SECONDARY EDUCATION (ages 16-18, grades 10-12)

Secondary education is based on basic education and is divided into **general secondary** education and vocational secondary education.

General secondary education

General secondary education is acquired within three school years in gymnasium, upper secondary school or lyceum. General secondary education provides the right to continue studies at the higher education level. Teaching at an upper-secondary school takes place as day, evening and distance study. Graduation is also possible as an external pupil.

Conditions for admission

The state and local governments must ensure the availability of secondary education to everyone. Admission to gymnasium (upper secondary school, lyceum) generally takes place according to the results of graduation from basic school. Schools may carry out tests to fill available places. Admission is decided by the school's admission commission.

School specialization

The state curriculum sets the compulsory subjects at each school level, their minimum volumes, and the number of elective subjects and courses. A school forms its specialization through the choice of electives or courses and/or the extended study of some subjects. A school may have more than one specialization.

Graduating from school

In order to graduate from gymnasium (upper secondary school, lyceum), grade 12 pupils sit at least five final examinations - three state exams and two school exams. A pupil has the right to sit all five final exams as state exams. It is compulsory for all graduates of gymnasiums (upper secondary schools, lyceums) to sit the Estonian language state exam. For non-Estonian schools it is also compulsory to sit the Estonian as a second language exam (with a result of more than 60 points, the graduate is issued with the mid-level language skill certificate). The other exam subjects can be chosen from amongst mathematics, foreign languages (English, German, Russian, French), physics, chemistry, biology and history. The German language state exam can also be sat as the Level II language diploma exam by the German Culture Ministers' Conference.

State exams are generally written exams. The marking commissions for the state examinations use a 100-point system to grade the results. Up to the 20 points the result of state exam is positive. Gymnasium (upper secondary school, lyceum) final exams are also higher education institution admission exams. Graduates from gymnasium (upper secondary school, lyceum) are issued a school graduation certificate and a state exam certificate.

Cooperation between home and school

Parents participate in decisions related to their children's education through parents' meetings and other bodies (board of trustees, council). In addition, pupils' representatives participate in work of the school's board of trustees.

Vocational secondary education

Is acquired in a vocational education institution, on the basis of either basic school or general secondary education. Vocational education is determined by state curricula in various vocational areas. The nominal study duration for vocational education acquired on the basis of basic education is at least 3 years, and on the basis of secondary education, at least one year. Most vocational education institutions belong to the state. A graduate from vocational secondary education institution has same possibilities to continue studies in higher education institution as a learner having general secondary

Conditions of admission

All citizens of Estonia and EU member states and those who have valid residency permits for Estonia can begin studies in vocational education institutions. The state and local governments are obliged to ensure all who wish it the opportunity to acquire vocational secondary education on the basis of basic education. Admission is based on documents proving previously acquired education, language skills and the result of admission tests, and a health certificate. Study according to the vocational secondary education curriculum,

following basic school, requires a basic school graduation certificate, and study following upper secondary school requires an upper secondary graduation certificate and a state examination certificate.

Schools may have additional admission requirements. According to the chosen specialty a candidate pupil must undertake certain test. Admission is decided by the school's admission commission.

Graduation from school

Graduation from a vocational education institution is proven by a graduation certificate. A graduate from a vocational education institution will have the right to sit for a qualification exam, and be awarded a professional qualification. A professional qualification is proven by a professional certificate, and the holder has the right to use the professional title of the profession, or its shortened form. The professional certificates are registered and entered into the professions register.

Graduates from vocational education institutions who wish to continue studies at the higher education level must generally sit for state exams. All learners with secondary education (both general secondary and vocational secondary education) have an equal right to compete for admission to higher education institutions.

ESTONIAN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

In Estonian-medium schools, Estonian is studied as the mother tongue from grade 1 to 12, according to the state curriculum. At the end of basic school, pupils sit for the compulsory Estonian language exam, and at the end of gymnasium (upper secondary school, lyceum) for the compulsory Estonian language state exam. In schools, where children of citizens of EU member states study pupils have been provided with individual curriculum according to the syllabus of Estonian language as a second language.

Children who do not speak Estonian at home can begin Estonian language studies at pre-school. In Russian-medium schools, pupils study Estonian as a second language from grade 1 to 12, according to the state curriculum. At the end of basic school, pupils sit for the compulsory exam, which is equivalent to language skills at beginner level (A). Graduates of non-Estonian gymnasium (upper secondary school, lyceum) sit for the compulsory Estonian as a second language state exam, which is equivalent to language skills at medium level (B). At least 60 points are needed to pass the level test.

