |

**See also**

* [Abitur after twelve years](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abitur_after_twelve_years)
* [Education in East Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_East_Germany)
* [Music schools in Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_schools_in_Germany)
* [List of schools in Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_schools_in_Germany)
* [List of universities in Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_universities_in_Germany)

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