CONCEPT NOTE ON PRIMARY EDUCATION

PART I: FUNDAMENTALS

Laws regulating primary education

Primary education in the Republic of North Macedonia is, for the time being, the first compulsory level of education, encompassing students aged 5 years and 8 months, i.e. 6 years to 14 years and 5 months, i.e. 15 years, and is organized in three periods as follows: from I to III grade, from IV to VI grade and from VII to IX grade.

The educational process and the activity of the primary education are regulated by the Law on Primary Education. The current Law on Primary Education[1] establishes the right to education of every child and establishes the principles on the basis of which primary education is developed: the best interest and full development of the student; equality, affordability, accessibility and inclusiveness; the general educational character of primary education; providing quality education and international comparability of students' knowledge; active participation of students in the life of the school and the community; preparing the student for lifelong learning; accepting diversity, multiculturalism and interculturalism; care for the physical safety and health; autonomy, competence and responsibility and partnership among the school, parents, i.e. guardians and local self-government units. The law emphasizes the protection against discrimination and the promotion of equality, as well as the inclusive nature of primary education.

The Law also regulates the organization and work of primary schools, the organization, planning and implementation of educational work, the rights and obligations of students, ensuring and evaluating the quality of educational work. Separate bylaws (rulebooks, instructions, programs) regulate various aspects and segments of the educational process in primary education.

International documents as a basis for the development of primary education

In an increasingly global society, education development and reform, in almost every country in the world, are guided by and rely on international documents that provide the framework, trends and directions of education policies. The most important documents in the past thirty years which countries rely on in the implementation of education reforms are the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), the *World Declaration* "Education for All" (1990), the *Dakar Declaration "Quality Education for All"* (2000), the *United Nations Millennium Development Goals* (2000), the *Salamanca Declaration* (1994) and the UNESCO *Incheon Declaration "Education 2030"* (2015). UNICEF's latest education strategy (2019-2030) aims to build a world in which every child learns and increasingly promotes equity and inclusion, especially for children excluded on the basis of sex, disability, health status, poverty, ethnicity and language, as well as those displaced or affected by a humanitarian catastrophe. The main directions for the development of education in Europe are set out in the *European Strategy 2020* (2009), as well as in the documents for the development of key competencies

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[1] Law on Primary Education ("Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" no. 161/19, 229/20)

(2006) and all further recommendations aimed at basing education in Europe on the key competencies for lifelong learning. (2018).

The Covid 19 health crisis has had a major impact on education and training systems in Europe and globally. Education as never before is faced with challenges and realities that impose new ways of learning, teaching and communication. This imposes the need to take measures that will prevent the health crisis from becoming a structural barrier to learning and skills development, which limits employment opportunities, youth earnings, as well as equality and inclusion in society. Therefore, EU member states seek cooperation in developing future flexible education systems, laying the foundations for the *European Education Area* by 2025.

In September 2020, the European Commission adopted two initiatives aimed at strengthening the contribution of education and training to the EU's recovery from the crisis and helping to build a "green" and digital Europe. The first initiative is for the *European Education Area* to take hold with six dimensions: quality, inclusion and gender equality, green and digital transitions, teachers, higher education, a stronger Europe in the world. The second initiative is the new *Action Plan for Digital Education (2021-2027)* with initiatives for high quality, inclusive and accessible digital education in Europe. The plan envisages action and stronger cooperation among member states at European level, as well as among all stakeholders, to make education and training systems suitable for the digital age. The health crisis has put distance learning at the center of educational practices. It has brought about the need to promote digital education and treat it as a key strategic goal for high quality learning and learning in the digital age. As the phase of emergency imposed by the outbreak of the pandemic is overcome, so will the need to develop a strategic and long-term approach to digital education and training rise. The mentioned initiatives will have to offer ways to improve the quality, especially in terms of basic and digital skills, and to make school education more inclusive and gender sensitive and to improve student achievement. They will need to help strengthen the understanding of climate change and sustainability, support the teaching profession, spread European values and improve the link between education and training institutions.

Of the stated dimensions, the following can be identified as key areas of action in our education system:

- mastering basic skills (mathematics, language literacy and natural sciences), including digital competencies,
- mastering transversal skills such as critical thinking, entrepreneurship, creativity and civic activism through approaches that are transdisciplinary, student-centered and challenge-based;
- fostering language learning and multilingualism to ensure mobility in education and the labor market and to more easily overcome the cultural barriers Europe is facing today,
- accepting a European perspective in education as complementary to national and regional perspectives, in order to provide insight into European values and European everyday life; and
- Ensuring that education and training institutions are safe environments free from violence, hate speech, disinformation and discrimination.

Challenges of primary education in our country

Since the introduction of the nine-year education in 2007 until today, attempts have been made to follow the modern trends in education, as well as to raise the quality of teaching and learning. Goal-oriented curricula have been developed, training of teaching staff has been conducted and a number of projects have been implemented to improve the quality of teaching and learning by the institutions, international and domestic organizations. An Education Strategy for 2018–2025 has been prepared which sets out the key activities to be undertaken in the coming years to improve teaching and learning. Priorities include student-centered teaching, measuring learning progress in relation to outcomes (instead of focusing only on acquiring knowledge) and introducing national assessment.

One of the challenges primary education faces is the compatibility of subsystems (preschool, primary and secondary education), in certain segments of the educational process, which reflects on the quality of education. When introducing nine-year primary education by "merging" the compulsory year before starting school with the previous eight years of primary education, only a partial connection of the subsystems was made and the importance of pre-school education was reduced. Thus, the coverage of pre-school children in kindergartens was reduced and there were differences in terms of didactic-methodological models and approaches applied in working with children in the year before and in the year after starting school, making it difficult for children to adapt as they move from one subsystem to another.

The compatibility between primary and secondary education is also impaired, as the changes in the curricula introduced in 2007 and supplemented in 2013 were not accompanied by adequate changes in the curricula in secondary education, which is a significant problem if we bear in mind that high school education has not been reformed since 2001. This has resulted in a loss of the continuity and the necessary expansion and upgrading of students' knowledge.

According to the OECD research[2], the strategic documents for primary education lack goals that lead to an increase in learning outcomes despite the country's poor performance in international student testing[3]. The same research also states that there is a lack of consistency in the approach for adapting

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[2] OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment in Education in North Macedonia, 2019
https://www.unicef.org/northmacedonia/reports/oecd-review-evaluation-and-assessment-education-north-macedonia

[3] In 2015, the average score of 384 points in science compared to 493 points in OECD countries (OECD, 2016) indicates that students at the age of 15 in our country are four years behind their peers in OECD countries. Compared to neighboring countries with similar income levels, students from North Macedonia have lower score than students from Albania (427 points) and Montenegro (411 points) and slightly higher score than students from Kosovo (378 points).
North Macedonia's achievements on most international tests indicate unfavorable learning outcomes. From 2000 to 2015, the performance in language literacy measured by the PISA tests dropped by 21 points. At the same time, Albania managed to increase its performance by 56 points, which equates to about two years of education.
According to the International study in mathematics and natural sciences (TIMSS), a similar pattern of stagnation has been found in the performance of 8th grade students between 1999 and 2011 (World Bank).
Even though the PISA test conducted in 2018 has shown an improvement in performance compared to 2015, still, the performance of the students of our country was very low, i.e. we are ranked 62nd in natural sciences, and 67th in mathematical literacy out of 78 ranked countries. (SEC, 2019)

the learning to the needs of the students in order to contribute to the improvement of the performance of all students. It is noted that the learning outcomes are at a very low level and do not improve, which can be attributed to students' lack of understanding of the connection between learning and their performance and the outcomes in the education system in general, which can be improved by creating effective teaching and an improved learning environment.

The assessments of the project funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) related to the mathematical and language literacy of primary school students in our country[4] indicate that students have acquired basic reading and math skills, but have difficulty with basic skills such as reading comprehension and subtraction. Tests also show that less than 40% of second grade students have completed the reading comprehension tasks, compared to the international standard of 80%.

Furthermore, according to the comparative analysis of the OECD (2016), in the Republic of North Macedonia, students under the age of 14 receive about 900 hours less instruction than students in the OECD countries on average. Short learning time at school limits the depth and scope of learning, as well as the participation in extracurricular and other activities that are not part of the teaching process itself. According to World Bank analyses, one obstacle due to which teaching duration in the country is not increased is the large number of schools working in two shifts.

Diversity, which is embedded in our primary education system, and understood in different contexts, is also a challenge for quality change and the development of an integrated and quality primary school for all children. The division of students by languages of instruction often contributes to differences in the achievements of students of different ethnicities. Such division is also reflected on the implementation of extracurricular and out-of-school activities, endangering both equality of opportunity and opportunities for interaction between teachers and students from different languages of instruction. In addition, there are large differences in infrastructural and other working conditions in small rural primary schools and those located in larger cities. Small rural schools, especially district schools, have less access to resources, fewer teachers available, and are often forced to conduct joint classes with students from different grades (combined classes) and/or hire teachers who do not meet the teaching staff norm. On the other hand, there are schools that have problems due to the large number of students, forcing them to work in two shifts (rarely in three shifts) and there are schools where students are forced to use organized transportation. In those schools they often sacrifice the implementation of the "extended program" of the school (extracurricular activities, additional and supplementary classes, etc.) due to additional organizational issues.

