



**Kanton Zürich
Bildungsdirektion
Volksschulamt**

Elementary Education in the Canton of Zurich Information for Parents

School is an important part of the everyday lives of children and adolescents. It complements the education and upbringing in the family. At school, your child has many different and valuable learning and life experiences. All children and teenagers have the right to an education. They go to kindergarten and school for free at their place of residence.

You as parents and legal guardians support schools, teachers, and authorities so that they can do their jobs and fulfil their tasks. You all work together and have a shared responsibility for the children and adolescents. By regularly updating and communicating with each other, you make sure that your children get the right support for successful school years.

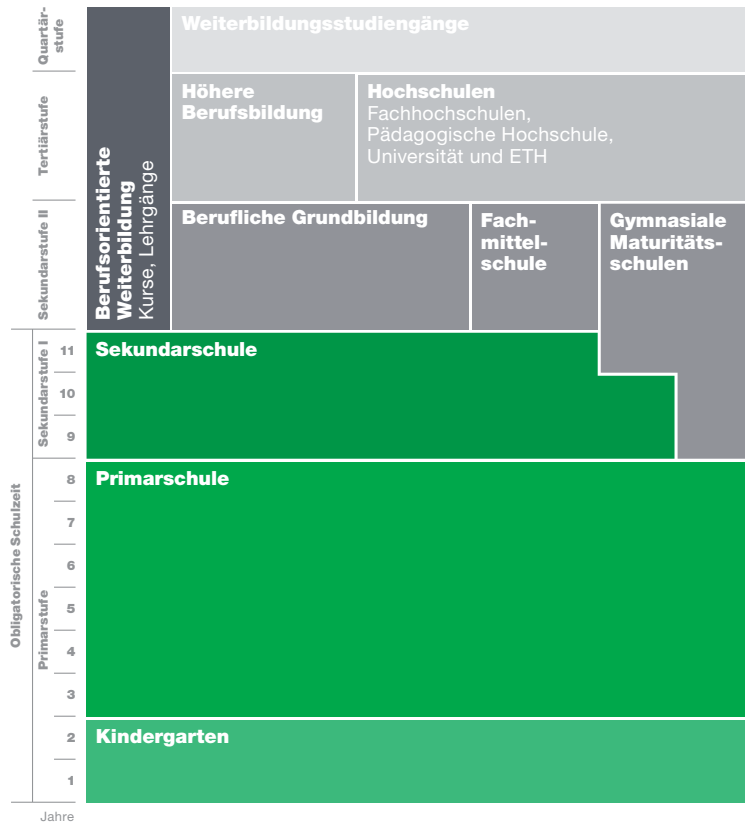
Responsibilities and objectives of schools

The compulsory public school in the canton of Zurich follows the fundamental values of the democratic political system. It does not advocate any religious or political views. Basic knowledge of Christian, humanistic, and democratic values is important for your child for a better understanding of our culture and society. The religious freedom of yourself and your children and teenagers is always respected.

During the mandatory school years, your children and adolescents develop fundamental knowledge and abilities; they are prepared for secondary education. The compulsory public school promotes respect for fellow human beings and one's environment. This helps your children and adolescents become independent, responsible human beings and find their place in society.

The mandatory public education period is usually eleven years. The compulsory education period can also be completed at private schools or through homeschooling.

**Overview of elementary education in the canton
of Zurich**



The first school years

If your child is four years old before the 31st of July, it will start kindergarten at its place of residence at the beginning of the next school year. The school board (“Schulpflege”) assigns the children to the kindergartens.

The school year

The school year begins in mid-August and ends in mid-July of the following year. Your child has a total of 13 weeks of holidays per school year. The fall, Christmas, sports, spring, and summer holidays are distributed over the course of the school year.

The school day



From Monday to Friday, lessons or supervision in the mornings are from 8 to 12 o'clock (block schedule) for all children. In the afternoons, the classes have individual schedules. As parents, you have to make sure that your child gets to school on time and goes to the classes on their schedule. The municipalities offer daycare structures outside of school hours. These usually cost something.

Two years of kindergarten



Your child spends its first two school years in kindergarten. In these two years, it is supported and encouraged in its individual development in a variety of ways and is prepared for primary school. Swiss German is spoken in kindergarten.

Six years of primary school



When your child is six years old, it enters primary school. In primary school, all children attend class together, no matter their origin, gender, and academic performance. Usually, the teacher who is responsible for the class changes after three years. Oftentimes, the classes are then also reassembled.

In primary school, your child establishes, improves, and strengthens its reading, writing, and basic math skills. The curriculum in primary school includes handicrafts, music, movement and sports, environment, humans, and society, religions, cultures and ethics, and media and IT.

Starting in the second grade, your child will receive a report card twice a year. The report card tells you about your child's academic performance as well as its working, learning, and social behaviour.

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Children who need assistance in their intellectual or personal development receive support through educational measures for special needs. This also includes gifted education programs. Usually, the school, in agreement with the parents, decides which measures are necessary.

After six years in primary school, your child moves on to secondary school. If your child shows above-average performance in the subjects German and mathematics, it can apply for Gymnasium (intermediate school). If it passes the entry exam, it is admitted. With that, it leaves compulsory public school and spends its last three mandatory school years at Gymnasium.



Secondary school, which is three years, is divided into two or three groups

In secondary school, your child consolidates and increases the knowledge and abilities learnt at primary school. Additionally, subjects such as nature and technology and economics, work, and domestic science are taught. Secondary school prepares your child for vocational education and training or continuative intermediate schools. In order for the adolescents to receive optimal support, secondary school has two (A, B) or three (A, B, C) groups, depending on the municipality. Group A is the most demanding. In certain subjects, the municipalities can institute performance levels I, II, and III. Performance level I is the most demanding level, performance level III is the level with the lowest requirements.

