

Introduction

Nikolay Popov & Marina Pironkova

School Reforms in Bulgaria from the 9th to the 21st Century

Abstract

The aim of this introductory piece is to present the main school reforms in Bulgaria from the 9th to the 21st century. The cornerstones of school reforms during the different periods of Bulgaria's history are analyzed. Various cultural, social and political factors determining the school development are also discussed. The authors present the creation of the Slavic alphabet during the First Bulgarian State and the appearance of the first Bulgarian schools in 'The Golden Age of Bulgarian Letters and Culture', the school development during the Second Bulgarian State, the hard blow to the development of education under the Ottoman rule, the school uprising during the Bulgarian National Revival, the main school reforms from the Liberation to the 1940s, the educational development during the Socialist period, and the latest school reforms in Bulgaria since 1989. Special attention is paid to the current school system in Bulgaria.

Keywords: Bulgaria, school reforms, history of Bulgarian education, current school reform in Bulgaria, Bulgarian school system

*March ahead, o revived people,
to your future march ahead,
forge your destiny of glory,
by the might of letters led.*

*March to powerful knowledge,
let your duty be your guide!
Join the host of other peoples,
God is always by your side.*

*Go! For like the sun is knowledge.
On the soul it sheds its rays.
Go! A people shall not perish,
when true learning lights its days.*

Stoyan Mihaylovski's poem *Cyril and Methodius*
Source: <https://lyricstranslate.com>

Introduction

In its 1340-year history, Bulgaria has gone through three Bulgarian states and two foreign rules: First Bulgarian State (681-1018); Byzantine rule (1018-1186); Second Bulgarian State (1186-1396); Ottoman rule (1396-1878); Third Bulgarian State (since 1878). Education has always played a very important role in the history of Bulgaria. Schools have always been considered very powerful institutions in the cultural, social, political and economic development of the Bulgarian nation.

First Bulgarian State (681-1018)

The founding date of the Bulgarian state is considered to be 681, the year when the Byzantine emperor Constantine IV Pogonates signed a peace treaty with the newly-founded union between Proto-Bulgarians and Slavs under the rule of khan Asparukh. Of the time period between the end of the 7th century and the second half of the 9th century when the First Bulgarian State adopted Christianity and the first schools were established the records contain very little information. Many stone inscriptions were found, some that marked important political events, the construction of palaces, or the death of the great boils, the Proto-Bulgarian military leaders. They are written in Greek or Latin, a few are written in Bulgarian with Greek characters. There are also Proto-Bulgarian symbols that have not been fully deciphered until today (Besheliev, 2008, pp. 257-260). We do not know anything about the existence of schools but there were literate people, Bulgarians and Greeks, who had linguistic and legal training, handled state correspondence, and produced literature.

The establishment of the first Bulgarian schools is linked to the adoption of Christianity (865) and the introduction of the Slavic alphabet, created by Cyril and Methodius in 855. This graphic system was called *glagolitsa* (the Glagolitic script) from *glagol*, which means *word* in Old Bulgarian (Ivanova-Mircheva & Davidov, 2001). The founders of the first Bulgarian schools are considered to be Cyril and Methodius' disciples who arrived in Prince Boris' court in 885. There are records of a court school in the capital Pliska (the capital was moved to Preslav in 893) that was managed by Naum and a second school in the southeastern parts of Bulgaria with centers Ohrid and Devol, managed by Kliment. They translated from Greek to Bulgarian basic Christian texts, the New and the Old Testament, the works of the Church Fathers, and liturgical texts. With these translations, thousands of new concepts came along and the Bulgarian literary language was formed (Matanov, 2014, p. 150). Prolific authors from this period are Kliment Ohridski, Konstantin Preslavski, Yoan Ekzarh, Chernorizets Hrabar. They translated and wrote religious texts, some works (*Hexaameron*, *Heavens*) described the animals, man, and natural phenomena, i.e. scientific knowledge also circulated.