Substandard textbooks, insufficient teaching resources in schools, lack of opportunities for career development of teachers, inconsistent professional development, insufficient readiness of teachers to apply new digital approaches in teaching accompanied by organizational and infrastructural problems are additional challenges that the system of primary education has been dealing with for years. An additional challenge is the lack of an integrated approach to curriculum development and an

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[4] Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) were implemented in 2016 on a sample of about 8,000 students at the end of II and III grade.

interdisciplinary approach to the study of processes and phenomena of the same field, which makes it impossible to connect learning with reality and is indirectly reflected on student achievement.

Need for change

The need for quality education and to build the bigger picture of the education system requires changes in primary education. These changes should enable conceptual connection and substantial harmonization of pre-school, primary and secondary education in terms of all aspects that determine the function and nature of education, taking into account the nature of children's development and its relation to the learning process. Such connection and harmonization require rethinking of the social functions, place and role of the education system, without challenging the place and role of each individual subsystem. In that context, it is expected to make the year prior to commencement of school education, which is part of the pre-school education, to become mandatory for each child, regardless whether it would be realized within kindergartens or primary schools.

Changes in primary school should focus on teaching and learning in which analytical and critical thinking are fostered, creativity is encouraged, recognizing true and false information and its correct use is far more useful and valuable than merely having information. In the improved education, teaching is motivating and offers students skills that are relevant and necessary for success both in school and in the out-of-school reality. Lifelong learning competencies translated into National Standards, and in particular those relating to the skills of creative expression, critical thinking, communication and collaboration, should be integrated into all curricula and be part of every lesson, in the same manner as language and mathematical literacy.

Digital integration is also the basis of the new education, but not just by simply "adding" ICT to existing teaching methods. Digital technology must be applied in a way that is of immediate benefit to students. The design of the new concept of primary school includes the preparation of students for a combined approach to learning, through digital platforms, or through distance learning in different conditions, as well as the use of digital technology to support the inclusion of children with disabilities into the mainstream education setting.

Some of the listed innovative approaches in teaching and learning, with more or less success, have already been tried in schools in our country through the implementation of various projects, led by domestic and international organizations. Some of them have been built into the system and it is necessary for that experience to find its suitable place in the "new school". Furthermore, of particular importance are the experiences and achievements in the projects for improving the interethnic integration and inclusion in education, for advancing the education of the smaller ethnic communities, for raising the quality of teaching in civic education, for strengthening student participation and student organization and support for student initiatives, for promoting students' socio-emotional development, for building school communities for learning and cooperation, for improving knowledge of environment and natural resources, living in connection with nature, climate change and its effects, for building school communities for learning and cooperation, for promoting language and mathematical literacy, for promoting media culture and digital competencies of students, for improving student assessment, for building the concept of "school tailored to the child", etc.

The new concept of primary education recognizes the need for change based on new knowledge for the development of quality education, on global and European trends in education based on competencies, digitalization of education, as well as all on our previous experiences and aspirations to improve the quality of teaching and learning in our schools that should become a place for learning and development of motivated students ready to acquire the expected competencies. Furthermore, the new concept fully respects teachers' observations and opinions obtained from the research conducted in November 2020. Thus, the new concept of primary education offers changes in several areas related to the integration of teaching and subjects, the selection of subjects of interest to the student, learning through research and projects, reducing the excess of factual data in teaching materials, adapting the teaching to the needs of all students, the use of various teaching materials, the active participation of students in school life, the cooperation and professional development of teachers and their motivation for career development, thus enabling the opportunity to build a school tailored to the children.

In view of the changes, there is full awareness that only with commitment and dedication of each stakeholder in education, starting with the Ministry of Education and Science, the Bureau for Development of Education, the State Examination Center, the State Education Inspectorate, local communities, school principals, councils of parents, school boards, teachers and students, can the guidelines and solutions proposed by the Concept Note be realized.

What do teachers think about the need to reform primary education?

In the research conducted by the MES and BDE in November 2020, 4168 primary education teachers (2168 6th to 9th grade teachers, and 2020 1st to 5th grade teachers) responded to online questionnaire to express their opinion on the need for reforms in education. The results showed that 82% of teachers who participated in the research agreed that primary education in the country was not sufficiently good and it was necessary to reform it in order to improve it. Following were emphasized as the greatest weaknesses of the current education system: textbooks were not adjusted to the needs of students and/or requirements of the curricula (67%), students learnt unnecessary and rather useless things (61%) and the upbringing component was missing (47%). Significantly lower share of teachers considered the following as the greatest weaknesses: lack of stimulation of students to develop critical thinking (30%) and absence of innovative teaching methods (14%).

Most of the participants (75%) considered that **textbooks and teaching materials** were the reform area of highest priority. 72% of teachers thought that the most important change to be undertaken in this area in order to improve the education was development of new textbooks in most of the subjects, and 48% of teachers thought that the most important thing is provision of greater freedom to use other teaching materials together with the textbooks.

Reform of the **curricula** was considered a priority by most of the respondents in the research (64%). In this area, following were listed as the most important changes that would result in improved education: alignment of contents and goals with the needs/interests of students (57%) and reduction of the scope of topics/contents covered by the curricula in most of the subjects (52%).

Approximately one third of the respondents pointed out that **teachers' training** (37%) and/or **curricula** (36%) were the reform area of the highest priority. Furthermore, following are considered the most significant changes to the syllabus resulting in improved education: reduction of the number of existing subjects by merging related subjects and/or inclusion of the content of certain subjects in others (64%) and changes in the number of planned lessons for most of the subjects (53%). The most important stated changes aimed at improvement in the area of teachers' trainings refer to a continuous institutional support to teachers when changes are implemented (52%) and extension of the duration of trainings that should be both practical and skills oriented (44%).

Even though **assessment** and **instruction**, when compared to other areas, were considered of lower reforming priority (only 20% and 13% of the respondents, respectively, stated they were the highest priority), teachers stated manners for their improvement. Most of the teachers agreed that the assessment (grading) would be of better quality and more objective if when several different techniques were used when giving grades, such as tests, oral examination, projects, performances, etc. (62%) and/or if clear grading criteria were set (35%). At the same time, teachers were almost equally distributed as regards the various possibilities for improvement of instruction intended to improve the education as a whole: students should have less lectures, and should spend more time on research and projects (43%), teachers should use more interactive methods that would make all students active during the classes (41%) and/or teachers should be given greater freedom to use more diverse teaching methods (37%) and/or teaching materials (video/audio materials, digital content, created scenarios, etc.) they would create or select by themselves.

PART II: CONCEPT NOTE ON THE PRIMARY EDUCATION[5]

The Concept note renders the basis for provision of quality primary education, where the schools is expected to make children capable of responding to the requests of life in the present and future, that is, to teach students how to learn in their further education and in life, in general. The Concept note provided the vital precondition to attain this goal – to focus teaching process towards in-depth and conceived learning based on critical thinking and making logical conclusions. This learning requires devising and connecting information and solving problems, instead of memorizing facts, which, in modern times, are not only easily available, but they are also prone to manipulation. At the same time, the concept note takes into consideration the fact that the task of the primary education in 21st century is to strengthen the upbringing component of the educational process and, apart from the knowledge and skills that contribute to the cognitive development of the pupils, it should allow for development of features and acquisition of values to enable the development of pupils as socially responsible citizens and self-confident persons.

The Concept note defines the interests and needs of pupils as a priority and puts them into the focus of the primary education. The Concept note starts with the notion that pupils may achieve the expected learning outcomes more easily if they experience what they learn as relevant and useful, that is, as something that may be related to the everyday life, therefore, it proposes for the curricula to be designed by following this guiding principle. At the same time, the concept note envisages a broader offer of elective subjects which derive from the stated interests of the pupils and they may aid the development of their potentials, as well as to increase their satisfaction while staying and learning in the school and to elevate their motivation to be successful out of school.

The Concept note relies on the inclusiveness, gender sensibility/equality and interculturalism as key principles and it is directly linked to the National Standards on Primary Education providing guidelines to be followed by the entire organization and realization of the upbringing and educational process in primary schools.

INCLUSIVENESS, GENDER SENSITIVITY/EQUALITY AND INTERCULTURALITY

Provision of inclusiveness

Inclusiveness of the primary education is a basic postulate for the exercise of the children's right to education under the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the constitutional right and obligation

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[5] The term education used in this document includes the upbringing aspect as well, which is here treated as a segment of the overall educational process/system.

for primary education for all as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia. In order to allow education for all under equal conditions, the primary education is conceived and organized to provide enrollment, inclusion and completion of the primary education for all children.

