

Cyprus Country Report - Educational Policies in the Greek-speaking Public School System

NESET Expert Author:
Miranda Christou,
University of Cyprus



1. The New Curriculum Initiative (2008-2015)

The New Curriculum for the educational system in Cyprusⁱ is part of the Educational Reform that was initiated in 2003 and aims at comprehensive restructuring of the 3 levels of public education (Preschool, Elementary, Secondary) in order to create smoother transitions between educational levels, reduce centralization and promote the autonomy of the school unit. The restructuring of the educational levels involves the following provisions: one year of mandatory preschool education that aims at preparing children for the following years. The existing nine year mandatory schooling is expanded to ten years and includes: Elementary school (six grades), Gymnasium (3 grades) and one year of Lyceum. The last two years of Lyceum will be devoted to courses that aid students in their preparation for university entry. The existing division between academic Lyceums and Technical Lyceums is terminated and one to two semester programs of technical and professional education are offered for those who finish mandatory schooling.

A Scientific Committee of academic and education experts drafted the basic framework regarding the structure, the principles, the methodology and the timeline of implementing the New Curriculum. Three other specialized advisory committees (Inclusive Education; Gender Equality and Multiculturalism; Information and Communication Technologies) provided feedback on the text.

The New Curriculum aims at creating the right conditions for departure from the 'traditional' school and emphasis on a *democratic* and *humanistic* educational system. *Democratic* schools are defined as those which go beyond equality of opportunity and assume responsibility for educating all students regardless of ability and background. A *Humanistic* school focuses on inclusion by trying to combat marginalization and stigmatization.

These two general goals define the future student as one who:

- Demonstrates knowledge proficiency in various scientific categories and can use this knowledge as the basis for future studies and a successful professional life;

- Has shaped the necessary standpoints and attitudes towards social justice including issues of gender equality, the multicultural society, respect for the environment and self-awareness; and,
- Possesses the necessary skills for functioning in the 21st century such as critical thinking, creativity, collaborative problem solving and the ability to transform theory into practice.

The implementation of these goals is reflected in the New Curriculum through the following directives:

1. Unified curriculum from Preschool to Secondary with common themes and goals that are re-introduced according to students' level.
2. Reduction of teaching material and homework in order to prevent unproductive memorization and students' disengagement from knowledge.
3. Differentiated pedagogical approaches that provide learning opportunities to all students in a heterogeneous classroom.
4. Use of collaborative methods of teaching and effective utilization of new educational technologies in the classroom.
5. Introduction of thematic activities related to the students' everyday life in schools and the community.

A group of 53 experts and educational superintendents along with 400 teachers from all educational levels worked between 2008-2010 to define the new programs of study for students in Preschool, Elementary and Secondary levels. The process of defining and implementing the New Curriculum involves continuous dialogue between various stakeholders, including parents and active duty teachers. Teacher training, organized by the Pedagogical Institute, is also taking place in controlled stages and involves a gradual widening of teacher training and the production of an Educational Material Bank that provides sample lesson plans and ideas for thematic activities for all courses. Preliminary implementation began in 2010 and will lead to full implementation in 2015.

2. New Teacher Evaluation System

Reform of the Teacher Evaluation system started in 2009 and involved a close dialogue between a group of experts, the Ministry of Education and Culture and teacher unions. The most recent draft of proposals identifies the main drawbacks of the existing scheme:

- An outdated system that focuses on teacher's one-dimensional, external evaluation by superintendents.
- Absence of mechanisms that encourage professional development and improvement.
- Overemphasis on seniority and lack of alternatives for promotion and advancement apart from Principal status.

The proposed reforms include the following:

1. Internal school unit evaluation system and decentralization of evaluation process with emphasis on democratic participation of all relevant stakeholders.
2. External evaluation of the school unit by a group of pedagogical experts every 5 years.

3. Introduction of the Pedagogical Advisor position for teachers' mentoring, support and professional development. Leading up to their tenure, teachers will be in close collaboration with their Advisor for classroom material and observations.
4. Establishment of the Educational Leadership Academy for evaluating applicants for the positions of Assistant Administrative Principal, Pedagogical Advisor, Principal and School Advisor (currently the School Superintendent).

Teacher evaluation disconnected from seniority status. Evaluation and promotion based on skills relevant to the position sought by the applicant.

ⁱ These reforms refer to the Greek-speaking public school system that is under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Cyprus.