

GERMANY ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Location: Germany is located in Central Western Europe. It is surrounded by the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Austria, Czech Republic, and Poland. In the North, Germany borders with the North Sea, Denmark, and Baltic Sea.

Language(s) of Instruction: German

Grading Scales: Generally, the conventional six-mark scale is used in individual student assessment in schools. The 15-point scale is used on the *Zeugnis der allgemeinen Hochschulreife* (Certificate of General University Maturity) awarded upon successful completion of a pre-university upper secondary school (Gymnasium) program.

Conventional six-mark scale	<i>Gymnasiale Oberstufe</i> (Higher Gymnasium Level) point system	Description
1	13 – 15	<i>sehr gut</i> (very good) well above required standard
2	10 – 12	<i>gut</i> (good) fully meets required standard
3	7 – 9	<i>befriedigend</i> (satisfactory) generally meets the required standard
4	4 – 6	<i>ausreichend</i> (adequate) generally meets required standard, but with some deficiencies
5	1-3	<i>mangelhaft</i> (poor) does not meet the required standard, but the basic knowledge is there and deficiencies may be made up with time
6	0	<i>ungenügend</i> (insufficient) deficiencies too incomplete to make them up in a reasonable period of time

Principal educational authority: The responsibilities of the Federal Government in education are defined in the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law). Based on the Basic Law, education in each *Land* (state) is regulated by the appropriate administrative and legislative state authorities. Each state has its own Ministry of Education, regional, and local educational authorities. Educational reforms are implemented at the state level but discussed at the federal level through the *Kultusministerkonferenz* (Conference of Ministers for Education and Cultural Affairs).

Academic Calendar: School year lasts 188 – 208 days (five-six day weeks) from August to July. Start and end dates may vary depending on the state where the school is located (see sample dates below).

GERMANY: In accordance with the *Hamburg Agreement* between the *Länder* on harmonisation in the school system, the school year begins on 01 August and ends on 31 July. The actual beginning and end depend on the dates of the summer holidays which vary from one year to the other.

LENGTH OF STUDENTS' SCHOOL YEAR 2006/2007 AND SUMMER HOLIDAYS 2007			
Primary and secondary education			
	Beginning of school year 2006/2007	Summer holidays 2007	
		Beginning	End
NORDRHEIN-WESTFALEN	08 August	21 June	03 August
HESSEN, RHEINLAND-PFALZ	28 August	09 July	17 August
SAARLAND	28 August	09 July	18 August
HAMBURG	17 August	12 July	22 August
BERLIN, BRANDENBURG	21 August	12 July	25 August
MECKLENBURG-VORPOMMERN, SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN	21 August	16 July	25 August
BREMEN, NIEDERSACHSEN, SACHSEN-ANHALT, THÜRINGEN	31 August	19 July	29 August
SACHSEN	04 September	23 July	31 August
BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG	18 September	26 July	08 September
BAYERN	12 September	30 July	10 September

Literacy Rate: 99% (source: The World Factbook)

SCHOOL STRUCTURE:

Basic Education: Compulsory schooling is required until the age of 15 (usually encompasses 9 – 10 years of primary and lower secondary education).

1. Preschool Education: Preschool education is not part of the education system. It is provided by either public or private institutions (*Kindergarten*) to infants and children aged no more than six years old.
2. Primary Education: *Primarstufe* (Primary Level) education is provided by *Grundschule* (Basic School) and represents completion of grades 1 – 4 (except in Berlin and Brandenburg where it extends to 6 years).
3. Lower Secondary Education: *Sekundarstufe I* (Secondary Level I) education is provided by the following types of schools:
 - a) Gymnasium (University-Preparatory General Secondary School) incorporates grades 5 – 10 (or 7 – 10 in some *Länder*) . General academic curriculum is comprised of the following subjects: German, at least two foreign languages, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, geography, history, politics, music, art, sport and religious education. Completion of Grade 10 leads to entry into the *Gymnasiale Oberstufe* (Upper Level Gymnasium).
 - b) Realschule (General Secondary School) . General full-time lower secondary school comprising education in grades 5- 10 (or 7 – 10 i.e. 4 years in the states of Berlin, Brandenburg and Hamburg). Completion of the program leads to a *Realschulabschluss*

or *Abschluss der Realschule* (General Secondary School Completion) and admission to further education at upper secondary schools such as *Berufsfachschule* (Vocational Specialty Secondary School) and *Fachoberschule* (Upper Specialized Vocational Secondary School) and is also used for admission to a course of vocational training within the *duales System* at *Berufsschule*. (Dual system at Vocational School). Best students may be able to enter the *Gymnasiale Oberstufe* (Upper Level Gymnasium). Synonyms: *Erweiterte Realschule*, *Integrierte Haupt und Realschule*, *Mittelschule*, *Regelschule*, *Regionale Schule*, *Sekundarschule*, *Verbundene Haupt und Realschule*.