Inclusiveness in the primary education *is basically* provided by including all children at the age of 6 years until their completion of the primary school. The network of primary schools makes the school easily accessible to students or transport to the school is provided free of charge. Primary schools closely cooperate with the local and central authorities to provide information and undertake activity so that no child will be left behind. Particular attention is paid to ensure enrollment and regular attendance by students from vulnerable groups at risk of early school dropout. In accordance with the Concept Note on Inclusive Education, the schools undertake activities to facilitate the inclusion of students who did not attend school for a longer period, who dropped out or who failed to enroll at school in time.

The inclusion is also promoted by excluding content (visual and textual) that may support prejudice or encourage discrimination against any grounds or that may create a sense of lower value or exclusion of students from the curricula, textbooks or teaching materials. On the contrary, the curricula, textbooks and other teaching materials include content where people from vulnerable groups are presented as equal members of the society.

Substantial inclusion is provided by including all students in all school' activities in accordance with their capabilities needs and interests. It is enabled by offering various elective subjects and by adjusting extra-curricular activities to the capabilities of all school children.

Inclusion is also provided by adjusting the space and securing accessibility to premises (removal of physical barriers, adjustment of toilets, elevators, signs) and to didactical materials (sufficient space for moving around, access to books and learning materials, visible and readable presentations) and by adjusting didactical and teaching materials for students with special educational needs and providing assistive technology. The school organizes remote learning and peer support to those students who may not physically attend the teaching process due to various reasons (chronical or other disease).

Furthermore, inclusion is provided by active participation in the teaching process and extra-curricular activities and by allowing each child to be cognitively and emotionally engaged through using appropriate methodical approaches by the teachers (individualization, differentiation, team work, peer support), and when needed, though individual educational plan or modified curriculum and/or provision of additional support by third parties (personal and educational assistants, educational mediators, tutors-volunteers, and professionals from schools with resource center). The regular formative assessment also contributes to timely identify learning difficulties of students, particularly those from vulnerable groups and to make them feel encouraged and supported to progress along with their age group. According to the *Concept Note on Inclusive Education*, the summative assessment of students working under individual educational plan and modified program is in compliance with the adjusted learning outcomes and takes into consideration the student's engagement.

Inclusiveness is provided by creating a school environment where all students feel accepted and supported. In order to protect, primarily students with special educational needs, the schools realize programs for protection against bullying and discrimination, for personal growth and development, for assistance and support for students from socially vulnerable groups, and they should insist upon their complete inclusion in the school life. Apart from teacher, expert associates in schools play a significant role in such programs.

Moreover, inclusiveness in the schools refers to inclusion of parents/guardians and representatives of the local community in the work of the school. In its bodies (School Board, Parents' Council), the school provides for inclusion of parents/guardians from vulnerable groups to represent the interests of students who need additional attention due to threat of exclusion.

The inclusive school has inclusive teams to systematically monitor the progress of all students, to ensure that 'no child is left behind' and all students to achieve high results in accordance with their personal capacities.

Provision of gender sensitivity/equality

Since their earliest age, and particularly in the puberty and adolescence, boys and girls are exposed to various pressures for gender socialization, which generates gender inequality, and long-term consequences against the health and quality of life. The consequences of such gender socialization are particularly detrimental to girls and all children who do not conform to the heteronormative gender roles.

Education plays a key role in creating opportunities for transformation of detrimental gender norms and manners of behavior. In this manner, it contributes to reduction of the widespread gender stereotypes and gender inequality, discrimination and violence based on those stereotypes, and at the same time, it allows children to grow and develop in accordance with their authentic affinities and interests.

In order to provide gender equality, education encourages incorporation of the gender perspective in the teachers' trainings, and implements teaching process through contents without explicit gender stereotypes, and applies approach which is gender sensitive and encourages critical thinking about gender inequality. Educational content should be selected in a manner which ensures positive role models which are not limited by traditional gender roles for both girls and boys.

The content promotes gender equality, suggests that gender/sex should not be grounds for different valuation and power, contributing to better understanding of the negative consequences of the rigid abiding to gender norms, expectations and roles. Such content is present in the curricula of all subjects where possible, and textbooks and teaching materials in such subjects, apart from conveying the messages through the texts, they are complemented with a visual material and through different exercises intended for critical reshaping of terms.

When providing gender sensitive education, it is crucial that there are offered elective subjects which are at least partially dedicated to acquiring knowledge that gender norms and roles are not fixed, as well

as that gender stereotypes may lead to serious individual and social consequences, including gender-based violence as the most problematic aspect. Such subjects, through the content they offer, are expected to build negative attitude towards all types of gender discrimination, including discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Important component in promotion of the gender equality through education is stimulating the participation of students in curricular and extracurricular activities regardless of their sex/gender, that is, stereotypes and expectations associated with their sex/gender. It is achieved either by offering special incentives for participation in 'gender atypical' activities (for example, boys may take elective classes as *cooking*), or by establishing both female and male groups for the same activity (for example, sport teams).

Professional orientation and counseling in school may also contribute to overcoming the traditional perception of professions as 'male' or 'female' and to encourage girls and boys to select their profession in accordance with their desires, abilities and interests.

Provision of interculturality

Introduction of intercultural education is necessary to go beyond the passive coexistence between different ethnical and religious communities living in our country and to find a sustainable manner for joint living in our multicultural/multiethnic society. In order to achieve this goal, the primary education includes activities and contents that promote respect of cultural diversity and interaction among students belonging to different ethnic communities and whose teaching is implemented in the same or in different languages.

Interculturality in the education is provided in different manners. One manner is to introduce multicultural content which promotes cultural characteristics of all ethnic/religious communities living in our country and/or refer to interaction between people coming from those communities. Such content is present in curricula for all subjects whenever it is possible, which is obligatorily reflected in textbooks and teaching materials for those subjects.

Among the elective subjects, there are subjects that are fully or partially dedicated to acquiring knowledge about cultural/ethnical features of all people living in the RNM, as well as to emphasizing common interests and values of all citizens of our country coming from different ethnical background. Also, an opportunity is provided for pupils to study the second official language of the municipality where the school is located (Albanian, Turkish, Serbian, Roma).

Interculturality is strengthened through organization of activities for multiethnic integration. These are, in fact, joint curricular and extra-curricular activities with 'mixed' groups of students who are taught in different languages. Such activities are very important for ensuring interaction between students who do not have many opportunities to be in contact and to cooperate in the course of formal education. The possibility to realize such activities is higher in schools with two/three languages of instruction than in schools where teaching process is conducted in only one language. Within schools with two/three languages of instruction, joint projects and researches are conducted as part of the teaching process in

the mandatory subjects and joint classes in elective subjects are organized (for all or most of them). At the same time, the extracurricular activities (such as field trips, celebrations, one-day workshops, ecological and humanitarian actions) in these schools are organized and implemented as joint activities with students with different languages of instruction. Due to the existence of conditions for realization of various activities for multiethnic integration in multilingual schools, the educational system stimulates as many pupils with different language of instruction as possible to study under one roof.

In order to improve the interaction between students with different language of instruction, one-language schools are stimulated to establish partnership with schools with different language of instruction and to jointly plan, organize and realize mutual visits or online meetings where "mixed" groups of students with different languages of instruction will participate. In this manner, joint extracurricular activities are organized (for example, one-day workshops, field trips, celebrations, actions) that follow the rules on bilingual activities (exceptionally, trilingual) and are based on the joint activities criteria as described in the Concept Note on Extracurricular Activities.

Interculturality is also developed through organization of the entire work of the schools with two and three languages of instruction, which creates conditions for formal and informal communication of teachers and students from different ethnic background through mandatory representation of all languages of instruction in the same shift, through joint professional staff meetings with teachers from all languages of instruction and through joint bodies where parents of all languages of instruction are involved.

In schools with two and three languages of instruction, an equal treatment of all represented languages of instruction is provided which is evident in the content and the manner of presentation of all visual and textual content displayed in all joint premises inside and outside of the schools. This principle is respected both for educational and informative content, regardless of which language/cultural/ethnic community they refer to primarily. In schools with one language of instruction, it is necessary to pay attention that visual and textual content displayed in the joint premises do not encourage ethnocentrism, but on the contrary, to promote Republic of North Macedonia as a multicultural/multiethnic country.

Short-term/Long-term effects
- Reduced number of students dropping out of primary education.
- Increased sense of equality/equitability of the students of vulnerable categories.
- Greater achievements of the students with special educational needs.
- Increased satisfaction of students from being at school and studying.
- Fewer gender and ethnic stereotypes and prejudices with the students and faculty.
- Fewer cases of gender based violence in school context and the negative consequences to the health and wellbeing of students as a result of such violence.
- Sex/Gender does not play a role in the selection of secondary education and future vocation.
- Students have developed intercultural competences.

- Students have completed national identity which arises from belonging to the common country Republic of North Macedonia.
- Improved inter-ethnic integration in education and social cohesion in the society.