The First Bulgarian State saw the creation and distribution of works written in two alphabets. The first was *glagolitsa*, a graphic system created by Cyril, which combined elements with a geometric form, in particular, the circle and the triangle. In parallel to it, another system was in use, one that in form was closer to the Greek alphabet used in Byzantium, which was later on given the name of *kirilitsa* (the Cyrillic script). The following centuries the Cyrillic script gradually prevailed as it was easier to write and, in a time when books were copied by hand, proved more

convenient to use. Glagolitsa was used in the Bulgarian literary language until the 12th century (Cholova, 2013, p. 49) but in the western parts, which nowadays make a part of Croatia, it was in use until the 19th century.

The schools of the First Bulgarian State trained scribes, men of letters, translators, and priests. Most became clerics, which was common for this age, but there were also educated members of the aristocracy, the administration, and even craftsmen (Cholova, 2013, p. 112). In terms of structure and curriculum, the schools most likely shared similarities with Kliment Ohridski's school, which was described in the Hagiography of St. Kliment. In the school, there were two levels. The first one was a school for beginners. It enrolled children who had initial education – they learned to read, write, and learn by heart short teachings and Psalms. Separately, as a second level, there were schools for the advanced, which taught grammar and Greek, as well as how to interpret the Holy Books and theological texts, how to lead mass and other religious service. The schools were usually not big but the Hagiography of St. Kliment states that he had prepared 3500 students that became clergymen (Milev, 1966, p. 127). There is little record regarding the volume and location of the schools but outside of the aforementioned centers, excavations in other places (Karaach Teke, Varna region, Ravna, near Provadia) in the last couple of years indicated the existence of big literary and educational centers.

The Bulgarian rulers supported the education, where Tsar Simeon (893-927) himself, who completed his education at Byzantium's most renowned school – the Magnaura School (in Constantinople), took part in the compilation of three volumes of theological texts. The next Bulgarian monarch, Tsar Peter was also renowned for having received a good education. The boom in education and knowledge from the end of the 9th century to the beginning of the 11th century was named 'The Golden Age of Bulgarian Letters and Culture'.

Second Bulgarian State (1186-1396)

The Second Bulgarian State was established after a successful revolt in 1186, led by the brothers Asen and Peter of Tarnovo. During the first decades of the 13th century Bulgaria became a leading European country with rich cultural life. Scriptoria were created in the monasteries around Tarnovo, and young men underwent training for spiritual or secular life. Important centers for book copying and pupil training were the Athos monasteries (Mount Athos), the Rila monastery, the Bachkovo monastery, as well as the cities, cleric centers like Veliki Preslav, Vidin, Plovdiv, Skopje, Sofia, Ohrid, etc. (Gyuselev, 1985, p. 97). More manuscripts from this period have been preserved and give us a clear picture of the education of the High Middle Ages in Bulgaria.

Schools were established, as parts of the churches and monasteries, and they received children (6 and 7-year-olds) who learned how to read and write. They used wax-covered boards, where the alphabet could be written. First they studied the letters, then the syllables, and finally the words. They studied prayers by heart, texts from the Psalter, other basic liturgical books, and some antique volumes with maxims, translated in medieval Bulgaria. Attention was paid to Calligraphy. The training took 3-4 years. Women also received an education, although less frequently so (Cholova, 2013, p. 134). There were schools in the monasteries and the city centers where the pupils received a more comprehensive education. It included

reading and interpretation of biblical and theological texts, as well as Greek, Cosmography, Chronology, Arithmetic, etc.

At the end of the Second Bulgarian State, Evtimiy Tarnovski, the last patriarch, initiated the introduction of new common spelling rules and together with his pupils and followers implemented a language spelling reform. Common spelling rules, compulsory for all scribes and men of letters, were introduced and uneducated and untrained personnel were barred from dealing with letters (Gyuselev, 1985, pp. 96-97). After the fall of the Bulgarian State under Ottoman rule, the men of letters migrated to the neighboring countries and spread these ideas in Russia, Wallachia, Moldavia, and Serbia. The first Bulgarian pedagogical work was also from this period, *Explained Exposition of Letters ...*, known as *Tale of Letters*, by Konstantin Kostenechki, which described the education method (Kostenechki, 1993). He proposed a simplification of the training methods in reading through the use of elements of the phonological method, an idea, which was put in practice in schools some centuries later.