- c) *Gesamtschule* (Integrated Secondary School) offers general full-time lower secondary education. There are two types of *Gesamtschulen*: *kooperative* (Cooperative) *Gesamtschulen* where students are grouped according to the qualification to be taken, and *integrierte* (Integrated) *Gesamtschulen* where students are grouped together according to their level of proficiency for a number of core subjects, but study them together as a group for all other subjects.
- d) *Hauptschule* (Main Secondary School) is a full-time basic general lower secondary school comprising of grades 5 – 9 (or 7 – 9). An additional year known as the *10 Schuljahr* (10th Grade) may also be available in some states. Students follow a core curriculum with some options. A general school-leaving certificate (*Hauptschulabschluss*) may be awarded after the 5th year [Grade 9](or the 3rd year in Berlin and Brandenburg) and is generally used by its holder for a course of vocational training within the *duales System* at *Berufsschule* (Dual system at Vocational School). After the 6th year [Grade 10](or the 4th year in Berlin and Brandenburg), the *Mittlerer Schulabschluss* (Middle School Completion) – usually called the *Realschulabschluss* – may be obtained. This qualifies students for admission to courses of upper secondary education at *Berufsfachschulen* (Vocational Specialty School) and *Fachoberschulen* (Specialized Upper Secondary School), and also for a course of vocational training within the *duales System* at *Berufsschule* (Dual system at Vocational School). Best students may also be entitled to go on to the *Gymnasiale Oberstufe*.

4. Upper Secondary Education: Sekundarstufe II (Secondary Level II) provides academic and vocational education in the following types of institutions:

- a) *Gymnasiale Oberstufe* (Upper Level of Gymnasium) is a continuation of the *Gymnasium* education in grades 11-13 (or 10-12) divided into one-year introductory phase and a two-year qualification phase. Each student studies subjects from each of the following thematic groups:
- languages, literature and the arts (e.g. German, foreign languages, fine art, music)
 - social sciences (e.g. history, geography, philosophy, social studies/politics, economics)
 - mathematics, natural sciences and technology (e.g. mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, information technology).

Subjects are studied as half-year courses and are divided into two types: *Grundkurse* (Basic Courses) taken for at least two terms, and *Leistungskurse* (Intensive Courses) taken for at least four terms. German, foreign language, and mathematics are taken for at least three terms. Currently, an on-going reform is taking place in most German states to replace the

former 9-year Gymnasium education with only 8 years. It is sometimes referred to as “G8” reform.

Table below shows the most recent status of the reform in each state:

State	Program length
Baden-Württemberg	Since 2000/01 the eight-year Gymnasium has been introduced alongside the traditional nine-year programs. In 2012, first eight-year program graduates and last nine-year program generation will obtain the Maturity certificate
Bayern	Since 1999, selected schools started offering the eight-year Gymnasium. Generally introduced in 2004/05 mostly in the “all-day” school format
Berlin	Eight-year Gymnasium introduced in selected schools. Since 2006/07 the eight-year program was opened to students entering Grade 7 . The following generations will complete the eight-year curriculum.
Brandenburg	Eight-year Gymnasium is in the process of introduction. Common curricula for neighboring states (Berlin, & MV) established in 2006/07.
Bremen	Currently, the eight-year curriculum is in place.
Hamburg	Currently, both the nine-year and the eight-year (introduced in 2004) curricula are available.
Hessen	Selected schools introduced the eight-year Gymnasium. In 2005/06 the fifth-grade students became the first general intake of students into the eight-year program
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	12-year system consists of grades 7 – 12.
Niedersachsen	Currently, the eight-year Gymnasium is in place, last class of graduates from the nine-year curriculum are scheduled to complete education in 2011.
Nordrhein-Westfalen	The eight-year Gymnasium is the norm, established in 2005/06. Students already in the traditional nine-year curriculum continue until grade 13.
Rheinland-Pfalz	The nine-year Gymnasium is preferred, however since 2008/09 the eight-year program will be available in the “all-day” school form.
Saarland	Eight-year Gymnasium introduced in 2001
Sachsen	After the reunification, unlike majority of other eastern states, Saxony retained the pre-existing 12-year system of education
Sachsen-Anhalt	The 13-year system discontinued in 2006/07
Schleswig-Holstein	The eight-year Gymnasium introduced in selected schools in 2001/2002.
Thüringen	After the reunification, unlike majority of other eastern states, Thuringia retained the pre-existing 12-year system of education

All Gymnasiums teach the required minimum of 265 hours of instruction. Shorter program length is compensated by introduction of the so called *Ganztagsschule* (all-day school) forms. Vocational, professional, and evening *Gymnasium* programs are typically longer than the general academic *Gymnasium*. Each state regulates its own curriculum content.

