

German School System from <http://www.howtogermany.com/pages/germanschools.html>

German public education makes it possible for qualified kids to study up to university level, regardless of their families' financial status.

The German education system is different in many ways from the ones in Anglo-Saxon countries, but it produces high-performing students. Although education is a function of the federal states, and there are differences from state to state, some generalizations are possible.

Children aged three to six may attend kindergarten. After that school is compulsory for nine or ten years. From grades 1 through 4 children attend elementary school (*Grundschule*), where the subjects taught are the same for all. Then, after the 4th grade, they are separated according to their academic ability and the wishes of their families, and attend one of three different kinds of schools: *Hauptschule*, *Realschule* or *Gymnasium*.

The *Hauptschule* (grades 5-9 in most German states) teaches the same subjects as the *Realschule* and *Gymnasium*, but at a slower pace and with some vocational-oriented courses. It leads to part-time enrollment in a vocational school combined with apprenticeship training until the age of 18.

The *Realschule* (grades 5-10 in most states) leads to part-time vocational schools and higher vocational schools. It is now possible for students with high academic achievement at the *Realschule* to switch to a *Gymnasium* on graduation.

The *Gymnasium* leads to a diploma called the *Abitur* and prepares students for university study or for a dual academic and vocational credential. The most common education tracks offered by the standard *Gymnasium* are classical language, modern language, and mathematics-natural science. In recent years many States have changed the curriculum so students can get the "Abi" at the the end of the 12th grade. Other States are making the transition but may still require a 13th grade for the next couple of years.

Grundschule teachers recommend their students to a particular school based on such things as academic achievement, self confidence and ability to work independently. However, in most states, parents have the final say as to which school their child attends following the fourth grade.

The *Gesamtschule*, or comprehensive school, is a more recent development and is only found in some of the states. It takes the place of both the *Hauptschule* and *Realschule* and arose out of the egalitarian movements in the 1960s. It enrolls students of all ability levels in the 5th through the 10th grades. Students who satisfactorily complete the *Gesamtschule* through the 9th grade receive the *Hauptschule* certificate, while those who satisfactorily complete schooling through the 10th grade receive the *Realschule* certificate.

No matter what kind of school a student attends, he/she must complete at least nine years of education. A student dropping out of a *Gymnasium*, for example, must enroll in a *Realschule* or *Hauptschule* until nine years have been completed.

Beyond the *Hauptschule* and *Realschule* lies the *Berufsschule*, combining part-time academic study and apprenticeship. The successful completion of an apprenticeship program leads to certification in a particular trade or field of work. These schools differ from the other ones mentioned in that control rests not with the local and regional school authorities, but with the federal government, industry and the trade unions.

German children only attend school in the morning. There is no provision for serving lunch. There is a lot more homework, heavy emphasis on the "three R's" and very few extracurricular activities.

A very low-cost or free higher education could lie beyond a German Abitur. Many of Germany's hundred or so institutions charge little or no tuition. But, students must prove through examinations that they are qualified.

There are several varieties of university-level schools. The classical universities, in the tradition of Alexander von Humboldt, provide a broad general education and students usually attend them for six and one-half years. The Technical Universities (*Technische Hochschulen*) are more aimed at training students for specific careers and are usually attended for four and one-half years. There are also Hochschulen for art and music.

The whole German education system, including the universities, is available to the children of bona fide expatriates. The catch, of course, is that the classes are conducted in German, which is usually all right for school beginners but becomes more and more of a problem as the children get older.

GRADE				AGE	
					19
13				University and college preparatory classes in Gymnasium and some Gesamtschulen	18
12	Berufsschule <i>(Apprenticeship combines work and classes)</i>	Berufsfachschule <i>(Vocational Training)</i>	Fachoberschule		17
11					16
10	Vocational Training <i>(full or part-time classes)</i>				15
Hauptschule students usually graduate after 9 years. Realschule students graduate after 10 years.					16
10	<i>(Some schools have a 10th year)</i>				15
9	Hauptschule	Realschule	Gymnasium	Gesamtschule <i>Comprehensive School (may combine elements of other 3 schools)</i>	14
8					13
7					12
6		Orientation Stage			11
5					10
4	Grundschule <i>Elementary School</i>				9
3					8
2					7
1					6
Kindergarten					5
					4
					3

Secondary School
(Second Phase)

Secondary School
(First Phase)

Elementary School

Pre-school