Ottoman rule (1396-1878)

Ottoman period

The fall of the Second Bulgarian State (the Tarnovo Kingdom in 1393, and the Vidin Kingdom in 1396) under the Ottoman rule dealt a hard blow to the development of education. Under foreign governance and dominant religion, the Bulgarian religious centers started deteriorating. The Bulgarian cities were in decline and in the course of several centuries, the monasteries came to be the only spiritual environments and places of worship. They were the centers that maintained the education and literacy of the population. Monastic schools were created as part of the monasteries and they trained their pupils for novices, taught literacy, and provided them with religious education. In some of the monasteries literary schools were developed. They established a tradition in developing and decorating handwritten books – liturgical books and volumes with diverse content, which was predominantly of a religious character (Gechev, 1967). The most renowned among them were the Athos monasteries, the Rila monastery, the Bachkovo monastery, the Etropole monastery and the monasteries and churches around Sofia.

The education of the Bulgarians during this period included the schools of the Bulgarians-Catholics in the 17th century. Orthodox faith played a unifying role for the Bulgarians, which limited the proselyting efforts of the Catholic Church. Some limited communities, however, adopted Catholicism – some villages in the Svishtov area and Plovdiv area, around Chiprovets and Ohrid. The Bulgarian Catholic population there gained access to literature and education in Europe – most commonly in Italy (Loreto, Rome, and Florence), less frequently in Austria, Germany, and Poland. Schools that enrolled and educated all children, who then studied the catechism were founded in Chiprovets and Kopilovets (Dimitrov, 1987, pp. 20-21). The education in these schools, however, was in Illyrian (a combination of Croatian and Bosnian). This way the scope of the achievement of the Bulgarian Catholics was limited to that of their community and did not influence the rest of the Bulgarians.

The Bulgarian schools during the Ottoman period were religious schools established for the needs of religious life. They helped maintain the Orthodox faith and the Bulgarian education tradition. They were called cell schools since they are most often located in a separate room (cell) in the monasteries, the church, or the convent. In most cases, the cell schools were elementary and the education there included reading and writing, Orthodox Slavonic singing and in some rare cases Arithmetic as well. The bigger cell schools also taught Greek and Calligraphy. The education was individual and conservative. It relied on the student's memory since everything had to be learned by heart. The cell schools played a role in preserving the national and religious spirit of the Bulgarians during the Ottoman period but the public needs of a secular education during the Revival period led to their closure and the establishment of the modern Bulgarian schools.

Bulgarian National Revival

During the 19th century the process of the Bulgarian National Revival marked the beginning of the modern school. The first schools introduced teaching and school books in Greek – that was the language used for trading in the Ottoman Empire. The teachers had graduated Greek schools and used that model in their work. Such schools were founded in 1810 in Sliven, in 1812 in Kotel, in 1815 in Svishtov and in other places, centers of the crafts and the trade. The teaching was in two languages – Greek and Bulgarian, and the goal was educating the sons of the rising Bulgarian manufacturer and merchant families.

In the 1830s there was an attempt to introduce reforms in the Ottoman Empire that allowed the local non-Muslim authorities to take care of the religious and educational life of their people. This gave birth to the modern Bulgarian elementary school. In his *Fable Book* (1824) the writer Peter Beron set out practical advice for the teacher on how to manage one hundred pupils. The first modern Bulgarian school opened in Gabrovo in 1835, and in the next few years 15 towns (Karlovo, Sopot, Sofia, Veles, Ruse etc.) followed the same pattern. In the beginning of the 1850s more than 200 elementary schools existed, most of them for boys and some for girls (Dimitrov, 1985, p. 83). The proliferation of these schools was possible because of the introduction of the monitorial system of A. Bell and J. Lancaster, where the 'helpers' of the teacher acquired the knowledge and competence to become teachers in a short period of time.