After compulsory public school

After the third year of secondary school, the adolescents have two educational options: vocational education and training (VET) or intermediate school. About two thirds of adolescents do a two-, three-, or four-year apprenticeship. If your child is interested in professions with increased requirements, it can get a Matura baccalaureate diploma at a Gymnasium, federal vocational baccalaureate school, business or IT school (HMS/IMS), or specialized intermediate school. This includes: Gymnasium baccalaureate, federal vocational baccalaureate, or specialized baccalaureate. All three baccalaureates enable your child to study at a university or a university of applied sciences. Further education courses can also be attended in the course of the professional life. Young adults will find a variety of continuing education options no matter which educational path they choose.

Compulsory public school and its services

Location of the school and route to school

Your child will go to school where you live. The local school board decides which school your child goes to. The school management (“Schulleitung”) assigns your child to a class at this school. Your child will go to school independently. On its way to school, your child has many social experiences: it discovers the world, gets to know other children, and, step by step, develops its personality.

Schedule (block schedule) and daily structures

Morning lessons or supervision are from 8 to 12 o'clock. The school board can reduce this time by 20 minutes maximum for organizational reasons. The different municipalities have different lunch breaks and afternoon schedules. The lunch break must be long enough for the child to have time to go home, eat lunch, and go back to school. The municipalities assess the need for daycare structures (morning, lunchtime, afternoon childcare) and provide the respective options from 7.30 a.m. to 6 p.m. on school days. Childcare offers outside regular block schedule times usually cost something.

Special education

Generally, your child is in a regular class, even if it needs specific support in certain subjects or areas. If your child does not speak a lot of German or has impairments or learning difficulties, but also if it has specific strengths and talents, it will receive additional support by the teachers. Your child has a right to equal opportunities in the classroom and to support according to its requirements. In addition to the regular classes, special assistance is available to your child, if required: integrative support, therapies (psychomotility, speech therapy, psychotherapy, audio pedagogy), German as a second language, complementary voluntary classes in native language and culture (“Heimatliche Sprache und Kultur”), integrated special education, special needs schools, hospital and clinic schools, and, in some municipalities, gifted education programs and special classes (enrolment classes, reduced size classes, and induction classes). Whenever possible, your child will be supported with these options in the context of the regular classes, or, if necessary and reasonable, outside of the regular classroom.

Health

The physical and psychological health of your child is important. The school medical services, dental prophylaxis, school psychology services, and school social workers offer health-promoting measures in



schools. All children are examined by a doctor and a dentist. These check-ups are mandatory. Enough physical activity and a balanced diet are equally important for the healthy development of children and adolescents. The school informs the parents about health-related topics in school. The schools can also invite external experts, for example for traffic/road safety education, promotion of physical activity, or sex education.

Parents and compulsory public

Educating the pupils is the shared goal of school and parents. An important prerequisite for the children's scholastic success is a good cooperation between schools, parents, and pupils. The school regularly informs you as parents about the behaviour and performance of your child. The school ensures the involvement of the parents in parent-teacher meetings, parental education, school project weeks, on school visiting days, in decisions regarding the set-up of the school yard, etc. This general involvement is not mandatory for you parents. In special cases, the school board or the school management can declare some of the parent meetings or events mandatory. Parents do not have a right to participate in decisions involving school personnel and methodical and/or didactic issues.

As parents, you are responsible for raising your child and making sure that it goes to school regularly for its compulsory education. You will inform the teachers or the school management about the behaviour of your child and occurrences in its environment if they are relevant for the school. The school will thoroughly discuss important decisions, especially concerning your child's school career, with you and your child. As parents, you also have to make sure that your child has the necessary clothes and equipment for school excursions. As a pupil, your child fulfils its duties and is actively involved in school. In compulsory public school, pupils have a shared responsibility and a right to share their opinions, in accordance with their age and stage of development. They are included when decisions that concern them are being made, as long as their age or other important reasons do not oppose it.

What to do in the case of difficulties?

Teachers and parents inform each other immediately. For you as parents, your child's class teacher is the first person you contact. If you cannot solve the difficulties in a conversation with the teacher, you should talk to the school management. If you are still unable to find a solution, contact the local school authorities, the school board.

School-related topics

Dispensation

For foreseeable absences, you as parents submit a request to the school for dispensation from class. The school grants a dispensation from class for your child if there are sufficient reasons, taking into account the personal, familiar, and school-related situation.

Joker days

Every school year, your child is allowed to miss two days of school without further explanation. Parents must inform the school about these joker days in advance.

Vacations

In the canton of Zurich, school holidays are a maximum of 13 weeks a year. Additionally, school districts (“Schulgemeinden”) can select four days on which there is no school. These are often local public holidays such as Carnival or fairs. However, the selection of these days cannot lead to a 14th week of holidays.

Competence-oriented assessment and report cards

The teachers regularly evaluate your child’s performance in the various subjects as well as its learning development and its behaviour within the class. The teacher’s evaluations for children who are in kindergarten and first grade are communicated twice per school year in a parent-teacher meeting. In the following grades, your child will receive a report card with grades in January as well as in July, at the end of the school year. When moving on from primary to secondary school, the class teacher will have a meeting with you and your child to discuss the transition.

Who can give parents information?

Parents should always contact their child’s teacher first. For information on all important places where you can get information, or on services such as the school medical service or the school board, you can contact the school administration (“Schulverwaltung”) where you live.

Nowadays, school districts have websites. A school’s web page has a lot of information for you.

Further information

Comprehensive information and the phone numbers of the most important information services can be found on the websites of the Department of Education and the Office of Elementary Education:

www.zh.ch/volksschule

www.zh.ch/bildungsdirektion

Bildungsdirektion, Volksschulamt

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