NATIONAL STANDARDS

The national standards for primary education establish the competences which should be acquired by the students with completion of the primary education. They shall involve the key competences for lifelong learning covered with the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union from 2018, also, their drafting shall also include the recommendations arising from international studies and other documents of the European Union, with the purpose to improve the quality of education in the member countries and provide harmonization and mobility among the educational systems in Europe. In this context, the key competences for lifelong learning from the European framework have been harmonized to the age of the students completing primary education, and also to the context of the Macedonian Society, whereas, their establishment took into consideration the experiences so far in the primary education in our country.

In defining the competences incorporated in the National Standards, we used the European Qualifications Framework, in accordance to which, the key competences shall be a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Whereas, it shall be understood that *'knowledge'* refers to facts, procedures, concepts, ideas and theories which have been already established and support the understanding of an area or subject, while *'skills'* shall be capabilities and capacity to use acquired knowledge, and *'attitude'* shall describe the thinking, believes and readiness to act or react to ideas, persons or situations. In the National standards, knowledge is referred to as acquired knowledge and skills, and the attitudes are referred to as values which the student understands and adopts as their own.

The National Standards shall refer to eight areas which categorize the competences, summarized in the following manner:

I.   *Linguistic literacy*
     This area shall consist of competences which provide for identification, understanding, expression, creation and interpretation of concepts, feelings, facts and opinions in oral or various written forms, using visual, audio and digital materials in different disciplines and context. These competences are related to the Mother tongue (i.e. the language used for teaching) and involve knowledge of reading and writing and fair understanding of written texts, mastery of a particular vocabulary and grammar, and knowledge of the linguistic functions, as well as capacity to use the main types of verbal interaction in oral and written form.

II. *Use of other languages*
     This area shall refer to competences providing adequate and efficient use of other languages for communication. This area shall cover the main components/areas of literacy: understanding, expressing and interpreting concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and within an adequate scope, in a language different from the Mother tongue, that is, different from the language of instruction.

III. *Mathematics and Natural Sciences*
     Mathematical competences shall refer to capability and preparedness for use of different mathematical and logical ways of thinking and numerical and spatial presentation in solving

problems in everyday life. The competences in natural sciences shall refer to the capabilities and preparedness to apply evidence based knowledge and approaches in explaining natural phenomena and improving human life, as well as understanding the changes occurring in nature as a result of the impact of human activities to the environment.

IV. *Digital Literacy*

Digital literacy shall cover the competences which provide for active involvement in the information and technology sophisticated modern society. They shall be provided through acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes, which enable openness towards, and knowledge of the potentials of ICT and to creative, critical and responsible use of ICT for learning, working and other personal and social activities in the course of education and in the future. These competences refer to the use of ICT to access information, skillful and effective use in problem-solving, sharing ideas, communication and cooperation within the school and the out-of-school life, creating digital content, as well as ethical and safe use of digital technology in everyday life.

V. *Personal and Social Development*

These areas shall be determined by competences which provide knowledge of self, and development of physical, cognitive, affective and social aspects of wellbeing. The development of these competences shall provide for development of mature, active and responsible persons, ready to tackle everyday life challenges that every person comes across as an individual and as a member of smaller and large social groups.

VI. *Society and Democratic Culture*

This area shall include the competences referring to the knowledge and understanding of oneself, the society, its history and organization, economic and political concepts, structures and movements, as well as the skills and attitudes which should enable him/her to act as a democratic and responsible citizen and be motivated and actively participate in the social and civil life.

VII. *Technics, Technology and Entrepreneurship*

The competences from this area shall include the capacity to undertake initiatives, act in accordance with the possibilities and transform ideas into products and/or services with cultural, social or commercial value. They shall refer to knowledge and skills in the fields of technics, technology, business, economics, financial literacy and entrepreneurship and shall provide for development of creativity and critical thinking, to the capacity of teamwork, decision making, risk taking and troubleshooting, which contribute to the personal and professional development of the student.

VIII. *Artistic expression and Culture*

Artistic expression refers to practicing activities in the field of music, dance, fine arts, literature, design, performing arts and similar activities which lead to creation of products with cultural and artistic content or experiences in interaction with works of culture. The competences in the area of culture shall enable the members of a culture to practice their culture and consume the culture's advantages, and at the same time, to be open towards other cultures and their products.

All areas included in the National Standards shall be considered equally important and all competences included in the areas shall contribute to the successful life in the society. Competences may be developed and applied in many different contexts and combinations, thus, they overlap and connect,

and some competences of essential importance for one area add to the competences of another and/or support the competences of another area. In such manner, most of the competences which define the area *Personal and Social Development* not only refer to the pedagogic component of education, but they also pose as a basis for the competences that are precondition for development of the competences in many other areas and/or for practicing the competences determined with other areas. Such are for example, the competences related to critical thinking, solving problems, cooperation and teamwork, communication and resolution of conflicts.

The National Standards shall be incorporated in the Curriculum, represented by the subjects and extra-curricular activities and in the syllabi, by transforming the competences into learning outcomes and accordingly, into assessment standards. On the one side, the National Standards impose the need of joining related teaching disciplines into a basic teaching subject (such as *Natural Sciences and History and Society),* and on the second side, they shall require all competences which contain separate areas (such as *Digital Literacy and Financial Literacy and Entrepreneurship)* to be acquired by including them in most of the mandatory and some elective subjects. On the third side, part of the mandatory subjects shall be intended for acquiring competences in particular areas (such as *Linguistic literacy, Society, Citizenship and Democratic culture, and Artistic expression, culture and multi-culture)*, however, at the same time there is a need to address them through other teaching subjects (mandatory or elective). Finally, there is an area, such as *Personal and Social Development*, which is special because it contains competences which may be acquired only if they are included in all subjects (mandatory and elective) and all extracurricular activities.

Short-term/Long-term effects
- Provided basis for complete development of the student.
- Provided information for all stakeholders in the pedagogic and educational process (students, parents, and teachers) for the output competences at the end of primary education.
- Facilitated international comparability and mobility among educational systems.
- Provided period for harmonization in the pedagogic and educational work (among different types of programs – curricular, extra-curricular, different areas/subjects).
- Provided basis for assessment of the teaching practices and students' achievements.

CURRICULUM

The Curriculum shall contain mandatory subjects, elective subjects and other activities offered by the school, all distributed in the relevant grades and distributed in certain number of classes weekly and annually. The Curriculum shall be the basis for structuring the pedagogic and educational work on State level and the way it is organized in the schools.

Mandatory subjects

The curriculum shall contain 8 to 11 mandatory subjects.

The subject *Macedonian/Albanian/Turkish/Serbian/Bosnian language* is defined by the language of instruction (and allows most of the students to acquire their mother tongue) and it derives from the area *Language literacy* from the National Standards for primary education. The subject *English language* derives from the area of *Use of other languages.*

The Subject *Natural Sciences* shall cover topics/content which belongs to biology, chemistry, physics and parts of geography, chemistry and together with the subject *Mathematics* they directly arise from the area of *Mathematics* and *Natural Sciences* from the National Standards. These three subjects are taught in all grades, with different number of classes.

The subject *History and society* shall cover topics/content which belongs to history, some parts of geography, civil education and other social-humanistic disciplines and together with the subject *Society* they directly arise from the area *Society and Democratic Culture* from the National Standards. This area is taught in continuity, first through the subject *Society* (from I to III grade), and through the subject *History and society* (from IV grade).

Mandatory subjects shall also include the subjects of *Arts and Music* (which derive from the area of *Artistic expression and culture*) and the *Physical and health education* (linked to certain indicators in the area of *Personal and Social development*). Each of these three subjects shall be taught in all grades of the primary education with the same number of classes.

The subject *Technical education and informatics,* which derives from two areas of the National Standards – *Digital literacy* and *Technology and entrepreneurship*—shall be introduced in the second period of education. The subject is taught in the third period of education, but the difference is ratio of covered topics - the lower grades will focus more on technical education, while the higher grades will focus on informatics.

Among the mandatory subjects for students whose language of instruction is different from Macedonian language, *Macedonian* shall be included in the second and third period of primary education (from IV to IX grade).

Elective Subjects

Every school shall be free to offer elective subjects which arise from the interests of the students of that school, taking into consideration the capacities of the teaching staff employed in the relevant school, as well as the resources available to the school. In essence, every school shall mandatorily offer two lists of elective subjects, one related to learning *Second foreign language*, and the other covering so called *free*

elective subjects offered by the school depending on the interests of the students and the capacities of the school.[6] Apart from those, schools may offer elective subject which refer to learning the language of the community, intended to learn the second official language in the municipality, learning Albanian language and/or learning the culture and the language of smaller ethnic communities intended for the members of those communities.

Each school is obliged to offer a list of languages to be studied as a *Second foreign language*, as follows: German, French, Italian and Russian. This list shall apply only to students from VI to IX grade, taking into consideration that the school shall be obliged to provide the conditions once elected second language (in VI grade) to be continuously taught until the end of the primary education.

It is recommended that bilingual and trilingual schools organize lectures in other foreign languages in "mixed" groups of students in different teaching languages. In this way, the school shall be able to offer students a choice from several foreign languages and at the same time, through joint learning, students will be able to acquire inter-cultural competences.