In the second half of the 19th century middle schools were opened (1843 in Elena, 1846 in Koprivshitsa, 1850 in Plovdiv, a. o.) as a higher level of education. They usually had 2 to 4 classes and the curriculum depended on the education of the teachers, who were graduates of secondary schools, seminaries, and universities in Balkan lands, in Russia, and some European countries (Radkova, 1986, pp. 215-217). Common subjects were Bulgarian grammar, Catechesis, Geography, History (World and Bulgarian), Arithmetic, Calligraphy, Orthodox singing, Physics, Turkish, and French. Some schools also introduced Sciences, Drawing, Algebra, Geometry, Pedagogy and Theology. There was a lack of school books and the teachers translated and adapted foreign textbooks.

In the eve of the Liberation (1878) there were also three secondary schools at the gymnasium level – in Gabrovo (7 grades), in Plovdiv (6 grades) and in Bolgrad (in Moldavia for Bulgarians). These schools were usually for boys, but there were

some for girls – the ones in Stara Zagora and Gabrovo were the best among them (with 5 grades) (Pironkova, 2015, pp. 26-28). They adopted models from Greece and Russia but adapted and reworked them in accordance with the ideas of the Bulgarian National Revival and Enlightenment.

Bulgarian schools were founded, financed, and governed by the municipal authorities. They were decentralized and it was only in 1870 when the Bulgarian Exarchate was founded that the first steps in introducing some general elements like school age, school year and teacher education took place. The governance was led at local level, where school councils were elected. There were regional teacher meetings, where methodological issues were discussed and decisions concerning organization and school books were made.

Just before the Liberation in 1878 in the Bulgarian lands there were more than 2000 schools of different type and level – monitorial, middle, monastic, and secondary. The connections between them were private and there was no such thing as an educational system, which was set up in the Third Bulgarian State.

From the Liberation (1878) to the Union (1885)

Bulgaria threw off the Ottoman rule on the 3rd of March 1878 and gained its liberty, thus establishing the beginning of the Third Bulgarian State. However, the Berlin Congress of July 1878 broke up this country into the Principality of Bulgaria and the Eastern Roumelia. The first law on education in the Principality of Bulgaria was called *Provisional Statute on the Public Schools* (1878), created by the first Bulgarian minister of education, Prof. Marin Drinov. The main principles of this Statute were: democracy and decentralization in the administration of education; a 3-year compulsory primary education; secular character of education. The Statute established the following structure of the educational system: 3-year primary school + 4-year basic school + 4-year modern schools and gymnasiums. Only 2 years later, in 1880, a new *Law on National Education* changed the structure into: 4-year primary school + 3-year gymnasium lower level (pro-gymnasium) + 4-year gymnasium upper lever. Some gymnasiums became schools for the training of primary school teachers. A tendency to centralize the management of education appeared in 1881 when the Ministry of Education established school district inspectorates whose heads were appointed by the minister.

In 1880, the *Law on Primary Learning in Eastern Roumelia* was adopted in this part of Bulgaria. The law decentralized the management and finance of education. The structure was as follows: 4-year primary school + 4-year secondary school lower level + 3-year secondary school upper level (called gymnasium).

From the Union (1885) to 1918

The Union of Bulgaria was established on the 6th of September 1885. The *Law on Public and Private Schools* (1885) regulated education financing in details. A very important act was the *Law on Public Education* (1891) which made four main changes:

- centralizing the management of education through giving the whole power to the Ministry of Education;
- introducing 6-year compulsory education;

- establishing kindergartens for children aged from 3 to 7 as the first level of the educational system;
- establishing a new structure which consisted of the following schools: 6-year basic school; 4-year specialized schools (pedagogical, industrial, technical) beginning after the last year of the basic school; 3-year secondary school lower level beginning after the 4th year of the basic school; 4-year secondary school upper level divided into two sectors – classical and modern.

In 1898, the duration of compulsory education was reduced to 4 years. A pre-school teachers' course was opened in 1905.

The next very important act was the *Law on National Education* (1909). It was aimed at achieving the West-European level of education. The centralization of management became much stronger. The structure was changed as follows: 4-year primary school + 3-year pro-gymnasium + 5-year gymnasium (divided into 3 types – modern, semi-classical, and classical), 5-year pedagogical schools, 2-year vocational schools, 4-year high vocational schools. This structure remained for 35 years.