- b) *Fachoberschule* (Specialized Upper Secondary School) is a general upper secondary school with a vocational curriculum comprising of grades 11 and 12. Admission usually based on a completed *Realschule* (General Secondary School). Completion of the *Fachoberschule* program leads to the *Fachhochschulreife* and admission to tertiary-level technical institutions called *Fachhochschulen* (Universities of Applied Sciences).
- c) *Berufsfachschule* (Vocational Specialty Secondary School) is a combined general and vocational full-time upper secondary schools based on completed *Hauptschule* (Main Secondary School) or *Realschule* (General Secondary Education). Programs are usually two years long, sometimes three years. *Berufsfachschule* provides a combination of general and vocational courses, preparing students for an occupation or vocational training with different levels of qualification. There are *Berufsfachschulen* for business occupations, occupations involving foreign languages, the crafts industry, home-economics-related and social-work related, artistic and health sector occupations, etc. (e.g. Nursing).
- d) *Berufsoberschule* (Upper Vocational Secondary School) is an institution offering school leavers with the *Mittlerer Schulabschluss* (Middle School Completion) who have completed vocational training or five years of working experience the opportunity to obtain the *Fachgebundene Hochschulreife* (Subject-Specific University Maturity). The *Berufsoberschule* only exists in a few states.
- e) *Berufsschule* (Vocational Secondary School) is the most popular vocational school type offering programs lasting 2 to 3 years (3 as a rule). Admission is based solely on the completion of compulsory full-time education (usually of 10 years), and not on satisfactory performance in an examination at the end of compulsory education. Characteristic program structure called *duales System* (dual system) consists of part-time in-class instruction combined with part-time on-the job training. Completion of the program leads to the award of a *Abschlusszeugnis der Berufsschule* (Vocational Secondary School Completion), and a separate *Prüfungszeugnis* (Examination Certificate) confirming the earned qualification upon a final exam typically administered by a local *Industrie- und Handelskammer* (Chamber of Commerce and Industry).
- f) *Fachschule* (Specialty School) offers short specialized advanced occupational education courses for students, usually from the age of 18, who are trained in a recognized occupation. Admission requires the completion of relevant vocational training in a recognized occupation and subsequent employment. Most popular fields of study: engineering, business, design, home economics, social pedagogy and the caring professions. Courses lead to the *Fachschulabschluss* (Specialty School Completion), which does not qualify its holder for further studies but is a professional qualification e.g. for *staatlich anerkannte* (state-certified) youth and child care workers, youth and community workers, etc. The *Fachhochschulreife* (University of Applied Sciences Maturity) qualification normally awarded by the *Fachoberschule* can also be obtained through attendance at extensive courses.

TIME LINE:

Years of education*:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
			A					B	C		E	G	
									D		F	F	F

- A = Primarstufe (Primary Level) / **Primary Education**
 B = Hauptschulabschluss (Completion of Hauptschule) / **Lower Secondary Education**
 C = 10 Schuljahr (10th Year) in extended Hauptschule / **Lower Secondary Education**
 D = Realschulabschluss (Completion of Realschule) or Mittlere Schulabschluss (Middle School Completion) / **Lower Secondary Education**
 E = Fachhochschulreife (University of Applied Sciences Maturity) / **Upper Secondary Vocational/Technical Education**
 F = Zeugnis der allgemeinen Hochschulreife (Certificate of General University Maturity), Fachgebundene Hochschulreife (Subject-Specific University Maturity) / **Upper Secondary Pre-University Education**
 G = Abschlusszeugnis der Berufsschule (Certificate of Vocational School Completion) / **Terminal Upper Secondary Vocational Education**

* Because of varying admission standards and program lengths, some credentials have been omitted from this time line. For details see individual program descriptions in "School Structure" section above.

VOCABULARY:

Abschluss	= completion	Land	= state (gov.)
Fach	= profession, specialty, skill	Prüfung	= examination
Fachhochschule	= university of applied sciences, technical institute	Reife	= maturity
Gesetz	= law, regulation	Schule	= school
Hochschule	= higher education institution, university	Staat	= state, government
Jahr	= year	Staatlich anerkannte	= state-recognized
Kurs	= course	Stufe	= level
		Zeugnis	= certificate

ON-LINE RESOURCES:

EURYDICE Information Network on Education in Europe <http://www.eurydice.org> (go to Eurybase and European Glossary links!)

German Ministries of Education Conference <http://www.kmk.org/aufg-org/home.htm?adress>

Glossary of educational terms (with explanations in English) http://www.kmk.org/doku/Glossary_dt_engl.pdf

Country Education Profiles by Australian Education International <https://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/CEP/Default.htm>

Components of National Education Standards: Germany
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Research5/Germany/standards_g2.html

"Zentralabitur" portal <http://www.b-wie-bildung.de/zentralabitur/index.php>

Links to various legislative acts in education <http://www.kmk.org/doc/beschl/SchulgesetzeInternet.pdf>

ENIC-NARIC network <http://www.enic-naric.net/index.aspx>