Upon parents' consent, schools located in municipalities where, apart from the Macedonian language, there is a second official language, may offer to students with a different language of instruction to learn the second official language through the elective subject *Language of the community.* Students may select to study the language of the community from IV to IX grade, as additional subject. All students with a language of instruction different from the Albanian language are offered a possibility to learn *Albanian language* as additional elective subject from VI to IX grade.

In order to ensure respect for the lingual and cultural identity of the smaller ethnic communities, students from these communities, with a language of instruction different from their mother tongue, are offered an opportunity to study their mother tongue and culture starting from the III grade by selecting one of the following subjects: *Language and culture of Roma, Language and culture of Vlachs, Language and culture of Bosniaks, Language and culture of Turks, and Language and culture of Serbs.* Once selected, the subject shall have the status of additional subject.

A special list of elective subjects shall contain the so called *Free elective subjects.* During the first educational period (I-III grade), the free elective subject is realized in a form of free activities led by the homeroom teacher in charge of the class in an agreement with the students. In the time provided for the free elective subject, each student is encouraged to choose what they want to do to complement the content learnt throughout the day/week and/or the entire class chooses a joint activity as a support to the personal and social development of students (for example, one of several offered workshops from the Life skills education).

Students in the second and third period of primary education (IV-IX grade) are offered to choose from four categories of free elective subjects:
(1) Elective subjects for broadening/deepening the knowledge in the mandatory subjects (for example, mathematical - logical reasoning, programming, painting/drawing, sculpting/classical culture, sexual education)

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[6] Guidelines for planning, realization and assessment of this type of subjects are provided in the *Guide for free elective subjects*.

(2) Elective subject for support of the student's interests, which are not part of the teaching subjects (for example, photography, gardening/horticulture, theatrical workshops, dancing, cooking, engraving, modelling),

(3) Elective subjects for support of the personal and social development of students (for example, education for life skills, multicultural workshops), and

(4) Elective subjects of sporting and recreational nature[7] (for example, soccer, basketball, handball, volleyball, ping-pong, yoga, Pilates).

The list of subjects of this type may vary from one to another period of primary education, in order to follow the age differences in the interests of students and the capacities of the teachers involved in class and subject teaching. For each educational period, every school shall be obliged to offer at least three elective subjects from each of the four categories. Exception shall be schools with small number of students, where the list of elective subjects, in agreement with the students (i.e. their parents/guardians) may be more limited.

Students shall choose two free electives during one school year – one for the first and another for the second semester. During the same education period, each student may not select the same subject twice, unless it is a subject in the same area at a different level (for example, Programming 1 and Programming 2). The realization of activities in one elective subject shall involve students who share common interests, regardless whether they come from the same class (for example, III^3), in different classes of the same year (for example VI grade), or different years within one period (for example, VII-IX grade). It is important for the whole group to participate together and continuously in the realization of the elective subject. Free elective subjects shall be conducted by teachers from the relevant educational period, who shall be appointed as responsible for the implementation of the subject, and if necessary in the work of the class other teachers, or parents/guardians or volunteers from the community may be involved as assistants.

Free elective subjects shall be planned exclusively around the expected learning outcomes which are the direct result from concrete competences from the National standards. They shall be realized through various activities based exclusively on interactive teaching and active learning in activities that all involved students experience as interesting and fun. One of the important goals of the free electives is to offer students an opportunity to discover their "strong side" and skills which may not be so obvious in other classes, whereby become recognizable in front of their classmates. It is expected that this will develop a positive attitude with the students towards the school, and shall motivate them for higher achievements in the mandatory subjects.

In those schools where teaching is performed in two or three languages, at least half of the free electives shall be realized with linguistically balanced "mixed" groups of students from different teaching languages (an exception shall be schools where multilingualism is achieved through regional schools belonging in their composition). As a rule, at least two teachers (one for each language) shall be responsible for the realization of elective subjects, who shall lead the activities bilingually, with equal treatment of both teaching languages and all involved students.

The responsible teachers[8] for implementation of the free elective subjects shall continuously monitor and evaluate the progress of each of the involved students in acquiring the knowledge, skills and

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[7] Students participating in sport clubs within their extracurricular activities may not select the same sport as elective subject.

values/attitudes as prescribed with the objectives of the relevant subject. Free elective subjects shall be evaluated descriptively and the students' achievements shall be included in an addendum to their certificates.

Extracurricular activities

The schools realize a number of mandatory extracurricular activities, which may be *short-term*, such as actions, field trips, excursions and one-time workshops, or *long-term*, such as ecology clubs, sport clubs, school theater, school choir and orchestra, etc.[9]

The school ecology clubs stimulate the students' interest and motivation to explore the environment, learn about climate changes occurring in the course of the year, how they affect the environment, in view of acquiring environment protection skills and habits. Sport clubs are established to promote all forms of sport activities and they are voluntarily joined by students of different age. The school may establish sport clubs for the students who show interest for a specific sport of any period of the primary school.

Every school offers the students an opportunity to become members of the school choir, school orchestra and school theater. The school may organize a choir, orchestra and a theater for the younger students (up to V grade) and for the older students. Students engage in such activities voluntarily, and the activities are carried out throughout the school year. If the students express interest and musical talent, they could establish other instrumental or vocal music groups, while the school, within its ability, would support such activities.

By participating in *actions* of ecological or humanitarian nature, the students are learning volunteer and community-based work and develop their personal and social competencies. The actions may be limited to the school itself (involving a greater or lesser number of students), but they can also be directed toward the community and include activities that are realized outside of the school premises (for instance, an action to clean the environment, reading books to children in kindergartens, collecting scrap paper in the neighborhood, visiting and assisting elderly people or people with disabilities in the neighborhood, etc.). Furthermore, every student of the third period (VII - IX grade) has an obligation to carry out at least 20 hours of community-based work (individually or together with his or her fellow students) in the course of the school year. The actions may be initiated both by the management, the teaching or professional staff and by the students' bodies in the school, and the school is responsible for the planning and organization of the actions. In bilingual and trilingual schools, students following instruction in all represented languages shall mandatorily take part in the actions and jointly carry out all activities within the frames of the action.

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[8] Free elective subjects in IV and V grade are realized by the homeroom and/or subject teachers, and in VI-IX grade, only the subject teacher.

[9] Detailed guidelines on the planning, organization, and realization of extracurricular activities are provided in the Concept *Note on extracurricular activities.*

One-time workshops are brief thematic events that are carried out within a single day and are organized with a specific objective or on a specific occasion, often for the purposes of preventing or responding to a specific situation, expressed need/interest by students, or on the occasion of visits of experts, practitioners or famous persons. They can be dedicated to various themes, but they have to promote the development of specific competencies included in the National Standards. The workshops may be intended for restricted groups of students (interested in the content) or for all students of a specific grade/grades or for all students in the school. They can be realized in the school itself or through visits to another school or institution/organization. This makes the workshops particularly appropriate for work with "mixed" groups of students learning in a single language school with those learning in multilingual schools, and the schools establish partnerships for such purposes.

The *field trips* may include all students of the school, but the *excursions* are most often organized for the students of a single grade/class. They are organized either to extend and enhance the students' knowledge of specific subjects (such as, for instance, those that include visits to important regions in terms of environment, natural resources of the country, sites and objects of cultural, historical or other significance), or for the purpose of sports, recreation and socializing, or a combination of the two. It is recommended to use them as much as possible to contribute both to help the students learn about the environment, natural resources, various climate conditions ensuring the raising of different crops and plants, gastronomy, culture of different ethnic communities in our country (by virtue of selection of the cultural and historical sites to be visited), and to interethnic integration in education (by providing for interaction among students following instruction in different languages with the same or in different schools). Notwithstanding the main purpose of the field trip or excursion, the planning thereof should mandatorily indicate the specific competencies under the National Standards that they will address and the activities to develop such competencies.

Some schools are occasionally or continually implementing *projects* as a specific type of one-time extracurricular activity. The project could support the existing subjects/fields or be in the function of other fields. They can be initiated by the school itself, in cooperation with other schools and organizations, and could be restricted to local or national level, but they can also have an international character. The projects may also be initiated by the educational institutions, the municipality, international organizations/donors, and they can potentially be implemented by other organizations/institutions which have obtained the relevant license to do so. The projects initiated by other organizations/institutions aim to pilot a new programme and/or a different approach, and potentially to verify the effects of the introduction of such programme/approach in the educational system.

The *exchange visits* by schools from abroad within projects such as Erasmus, twinned schools, etc. may also be considered a special type of extracurricular activity. Visits of this type intend to include a small number of schools and a small number of students in the capacity of project participants and/or school representatives.

During the winter and/or summer recess, the schools can also organize *camps/schools* in order to provide organized extracurricular activities to the students in the form of concentrated, full-day

activities in the course of several days, a working week or a longer period of time. They can be intended to support the personal and social development of the students, have a sports-recreational character and/or could meet other extracurricular interests of the students.