From 1919 to 1944

After participation in three wars (the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 and World War I) in 1919 Bulgaria was a broken country. In the years of the post-war crisis (1919-1923) the general aim was the re-building of society, economy and education.

In 1921 a new law on education was adopted. Its main principles were: a) vocationalization of secondary education; b) replacement of the 5-year gymnasium with a 5-year secondary school consisting of a 3-year lower level (called modern school) and a 2-year upper level (called gymnasium); and c) introduction of 7-year compulsory education.

Three years later, in 1924, the vocationalization of secondary education was abolished and the general character was reinforced, putting the accent on classical education. The role of civic, moral and religious education increased. The strong centralized education management was kept and continued. The 5-year gymnasium was re-established and admission examinations between the pro-gymnasium and gymnasium were accepted.

In the middle of the 1930s the duration of pre-school teachers' training became 2 years after completing secondary education. A national institute for training pre-school teachers was opened in 1942.

Socialist period (1944-1989)

The Communists came into power on the 9th of September 1944 ushering in the period of the Communist regime in Bulgaria. Within some years all private schools (American, French, German, Armenian, Jewish, etc.) were closed. Only the Turkish schools were open up to 1959. In 1944-1948 the gymnasium admission examinations were abolished and the duration of gymnasium education was reduced by a year. The new *Law on National Education* (1948) established the following school structure: kindergarten for children from the age of 3 to 7; 4-year primary school + 3-year pro-gymnasium + 4-year gymnasium or 2-year vocational schools.

The idea of building first socialist followed by communist society found final expression in a law on education (1959) called *Law on Further Closer Links*

between the School and Life and on Further Development of People Education. The main aim of this law was to prepare the Bulgarian youth for life in socialist and communist society through connecting education with socially useful and productive work. That aim, which crippled the Bulgarian education system, was practically abolished in the end of 1989, and finally by law in 1991. The law of 1959 made two main changes in the structure. The duration of compulsory education became 8 years and the 12-year secondary polytechnic school was established. The latter was divided into three phases – primary, middle and high – each lasting 4 years. Two types of vocational schools – 4-year *technikum* (from Russian meaning ‘vocational school’) and 3-year secondary vocational technical schools were formed after grade 8.

However, the educational practice showed that a 12-year duration of school education was difficult to fulfil. Thus, in the early 1970s, the duration of the high phase of the secondary polytechnic school was reduced by a year, i.e. the structure became 4+4+3.

In 1979 one of the most unsuccessful experiments in Bulgarian education started – the so-called Educational Vocation Complexes were established. A United Secondary Polytechnic School was formed. It had three levels: first – 10-year education; second – 1-year Educational Vocation Complexes where students learned some profession with large polytechnic profile simultaneously with their regular classes; and third – half a year-specialization in a specific profession.

The Socialist period in Bulgarian education should be assessed from two aspects. Undoubtedly, the negative aspect is that everything in education – aims, content, management, structure – developed and functioned under the communist ideology. The educational process completely followed the examples and lessons of education in the Soviet Union. However, the positive aspect is that the State really cared about education. Thousands of kindergartens and schools were built. Many campuses, rest-houses etc. for children were also constructed.

Democracy (since 1989)

On the 10th of November 1989 the Communist regime in Bulgaria collapsed catalyzing deep political, economic and social changes. Democracy and market economy were reestablished in the country. This process brought about a new face to the school system. The most important positive features of the development of basic and secondary education in the early 1990s were as follows:

1) Abolishing all kind of ideological, political and party instructions in educational aims, management and contents; 2) Paying attention to the freedom and initiative of the individual; 3) Focusing on the educational interests and needs of students; 4) Diversifying textbooks, curricula and syllabi; 5) Allowing students to make their own choice; 6) Opening of private schools.

The following laws, regulating preschool and school education, were adopted in the 1990s: *Law on National Education* (1991); *Law on the Level of Education, General Education Minimum and Curriculum* (1999); and *Law on Vocational Education and Training* (1999) (Republic of Bulgaria, 1991, 1999a, 1999b).

