Law on the Socialist Development of the School System in the German Democratic Republic (December 2, 1959)

Abstract

The reform of the GDR school system on the basis of Socialist principles reached a temporary conclusion in 1959. Henceforth, the ten-grade schools introduced at the beginning of the 1950s represented the core of the school system as "general education polytechnical secondary schools." Graduates were qualified primarily for vocational training, but could also pursue the *Abitur* through additional years of schooling. In addition, there was the "expanded general education polytechnical secondary school" with twelve grades, which replaced the previous German *Gymnasium* and led directly to university qualifications. While ten years of schooling was legally stipulated for all young people in the GDR, in West Germany at the same time obligatory school attendance ended after eight or nine years, depending on the state.

Source

School holds great importance for the social upbringing and education of people. Obligatory school attendance has already existed in Germany for over a century. But in the past, until 1945, the school did not serve the interests of the people. It was a school for the privileged and excluded the children of workers from higher education.

For the first time in German history, the democratic comprehensive school realizes, on the territory of the German Democratic Republic and in democratic Berlin, the demands of the Socialist workers' movement and of all progressive forces for a comprehensive school and for equal educational opportunities for all children of the nation in city and country. With this, the progressive ideas of such great educators as Comenius, Pestalozzi, Diesterweg, and Wander have been fulfilled and developed further.

This successful development of the school system was possible only because the working class, in alliance with the farmers and the other democratic forces of the people, exercises power in the German Democratic Republic.

The People's Chamber therefore decides:

I.
The general education school in the German Democratic Republic, its character and its tasks

§ 1

(1) The general education school for all children in the German Democratic Republic is the ten-grade, general education polytechnical secondary school, hereafter referred to as Secondary School. Attendance at this school is compulsory.

(2) The Secondary School is to be set up by the fall of 1964 in accordance with the plans and, gradually, in line with the economic conditions and outlook in the individual districts and counties.

§ 2

(1) The academic rearing and education of the youth is the exclusive business of the state.

(2) Education is free.

§ 3

(1) Education and rearing in the Socialist school must be closely tied to productive work and the practice of building up socialism. School must prepare the youth for life and work in Socialism, raise them to be all-around, polytechnically educated persons, and ensure a high level of education. It raises children and young people to solidarity and collective action, to love of work and of working people, and it develops all of their mental and physical abilities for the good of the people and the nation.

(2) The school must see to it that all students reach the educational goal of the Socialist school. In the process, it must promote and train the children of workers and farmers with particular care and according to plan. The children of working mothers must be given effective support and aid.

(3) Schools in rural areas have the special task of educating young people who can actively participate in the Socialist refashioning of the village and thus in the gradual elimination of the essential differences between city and country. The youth must be enabled by the school to become successfully active in the Socialist large-scale production that is developing in the village.

§ 4

(1) The polytechnical education is the main feature and a constituent part of the instruction and the education in all school years. In keeping with the age of the children, classroom instruction is to be combined with socially useful activity, for example, productive work. At the center of the polytechnical instruction in the lower grades are handicraft lessons, and, beginning in grade 7, instruction in Socialist production.

(2) Lessons are to be taught according to the state curriculum, which must ensure that classroom instruction is scientific and systematic. Instruction must proceed from the latest insights of science, ensure the connection of theory and practice, and apply a progressive teaching method that is based on and promotes the activity and self-activity of the students. Adhering to the rules of school hygiene and educating students to a healthy way of life must become a permanent component of the work of the school.

II.
Course of education and obligatory school attendance in the German Democratic Republic

§ 5

(1) The Secondary School has

one lower level (grades 1 to 4)

and

one upper level (grades 5 to 10)

(2) The Secondary School creates the foundation for the vocational training and for all higher educational institutions. It is to convey to the students a high general education based on the polytechnical education and ensure knowledge of the foundations of science, technology, and culture.

§ 6

The path from the Secondary School via vocational training is the chief path for developing the next

generation of the technical colleges and universities. The following paths exist for higher education:

1. Completion of the Secondary School and acquisition of skilled vocational training. A vocational training of at least two years qualifies an applicant for admission to a technical college. It is necessary to create opportunities whereby attendance at a vocational school and simultaneous vocational training allows for the acquisition of the *Abitur*, which qualifies a student for admission to a university or college.

2. Completion of the Secondary School and

a) attendance of an enterprise secondary school [*Betriebsoberschule*] (graduation with *Abitur*) or

b) attendance of an evening secondary school [*Abendoberschule*] (graduation with *Abitur*) or

c) participation in a training course in preparation for a special *Abitur* exam.

Via this path it is also possible to qualify for admission to a professional school or college or university. Participation in the higher Secondary School and training courses takes place without interrupting career activity. Participation must also be opened to young workers who finished the elementary or middle school before the introduction of the Secondary School.

3. Attendance at Workers' and Farmers' Institutes in preparation for direct study at a university or college by young workers with completed vocational training, especially by young people who completed the elementary or middle school before the introduction of the Secondary School.

§ 7

(1) In addition to the Secondary School there is a twelve-grade, general education polytechnical secondary school, hereafter referred to as the expanded secondary school.

(2) The expanded secondary school with a scientific, modern language or classical language track leads to qualification for university study. Through the close connection of classroom teaching and production, it is to prepare students for their vocation or for study at a professional school, college, or university. In the expanded secondary school, students are to be taught, on the basis of the polytechnical education, the latest scientific knowledge, especially in the natural sciences.

(3) The path from the expanded secondary school to the college or university runs, after graduation (*Abitur*), through a practical vocational year under the direction of the college or university.

§ 8

(1) After the establishment of the secondary school for all children in the various districts and counties, universal obligatory school attendance exists for the area of the respective districts and counties in the sense of § 1, Sec. 1, followed – unless students attend the expanded secondary school – by an obligatory vocational training of at least two years.

(2) Obligatory school attendance exists, beginning at age seven, for all children whose legal guardians have their residence or permanent domicile in the German Democratic Republic; it must be fulfilled in the state-run schools of the German Democratic Republic.

(3) Obligatory schooling extends to the regular attendance of classroom instruction in accordance with the curriculum, participation in school events declared obligatory by the Ministry of National Education, and adherence to the school code.

(4) Guardians must see to it that the child subject to obligatory schooling meets its obligation.

(5) Physically or mentally handicapped students subject to obligatory schooling fulfill their obligation in the state-run special schools prescribed for them.

Source*: Gesetzblatt der DDR* 1959, II, p. 859 ff; reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann, ed., *Zwei Staaten, eine Nation. Deutsche Geschichte 1955–1970*. Göttingen, 1988, pp. 568–70.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

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