Organization of the teaching in accordance with the syllabus

The stay of the students in the school is not understood solely as sitting in the classes in accordance with the established weekly schedule, but rather as a time spent learning (formal or non-formal learning) and socializing through games and other entertaining activities (more or less structured). In order to achieve this, the school is organized in the function of promotion of learning and meeting the child's best interests. On one hand, the organization ensures integration of as many as possible different resources in order to achieve a maximal effect on the students' learning and increased flexibility of teachers and students. On the other hand, it contributes to a quality interaction among the students and the teachers and enables the development of all competencies of the students. For these reasons, the organizational plan of the school covers the schedule of classes and other time at the school, use of premises for teaching and other activities, and the engagement of the entire school staff (teaching staff, professional associates, persons in charge of maintaining the hygiene, etc.). The manner of addressing these issues not only affects the efficient and effective operation of the school, but also determines whether all actors involved in its functioning (students, staff, parents) identify with the school and feel ownership.

As long as a major part of the students are attending double shift schooling[10], the mandatory stay of the students from I to V grade in the school is 5 hours per day, of which approximately 3-3.5 hours are spent at teaching classes, and the rest of the time is spent on other activities[11]. The students in VI to IX grade stay at the school 6 hours per day, of which 4-4.5 hours are spent in classes and the remaining time in other activities. For the students of all grades/ages, some of the activities are unstructured (such as the breaks in-between classes), while some are structured and organized by the teachers or the schools in the form of a homeroom class, supplementary or additional activities relating to teaching, or extracurricular activities. Each teacher is obliged to realize additional instruction during the time students pass at school for all students who do not succeed in achieving satisfactory results during the regular classes. For such needs, teachers drafts a schedule respecting the time suitable to students for which the additional classes are intended and the schedule is publicly announced. Large portion of the additional classes is realized through free elective classes which serve for broadening the knowledge of mandatory classes. Teachers organize additional mentoring classes for students who prepare themselves for competitions and the schedule is agreed with the students and publicly announced.

Each school adjusts its organization in line with its available capacities. Smaller schools and schools working in a single shift adjust more easily to such organization, while those schools working a double shift and providing teaching in several languages find the best possible solutions for the organization of

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[10]   There is a tendency to have all schools in the country operate in one shift. When this will be achieved, the compulsory time to be spent at school could be extended to accommodate more activities outside of the regular classes.

[11] Schools organize looking after those children one hour before the instruction, and additional accommodation may be organized after the mandatory 5 hours are completed.

work. These schools should apply a flexible approach to organization and should accommodate the time when the classes start to the age of the students, and the shifts are organized on those grounds, and not on any other grounds (such as the language of instruction).

The organization of the teaching in the function of the syllabus imposes a different role of the teachers, which also affects the time they need to spend at the school. The teachers are no longer "lecturers" for the relevant subject, but they are also implementers of elective subjects, which does not necessarily arise from their professional competencies (the diploma acquired), but rather arise from their informally acquired competencies (such as, for instance, cooking, photography, first aid, etc.). Furthermore, the teachers also assume the role of independent implementers or co-implementers of miscellaneous activities of the students, such as extracurricular activities, research and/or interdisciplinary projects, social and humanitarian work by the students, preparing the students for participation in competitions. So as to be able to carry out all of their tasks, the teachers stay in the school for 6 hours per day.

Short-term/long-term effects

- Reduced number of subjects and increased time of study of the students at the school
- The interests of the students are taken into account
- Development of the student's potential is enabled
- The interethnic integration is improved
- The development of the social responsibility of the students is enabled
- The school connects with the community
- Affirmation of the students is enabled
- Affirmation of the school in the community, the country and abroad is enabled

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CURRICULA

The curricula for the compulsory subjects and for the elective language subjects are developed at national level, by expert teams. The curricula for the free optional subjects are developed by an in-house team of teachers, according to the list of optional subjects provided by the school. These curricula are developed under the general guidelines issued by the Bureau for Development of Education, based on the established principles for development of curricula. The guidelines are translated into a Guide on free elective subjects where the curriculum components are described (learning outcomes, content/terms and activities) and the manner of monitoring and evaluation of students' achievements is identified.

Focus on learning outcomes

The curricular are competence-based in accordance with the National Standards. In order to ensure the recognition of the competences covered by a specific curriculum, the introduction of the curriculum lists

each specific knowledge, skill and attitude in the areas of the National Standards that are covered by the specific curriculum. These include competences arising from the area directly linked with the subject, as well as transversal competencies that need to be included in most curricula (such as *Digital literacy* and *Technics, technology and entrepreneurship*) or in all curricula (such as *Personal and social development*). This enables the representation and visibility of the same standard, in particular in the case of transversal competencies, but from various aspects, in one or several curricula, thus providing for the development of such competencies through teaching. The representation of standards from different areas and their interconnection within the frames of the curriculum enables a holistic approach to teaching and comprehensive development of the student.

The learning outcomes are at the core of the curricula. The attainment of the learning outcomes implies acquisition of the competencies defined in the National Standards. Learning outcomes define what the students are expected to have learnt by attending the instruction in a given subject. The learning outcomes are used to derive the standards of assessment, which indicate at least four levels of cognitive achievements of the students in accordance with Bloom's taxonomy (recognition, understanding, use and analysis/evaluation/creation). The assessment standards contribute to objective and transparent assessment by supporting the teachers in determining/defining the assessment criteria.

The curriculum offers guidelines and examples of activities that the teacher could apply to attain the learning outcomes, but, most importantly, it provides freedom to the teacher to use and create diverse activities and teaching materials and realize themes/content that match the students' interests and age. Thus, the teacher can tailor the instruction to groups and individual student so as to enable them attain the level of knowledge/skills defined by the learning outcomes.

The curricula that integrate several scientific disciplines (*Natural sciences*, *History and Society, Technical education and informatics*) are modular, i.e. each scientific discipline is a separate part, or 'module', within the curriculum, with clearly defined learning outcomes, assessment standards and timeframes (number of classes). Also, the curricula of those subjects may have a common module, in which disciplines are united under common learning outcomes. Such curricula represent and connect the different conceptual structures and research methods within a subject, for the purpose of integrating the knowledge and skills in a coherent union. The successful planning and realization of the teaching under such curricula requires cooperation among teachers of various disciplines.

Integration of disciplines and content

The curricula of subjects that include several scientific disciplines, such as *Natural Sciences* and *History and society*, pose a framework for an integrated approach and they allow for multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary teaching. Whenever possible, such approach emphasizes the common concepts, which it presents from the perspective and in the context of each of the disciplines that contribute to its realization. In this manner, students are enabled to connect the teaching materials to the reality more easily, to perceive the meaning of what they are learning and to experience the teaching activities as relevant and applicable.

Whenever possible, the curricula provide multidisciplinary integration which is a connection of different subjects in an attempt to "bring together" i.e. synthetize different perspectives on the subject/phenomenon of study. This integration requires the curricula of different subjects to enable realization of related topics in the course of the same grade. For example, when 'The Diary of Anne Frank' is being analyzed, as an activity envisaged in the curricula for mother language within one topic, the *History and society* curriculum for the same grade is intended to cover the Holocaust. Or, when the *Mathematics* curriculum focuses on graphic presentation of data, the *Natural Sciences* curriculum for the same grade includes an activity (e.g. conducting experiment) that leads to data that should be graphically presented. Multidisciplinary integration is necessary in the case of curricula for most of the subjects from the first period of education (I to III grade).

The transdisciplinary integration (also called horizontal integration) combines interdependent knowledge and skills from more than one subject area to learn a particular central theme or certain issue, providing a holistic approach that emphasizes the links between the processes/phenomena. For example, if the topic of sustainable development is included in the *Natural Sciences* and *History and society* curricula for the same grade, to allow for the knowledge, skills and positions related to that topic to be incorporated in the expected learning outcomes for both subjects. If the entire topic or key matters thereof are additionally included in the language curricula, it can be expected that students' understanding of the matter will be further improved.

The curricula follow the principle of the so-called spiral curricula which is based on repetition of key concepts, but with a gradual complication of the level of knowledge of these concepts and/or the perception of their meaning in different contexts. For example, the term 'culture' may be defined for the first time in the subject *History and society* in VI grade when teaching the topic of Cultures and civilizations, but its meaning may be broaden by relating it to other topics taught in the same grade and in the upper grades (for example, in relation to the creation of nations or multicultural societies), or in other subjects (for example, *Mother tongue*, when discussing the history of language or literary works). Thus, vertical integration is provided for deepening the knowledge in certain field, and also horizontal expansion of the knowledge in the field by connecting the field with concepts from other disciplines.

Curriculum adaptability

By being based on the learning outcomes, the curricula allow for their realization to be adapted to group of students or to individual students who, for certain reasons are or have been disabled to attend classes in full. It means that no adapted/adjusted/shortened curricula are developed, but the Bureau for Development of Education develops didactic guidelines for realization of curricula with different categories of students: students with special educational needs, students who join the education system later, or have the status of refugees. At the same time, each curriculum is the basis for preparing an individual educational plan for each student with a disability included in the educational process.