Additional information:

- Education Act, Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act and Private Schools Act http://www.legaltext.ee/et/andmebaas/ava.asp?m=022
- Information on examinations, level tests, Estonian language proficiency examinations, application for citizenship only in Estonian http://www.ekk.edu.ee/index2.html

Contacts:

Estonian Ministry of Education and Research

Non-Estonian Integration Foundation Munga 18, Tartu 50088 Liimi 1, Tallinn 10621 e-mail: hm@hm.ee Tel: 659 9021 Tel: 735 0222 e-mail: info@meis.ee www.hm.ee www.meis.ee

Citizenship and Migration Board

Endla 13, Tallinn 15 179 e-mail: kma@mig.ee Tel: 612 6979 www.miq.ee

Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs Gonsiori 29, Tallinn 15027 e-mail: info@sm.ee Tel: 626 9301 www.sm.ee

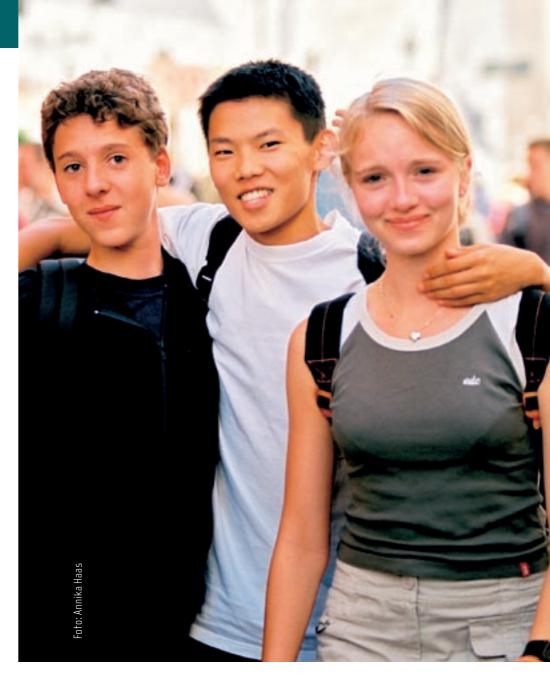
Local Governments http://www.riik.ee/en/omavalitsused/

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Learning in Estonian school

Estonia and its schools are becoming increasingly multicultural. In our schools, there are increasingly more children of foreign citizens. According to the Education Act of the Republic of Estonia, all children living in Estonia, including children from other countries, are obliged to attend school. In the choice of education, parents have the decisive say.

In Estonia, the education levels are pre-school education, basic education, secondary education and higher education. The Estonian education system supports inclusion of children with special needs and their participation in mainstream schools.

Acquisition of basic and secondary education in state or local government schools is free.

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION (ages 3-6)

A child acquires pre-school education in a pre-school institution or at home. The primary task of pre-school institutions is to care for and to strengthen the health of a child and to encourage his or her development, and to create preconditions for his or her successful coping in everyday life and for progress at school. A child who does not attend a pre-school institution may participate in the activities of a preparatory group, located either at a pre-school institution or at a school. A child can also go to school straight from home. Once a child turns 7 years old, he or she is obliged to attend school.

Pre-school institutions

- Crèche (up to 3 year old children) up to 16 children in a group
- Kindergarten
- younger group (3–5 year olds)
 - middle group (5–6 year olds)
- older group (6–7 year olds)
- composite group (2–7 year olds).

A kindergarten group may have up to 24 children, and a composite group up to 20 children.

A primary school can be combined with a kindergarten (kindergarten-primary school).

• Special kindergarten or special group, which takes into account the particularities of a child's development (multiple, physical, hearing and sight disabilities), or adaptation group (children with special needs in mainstream groups).

Depending on the disability, there are 4–12 children in a group.

Form of ownership

- Municipal pre-school
- Private pre-school

Participation fee in a pre-school institution is determined by the municipal or town council. It may vary according to the age of the child, the financial situation of the pre-school institution or other factors. In financing a municipal pre-school institution, the share covered by a parent for one child may not exceed 20% of the minimum wage¹ set by the Government of the Republic. The daily amount for a child's meals is set by the Board of Trustees of the pre-school institution and has to be paid by the parent.

Language of instruction

- Estonian 87%
- Russian 13%
- English 0,3%

If the instruction does not take place in Estonian language, children aged 5-6 are taught the Estonian language (by parents request and if possible, teaching may start earlier).

Conditions of admission

Parents are free to choose the pre-school for their child. Local government has to ensure a place for every child in its catchment area, if the parents so request. The parent must submit:

- an application
- the required doctor's certificate issued by the family doctor

A private pre-school institution may set additional admission conditions.

BASIC EDUCATION (ages 7–15; grades 1–9)

Basic education is compulsory for all. This is the minimum general education that provides the right to acquire secondary education or to enter working life. Pupils are obliged to attend school until basic education has been acquired or until they turn 17 years old. After that it is possible to acquire basic education in evening class, through distance learning or as an external student. The condition for graduating from basic school is the completion of the curriculum and passing the final examinations.

Form of ownership

- municipal school
- state school
- private school

A school is managed by a director. There is also a teachers' council and a board of trustees. Board of trustees consists of representatives from the local government council, teachers, parents, graduates and organizations supporting the school.

Language of instruction

- Estonian
- Russian
- English (private schools)

In schools where the language of instruction is other than Estonian, Estonian as a second language is a compulsory subject, starting in grade 1. If the mother tongue of the pupil is not the same as the language of instruction at school, it is possible to study the mother tongue as an elective subject. Studies will be organised if an application is made to the director by the parents of at least 10 pupils with the same mother tongue.