According to the above listed laws and their amendment laws the structure of the school system in Bulgaria consisted of the following levels and types of schools:

1. Basic education, 8-year duration, divided into 2 phases:
 - Primary phase, 4-year duration, grades 1 – 4; and

- Pro-gymnasium phase, 4-year duration, grades 5 – 8.
2. Secondary education, 4-year duration, grades 9 – 12. In many cases the entrance to secondary schools was after completing grade 7, i.e. they had a 5-year duration, grades 8 – 12.

These two school levels – basic and secondary – comprised the following types of schools:

- primary school, 4-year duration, grades 1 – 4;
- basic school, 8-year duration, grades 1 – 8;
- pro-gymnasium, 4-year duration, grades 5 – 8;
- gymnasium, 4- or 5-year duration, grades 8/9 – 12;
- secondary general school, 12-year duration, grades 1 – 12;
- secondary general school, 8-year duration, grades 5 – 12;
- technikum (renamed into vocational gymnasium in 1999), 4- or 5-year duration, grades 8/9 – 12;
- secondary vocational technical school, 4-year duration, grades 9 – 12;
- special schools – primary, basic and secondary.

The *Law on National Education* (1991) defined that education is compulsory for all up to the age of 16. Preschool education is for children aged between 3 and 7. Primary education starts at the age of 7 but admission of 6-year olds to primary education is left to the parents' decision and permission by the schools' administrations. In 2002, compulsory preschool education was introduced for students at the age of 6.

Current educational reform

In 2015, the latest school education law, entitled *Law on Preschool and School Education*, was adopted (Republic of Bulgaria, 2015). Some fundamental aspects of the current school system in Bulgaria will be presented, as described by this law.

Goals of the system of preschool and school education

The main goals of preschool and school education are (Article 5, Para 1):

- Intellectual, emotional, social, moral and physical development of all children and students in accordance with their age, needs, and abilities;
- Preservation of the Bulgarian national identity;
- Acquisition of competences needed for successful personal and professional life;
- Early identification of talents and abilities of every child and student;
- Creation of sustainable motivation for lifelong learning;
- Understanding of the principles of democracy, human rights and freedom, active and responsible participation in society;
- Formation of tolerance and respect to ethnical, national, cultural, language and religious identity of every citizen;
- Development of tolerance to the rights of children, students, and disabled people;
- Acquisition of knowledge of national, European and global values, traditions, processes and trends, and of principles, rules, responsibilities and rights in the European Union.

Structure of the school system

Preschool education is for children aged between 3 and 7, and is compulsory for children aged 5 to 7. Primary education starts at the age of 7 but admission of 6-year olds to primary education is permitted in accordance with the national education standards. Compulsory school education lasts until completion of the age of 16 (Article 8, Paras 1-3).

Schools in Bulgaria are state, municipal, private and religious (Article 36). The school structure consists of 2 levels (Article 73, Paras 1-3):

1. Basic education, 7-year duration, grades 1 – 7, divided into 2 phases:
 - Primary phase, 4-year duration, grades 1 – 4; and
 - Pro-gymnasium phase, 3-year duration, grades 5 – 7.
2. Secondary education, 5-year duration, grades 8 – 12, divided into 2 phases:
 - First gymnasium phase, 3-year duration, grades 8 – 10; and
 - Second gymnasium phase, 2-year duration, grades 11 – 12.

According to the type of education, school education is general, profiled, and vocational (Article 74, Para 1). According to the type of training, schools are nonspecialized and specialized (Article 37).

Nonspecialized schools are (Article 38, Para 1):

- primary school, 4-year duration, grades 1 – 4;
- basic school, 7-year duration, grades 1 – 7;
- gymnasium (profiled or vocational), 5-year duration, grades 8 – 12;
- comprehensive school, 10-year duration, grades 1 – 10;
- secondary school, 12-year duration, grades 1 – 12.