The orientation of the curricula towards the learning outcomes enables the adjustment of their realization in accordance with the conditions for teaching. In order to enable vertical movement of students in times of emergency caused by epidemics or crisis situation, or students who cannot attend the instruction process regularly, curricula are realized by using innovative approaches (combined

approach, flipped classroom, experiential learning etc.) with guidelines for distance learning[12] through the National distance learning platform.

Short-term/Long-term effects

- Didactic-methodologically modernized teaching provided
- Simplified and more objective assessment provided
- Students are more interested in the content they are learning
- Teaching based on holistic approach
- Conditions created for enhanced professional cooperation between teachers in different subjects and disciplines
- Every student involved in teaching, regardless of/in line with the circumstances.

COACHING AND TEACHING

Planning of the teaching

Teaching planning is prerequisite for quality, timely, successful and efficient preparation, organization and realization of the teaching process. It is based on the curriculum and the work calendar and takes into account the characteristics of the students (their age, prior knowledge, needs, opportunities and abilities) and the conditions and means of work available to the teacher, i.e. the school. When planning, teachers are guided by the competencies in the national standards and the defined learning outcomes indicated in the curriculum for the specific subject. When planning, teachers design the activities they will use to ensure the achievement of the expected learning outcomes, they select and/or create the teaching aid that will be used and determine how to monitor and check the achievement of the students. In this process, they use process development planning.

If a lesson is planned that integrates different subjects for the realization of a certain central topic, as it is done in the so-called classroom teaching, the teacher plans the activities for the realization of the teaching, interdisciplinary and holistic-based, in order to enable the students to perceive the key concepts from several different perspectives. This enables students to more easily relate the teaching content to reality, to see the meaning of what they are learning and to experience the teaching activities as relevant and applicable. If on the other hand, connection should be provided of different subject of the so-called subject teaching in order to ensure multidisciplinary integration in the study of related topics, then the planning of such topics is done jointly by all involved subject teachers, in order to ensure synchronized and meaningful realization of the topics.

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[12] Special guidelines for its adaptation and implementation in this direction are given in the Concept of Distance Learning.

The planning of subjects that unites multiple disciplines (such as *Natural Sciences* and *History and society*) includes two components: planning for the common integrated part and planning for the individual modules. Thus, for example, for the subject *Natural Sciences* the topics/modular units in the area of biology, chemistry, physics and geography are planned, which are structured in separate modules (*Biology Module, Chemistry Module, Physics Module, Geography Module*), but also the so-called *Integrated module* is planned which refers to topics/modular units in the area of biology, chemistry, physics and/or geography that are closely related to each other and elaborate similar matters. Such planning requires constant cooperation and teamwork of teachers from different disciplines who share the responsibility for the realization of the subject teaching.

When it comes to the first period of the primary education (I to III grade), teachers are at liberty to plan and implement the teaching as a whole - without visible division by subject and without defined duration of classes. This is expected to allow the teacher to adjust the teaching to age, needs and pace of progress of his/her students. Nevertheless, the total number of classes anticipated for each subject should be respected at a weekly level.

The process-development approach in planning emphasizes the value of the learning process in acquiring knowledge and instead of encouraging transfer of knowledge that is given in a ready, predetermined form, the focus is on the process of acquiring knowledge and the development of students' ability to learn. The knowledge is not sees as a consequence of the teacher's activity, but as a consequence of the activities implemented by students, therefore, what students do during the class is far more important than what the teacher does. Such approach emphasizes that the success in achieving results is increased if the planning is oriented towards student's activities in the learning process (process component) and enabling student to learn by discovering knowledge, and not by knowledge transfer (development component)

When planning is based on the process development approach, it should be borne in mind that the role of the teacher is not to present the content to be learnt to the students, but to put students in problem solving situations and encourage them to react to problems adequately. It may be accomplished in a learning environment (physical and social) which stimulated students to actively participate in the teaching process - students should become interested first, in order to focus themselves on what is expected of them.

This process development approach in planning ensures that teaching is tailored to the needs and abilities of students. The teacher plans in advance the realization of all topics represented in the curriculum for his subject/module and then plans the realization of each topic separately. However, what is planned is not considered as something fixed, but on the contrary, as flexible - it leaves room to change the order of study of the topics and to redistribute the time that is originally determined for the study of each topic. Flexibility also refers to the specific topics, the number of lessons, the selection of teaching methods and activities and/or the representation of different teaching aids provided by the initial planning. All or part of the above can be changed if majority of students in the class fails to advance in grasping the topic in line with the expectations of the teacher. Also, the pace at which the topic is realized may differ from one class to another, depending on the prior knowledge, interests and/or abilities of the students in the class, as well as some other factors that affect the work in one of the classes.

The adjustment in the process development planning is based on the results of the self-evaluation made by each class teacher at the end of each working day, i.e. each subject teacher at the end of the lesson, in relation to each subject he/she realizes. Self-evaluation is in fact an evaluation of the efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the overall activities during the day/lesson that are undertaken to achieve the expected learning outcomes. The self-reflection allows the teachers to see all the difficulties they faced in the realization of each segment of teaching (learning, coaching and assessment) during the individual lessons of the day and to take them into account in the planning process in order to ensure that possible weaknesses in teaching would be overcome. This implies a change in teaching when it comes to ongoing adoption of specific teaching material and achieving the expected learning outcomes of students, but also incorporating the gained experience in planning for the realization of teaching for future students.

Innovative approaches to teaching

Interactive teaching involves the application of interactive approaches based on learning and teaching methods that ensure active participation of students through continuous interaction of the teacher with students, through cooperation between students, through the use of audio and visual means as intermediaries and through direct engagement of students in the realization of activities during the lessons. In addition to the interactive approach, which should be still consistently applied, the contemporary teaching emphasizes both project-based learning and experiential learning.

Project-based learning is a teaching strategy that allows students to gain deeper knowledge and develop practical skills through the implementation of applicative projects that address challenges and problems of everyday life. Project activities engage students in real problem-solving or in seeking answers to more complex questions. Through them, students acquire in-depth and lasting knowledge of certain teaching materials, develop curiosity, creativity and critical thinking and improve their communication skills and skills for individual and team work.

The work through project activities enables alignment of the teaching material to the needs and interests of the students. For example, when teaching the classification of animals in the *Natural Sciences*, different groups of students can engage in the study and presentation (through models, video presentations, etc.) of the natural habitats of individual animals that are representatives of different classes of animals. It is recommended that project-based learning also be used to link non-related disciplines, such as *Physical and health education* with *Mathematics* (when, for example, physical endurance measures are required to be developed and presented in tabular and graphical form), *Natural sciences* (biology module) with *Music* (when, for example, research is done on how music affects the work of the brain), or *the subject of the language of instruction* with *History and society* (when, for example, it is needed to find out about the role of the language used in social media in the communication between young people).

Project-based learning is a dynamic and flexible teaching strategy that can vary from one group of students to another in each class, not only because of the content it addresses, but also because of the autonomy it gives students in the way they master the content. However, common to all project activities that support such learning is that they promote in-depth learning and greater and better engagement of students due to the following characteristics: work on a challenging issue, longer engagement (from one week to full semester), authenticity, application of knowledge, integrating content from the same or different disciplines, freedom of choice and participation in assessment. It is

recommended that each such project end with a product that, through performances, presentations, posters, brochures, reports, etc. is publicly displayed and available to the school and wider public.

Project activities can be based on research - to encourage students to take on the role of researchers and more or less autonomously (depending on age) to select a problem and to conduct research to be able to more easily and deeply understand the phenomena they learn and relate the content they learn with reality[13]. Involvement in research requires students to formulate a research problem and hypothesis, decide what resources they need, collect data, process data, draw conclusions, and prepare a report. Of course, the degree of involvement of students in the research process depends on the age and abilities of students, their previous experience of participating in researches, and the lack of skills of individual students is expected to be compensated by the teacher as process coordinator. Going through the research process helps students to conceive and use the information they come across in everyday life.

Experiential learning is student-centered and integrates the knowledge, skills and experience that students gain in or out of the classroom. It involves students in the learning process by ensuring that they learn through direct participation in activities that enable them to gain experience in relation to what they are learning or to relate what they are learning to previous experience gained outside the classroom. By engaging in concrete activities and reflection, students use the experience to acquire knowledge and skills and more easily relate what they learn in the classroom to real situations. Activities of this kind include experiments performed in class, making models, artistic performances, computer simulations, visits (real or virtual) to institutions, organizations, workshops, but also analysis of situations in which personal experiences are expressed. An example of an activity that provides experiential learning is a visit to a zoo or animal farm that allows, by observing animals and interacting with the environment, to learn about them, which would be much more effective than learning about animals only from a book.

Digital teaching

The use of information and computer technology in education modernizes teaching - strengthens competencies for lifelong learning, expands the range of teaching resources, increases the availability of teaching aids, brings learning and teaching strategies closer to the needs and interests of students and facilitates the evaluation for the teachers. Adequate infrastructure of the school and classrooms is necessary for the realization of such teaching: internet, equipment with computers and smart boards, availability of digital teaching materials and tools and other relevant electronic means for teaching and learning. The same infrastructure allows the use of electronic tools for monitoring and assessing students (such as an electronic portfolio).