Conditions of admission

The condition for admission to grade 1 is being of compulsory education age. A child who has turned 7 years old by October 1 of the current year falls under the compulsory education requirement. If a parent so wishes, a child can be admitted to grade 1 if he or she has turned six by April 30 of the current year.

Basic schools and upper secondary schools with basic school classes are obliged to ensure places for all children living in their catchments areas. Schools with city-wide or state-wide intakes may set conditions for admission due to their special circumstances: before admission, the candidate must pass a number of tests, where the conditions and times for the tests are determined by the school. Admission is decided by the school's admissions commission.

School levels and curricula

Basic school levels are:

- Level I (grades 1–3)
- Level II (grades 4-6)
- Level III (grades 7–9)

Generally, basic school study lasts for nine years, but this time may shorten or lengthen if a pupil follows individual curriculum.

Acquiring basic education is based on the state curriculum for basic school and upper secondary school. The curriculum determines the instruction objectives for the basic level, as well as the principles for the organization of instruction, the compulsory and elective subjects, the subjects' volume and syllabi, and the requirements for progression from each school level and for graduation from basic school. Each school uses the state curriculum as a basis for preparing its own curriculum, taking into account the wishes of the pupils and its own possibilities.

For pupils from abroad, the teachers' council of the school decides on the grade to which the new pupil will be admitted, based on the knowledge and skills of the pupil, and implements individual curriculum, if needed.

School year

In a school year there are 175 school days (35 weeks). The school year begins on September 1. School vacations are at the start of November (autumn vacation), end of December/start of January (Christmas vacation), end of March (spring vacation) and from June to the end of August (summer vacation). The precise dates for vacations are set each year by a regulation issued by the Minister of Education and Research.

Number of lessons

One school week is comprised of five school days. The weekly schedule of lessons is set through the school's curriculum. The health regulations relevant to the school's timetables and organization of

lessons are set through a regulation issued by the Minister of Social Affairs. The maximum number of hours per week permitted in grade 1 is 20 hours, in grade 2: 23 hours, in grades 3 and 4: 25 hours, in grade 5: 28 hours, in grades 6 and 7: 30 hours, in grade 8: 32 hours, in grade 9: 34 hours.

The duration of a lesson is 45 minutes. Breaks must last at least 10 minutes. Generally there is at least one 15 minute or longer meal break. The number of lessons and their sequence during the day is set in the timetable, which is approved by the school's director (manager). The school day is usually from 8am to 3pm, but in some schools in larger towns, lessons may take place in an afternoon shift. Many schools provide free of charge after-school activities for their Level I, and also partly for their Level II pupils.

School meals

Pupils from grade 1–9 in all basic schools can receive a free hot meal in the price limit set by state. If the price of the meal is higher than the set amount, the parents have to cover the difference. The cost of the meal for senior pupils is covered by the parents. Many schools sell snacks and drinks.

Assessing pupils

Assessment may be verbal (analysis/assessment) or grading (mark). Competencies are assessed only verbally. The knowledge, skills and proficiencies of pupils are graded using a five-mark system.

Mark of 5 - "very good";

4 - "good";

3 – "satisfactory";

2 – "deficient"; 1 – "weak"

In grades 1 and 2, teachers may use verbal assessments. The behavior of, and care taken by a pupil is assessed using the grades of "exemplary", "good", "satisfactory" and "unsatisfactory".

Assessment of pupils with special needs (final examinations included) may be differentiated. In Estonian-medium schools, pupils whose skills in the language of instruction are not at the same level with the speakers of Estonian as their mother tongue can be subject to differentiated assessment. In Russian-medium schools, pupils whose skills in the language of instruction are not at the same level with the speakers of Russian as their mother tongue can be subject to differentiated assessment.

Aggregate assessments are used at the end of a study period, a part of a study period (school term, half-year) or at the end of the course. Aggregate assessments of study results are the bases for issuing certificates which demonstrate the completion of the curriculum requirements. At school graduation pupils receive a graduation certificate.

Each year, grades 3 and 6 undertake level tests in the school's language of instruction, in mathematics and in one elective subject. In order to graduate from basic school, grade 9 pupils sit compulsory final examinations with common questions and tasks in

- 1. compulsory mother tongue examination
- 2. compulsory mathematics examination
- 3. one examination in a subject chosen by the pupil.

From the study year 2005/06 a pupil of an Estonian-medium school whose mother tongue is not Estonian may choose the examination of Estonian as a second language instead of Estonian as a mother tongue. This is a basic level Estonian proficiency examination. Mathematics and selective examination may be in Estonian or in Russian language.

Cooperation between home and school

Parents participate in decisions related to their children's education through parents' meetings and other bodies (board of trustees, council). In some schools parents and school communicate via Internet (E-School). At least once a year class heads carry out a development conversation with each pupil and his or her parents.

Should there be problems, parents have the right to refer to officials in the following institutions: school, local government education department, county education department, Ministry of Education and Research.

¹ In 2006, 3000 EEK (20% = 600 kr)