Specialized schools are (Article 39, Paras 1-2):

- sport school, 8-year duration, grades 5 – 12;
- culture school, various duration, grades 1/5/8 – 12;
- art school, various duration, grades 1/5/8 – 12;
- religious school, 5-year duration, grades 8 – 12.

There are also special schools, which are (Article 44, Para 1):

- school for students with sensor disabilities;
- boarding school for behavioral correction;
- social-pedagogical boarding school.

There are the following forms of training: full-time, evening, part-time, individual, independent, distant, combined, and dual (Article 106, Para 1). National tests, called national out-of-school assessment, are organized at the end of each school phase, i.e. after completing grades 4, 7, 10 and 12.

Governance of the school system

The governance of preschool education is performed at four levels: national, regional, municipal, and school level. The governance of school education is performed at three levels: national, regional, and school level.

The following institutions exercise the governance of preschool and school education:

1. At national level – the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), represented by the minister who is a specialized body for governing and coordinating the implementation of the state policy in the field of preschool and school education

(Article 251, Para 3). The minister exercises control over the work of all institutions in the school system (Article 251, Para 4).

2. At regional level – Regional Offices of Education, which are regional administrations to the minister of education for governance, control, support, and coordination over the work of schools and kindergartens on the territory of the regions (Article 252, Paras 1-2).

3. At municipal level – local administrations which provide and control (Article 256, Para 1): compulsory education; out-of-school activities, sport facilities and recreation; security and health care; buildings; financing; information and library equipment; canteen catering, hostels, transportation.

4. At school level – directors and pedagogical councils, which are the governing bodies of the school. The school director organizes and is responsible for all activities of the school by: following the state policy in the field of education; performing control on the education process and organization; appointing teachers and other staff. The Pedagogical Council accepts: school development strategies; school regulations; school curricula and programs; forms of training; school symbols, rituals, and uniforms; inclusive education programs; dropout prevention programs; sanctions and awards to students (Article 263, Para 1). Other bodies such as Public Council, Board of Trustees, Parents Council, and Student Council are also set up to coordinate activities within the school.

Finance of the school system

Since 2008, the delegated budget has been the mechanism of school finance in Bulgaria. This mechanism can briefly be presented as follows (Articles 282-289):

1. Each year, by analyzing data on the number of students and schools in the country, the Government decides the dimensions of education financing the Ministry of Finance should send to the first-level budget distributors.

2. The first-level budget distributors are: a) the Ministry of Education and Science for state schools; and b) all municipalities for municipal schools. After receiving education financing from the Ministry of Finance, the first-level budget distributors approve formulas for creating delegated budgets of schools. The formulas contain main and additional components. The main components are: 1) number of students; 2) number of classes; 3) number and types of schools; 4) standard per a student; and 5) standard per a school. The additional components are geographic, demographic, logistic, social and other characteristics of schools. The main components are obligatory and must be at least 85%, while the additional components are optional and can be up to 15% of the delegated budget.

3. The first-level budget distributors send the delegated budget financing to school directors who are the second-level budget distributors. The delegated budget contains costs for: 1) salaries of school staff; 2) insurance; 3) supplies; 4) services; 5) maintenance; 6) furniture; 7) equipment; and 8) teacher qualification. All schools receive additional finances, not included in the delegated budget, for: textbooks and teaching manuals, capital expenditures, pension taxes, work with students from vulnerable groups, student grants, student transport, breakfast, dropout prevention, support to gifted students, sport and recreation activities, etc. There is a national teacher qualification program that provides additional finances, different from those included in the delegated budget.

Conclusion

This is a concise presentation of the main school reforms in Bulgaria from the 9th to the 21st century and of the current school system in Bulgaria.

The following national education strategies have currently been applied in Bulgaria: 1) educational integration of students from minority groups; 2) effective use of the information and communication technologies in the teaching-learning process; 3) enforcement of basic literacy; 4) development of vocational education and training; 5) implementation of the dual system; 6) support to lifelong learning; 7) decrease of drop-outs; and 8) professional and career development of teachers.

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Prof. Dr.habil. Nikolay Popov, Sofia University, Bulgaria
 Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marina Pironkova, Sofia University, Bulgaria