The introduction of digital tools that follow best practices (such as interactivity, gamification, personalization) facilitates teaching and learning because it is based on innovative methods that are closer to the interests of students and the demands of modern living. In addition, teachers use electronic content (such as text presentations, audio and video presentations, and other simple e-content) that they create themselves.

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[13] Within this approach, the activity "Time for ingenious ideas" can be realized, through which students are encouraged to spend one hour a week in research work of their own choice. This enables autonomous research-based learning - giving students the freedom to explore their own ideas and focus on something that really interests them.

Internet platforms and portals in education (such as the national platform introduced in 2020) enable the use of electronic content and digital tools to enrich classroom teaching, but also to conduct distance learning. Such platforms provide access to teaching and contact with teachers for students when they are not able to attend school for a long time due to illness or other reasons. In parallel, such platforms enable teaching to be performed during major natural disasters, epidemics, pandemics and in conditions when it is not possible to conduct teaching in school.[14] Open educational resources whose use requires copyrights are particularly useful for the realization of the classroom and/or distance learning.

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[14] Application of the National Platform for Education for such purpose is described in details in the *Concept not of the distance learning*.

Adapting the teaching

The teaching is planned according to the needs and possibilities of the pupils. This means that the teacher is able to identify the prior knowledge and abilities of the pupils and accordingly plan an individualized approach and differentiated teaching. When planning, he/she adjusts the scope and depth of the content, the pace of work and the learning outcomes to be achieved by pupils with different possibilities and abilities.

To encourage, motivate and support pupils with special educational needs, teachers adapt learning and teaching by selecting/creating and assigning specific tasks, applying appropriate teaching methods, introducing adapted activities and, if necessary, using supplementary teaching aids. Also, teachers reduce the educational content to a reasonable level, use appropriate teaching approaches and strategies and adjust the overall organization of the pedagogical and educational process, in order to provide quality education for pupils with special educational needs. Guidelines for inclusion, development and education of all groups of pupils with special educational needs are given in the Concept for Inclusive Education.

On the other hand, teachers adapt the teaching to the pupils who progress faster (gifted and talented students), based on their individual potentials for high achievement in one or more areas. To maintain their interest and commitment to learning during the lessons, teachers individualize the teaching, giving them more complex tasks, including in more serious projects and applying other measures and activities in working with them. The school provides mentoring support to gifted and talented pupils through cooperation with professionals and institutions.

Short-term/Long-term effects

- Teacher's autonomy in teaching planning is increased
- Pupils are active participants in teaching and their interaction with teachers is improved
- Teaching is more interesting and pupils are more motivated to learn
- Pupils' achievements are improved
- Teachers are given more freedom to use different teaching method and techniques
- Teaching is harmonized with the individual needs and possibilities of pupils
- Learning based on experience (through projects, research, etc.) is allowed
- Combined and distance learning is allowed

TEACHING AIDS

Teaching aids are necessary to provide quality education that is based on interactive teaching and experiential learning and takes into account the needs of pupils in modern conditions. Therefore, teachers and pupils in primary education are provided with a variety of teaching aids in the form of textbooks, teaching materials and teaching tools/aids and are able to choose and create additional teaching materials that bring the teaching closer to their pupils. This enables teachers to adapt their

teaching to achieve the expected learning outcomes established by the curriculum, keeping in mind the developmental characteristics of pupils, their capabilities, interests and learning styles. A variety of teaching aids are also available to all pupils to facilitate their learning and enable them to learn through observation, research and problem solving. The diversity of available teaching aids contributes to creating a learning environment that offers a variety of experiences and gaining experiences that, in addition to the cognitive development of pupils, also support their social and emotional development.

Textbooks and teaching materials

All compulsory subjects and all optional subjects in the field of languages are covered with quality textbooks that are fully harmonized with the curriculum, as well as with the needs and interests of pupils. As regards the subjects *Macedonian/Albanian/Turkish/Serbian/Bosniak language, Mathematics, Natural sciences, Society, History and Society, English language* and all other language-related subjects (*Macedonian language for communities, Language of the community, and Language and Culture od Roma/Vlachs/Bosniaks/Serbs/Turks*) textbooks are being developed, and they are mandatorily in hard copy for students from I to III grade, and they can be both hard copy or electronic form for students from IV to IX grade.

The tendency is for the classic forms of textbooks (available in printed or electronic form) to be gradually replaced by digital versions that make it easier for teachers to realize the teaching, and for the pupils to achieve the expected learning outcomes. Digital textbooks integrate ICT into teaching and thus modernize teaching. In doing so, they not only develop pupils' IT competencies, but also encourage their creativity and learning autonomy. Digital textbooks can include all forms of auditory and visual materials, including written and orally expressed text, music, animations, photographs and videos, and can link different presentations e.g. picture with sound, oral expressions with written text, video material with text for translation, etc. The ability to engage pupils in a variety of learning activities makes digital textbooks interactive, engaging and stimulating learning aids. Their interactivity can be enhanced by being "programmed" to give feedback on the accuracy of the answers to questions and tasks they ask pupils and to guide pupils to additional activities that are tailored to their progress in learning and the level of achievement of the expected results. This makes digital textbooks adaptable for use by pupils with disabilities. Additionally, in addition to being used in the classroom, in physical contact with pupils, digital textbooks can be a powerful tool to support distance learning (in distance learning).

No textbooks are prepared for the mandatory subjects *Music, Arts, Physical and health education, and Technical education and informatics*, but teachers and pupils use teaching materials to achieve the results envisaged by the curricula. Teaching materials are also used for the free optional subjects, according to the topics they cover and the needs of the pupils. When it comes to subjects for which there are textbooks, the use of textbooks (particularly when textbooks are in printed and electronic form) is necessarily accompanied by teaching materials.

The teaching materials serve to facilitate the teaching and learning of specific content of the curriculum. They can have a textual form and be used as resources (sources of knowledge) or as material for determining and self-checking the level of acquired knowledge. They may have a visual, audio, audiovisual form (for example, educational and documentary television or Internet shows, recorded music, audio recordings with different sounds, etc.) and/or more or less follow the approach that is

characteristic of digital textbooks. Some of the teaching materials are prepared by expert teams (in accordance with the Concept note on drafting and evaluation methodology), approved by the Ministry of Education and Science and their availability is provided in all languages of instruction. In addition, teachers have the freedom in their classroom to use teaching materials that they have chosen and adapted (regardless of those officially offered), or have created them independently for the needs of effective teaching with their pupils. Such materials are shared among teachers in teaching staffs groups, and are shared with colleagues from all schools through national and other platforms.

A special type of teaching materials is the manuals intended for teachers. The manuals contain guidelines for the use of textbooks and/or guidelines for the implementation of individual curricula (such as the *Life Skills Education* manuals). They may also include teaching materials for working with pupils (for example, worksheets). They are intended to support teachers in their day-to-day work with pupils and to contribute to the strengthening of their competencies for teaching in individual subjects. The manuals can be created by expert teams, but also by the teachers themselves. More experienced and creative teachers are expected to contribute to the creation of the manuals by sharing the activities they have undertaken for the successful implementation of their own classes in certain subjects, which is especially important when it comes to free optional subjects. The manuals are available through electronic platforms and are open to suggestions for supplementation by teachers.

Auxiliary teaching aids

The visible aids and teaching aids serve to increase the activity and motivation of the pupils, to keep the focus of the teaching and to contribute to the development of the functional abilities of the pupils. For this purpose, the classrooms in the schools are equipped with computers, printer, projector, and other equipment that allows the use of digital textbooks, educational software and other digital and electronic materials available in visual, audio, audiovisual and/or textual form. In addition, schools provide access to apparatus and instruments intended for conducting experiments and supporting other research teaching activities, as well as for the realization of free optional subjects (e.g., chemical experiments laboratory, telescope, cooking equipment). For the smooth running of the classes, the teachers have at their disposal various visual aids that bring the teaching closer to the pupils, manipulatives that facilitate the learning and consumables (sketching pads, papers, play-dough, etc.) that enable the realization of the teaching. The norms and standards for space, equipment and teaching aids for primary school determine in more detail what is necessary for efficient and effective realization of the teaching and achieving the learning results from all curricula.

Short-term/Long-term effects

- Teachers have clear guidelines for realization of the teaching.
- Various teaching resources and other teaching aids are provided for quality realization of teaching.
- Teacher's autonomy in the use of teaching materials is increased.
- The possibility for affirmation of teachers and for career development is increased.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment as a component of teaching

Assessment is an important component of the teaching process – its main purpose is to support pupils' learning and contribute to achieving the expected results. What and how pupils will learn largely depends on what and how teachers assess. At the same time, the teaching itself, apart from the expected learning outcomes prescribed by the curricula, largely depends on how pupils progress in learning, which is determined by the achievements determined by the assessment. It makes assessment an integral part of all the kind of planning that both schools and teachers do.

The development and annual planning of the schools indicates the basic principles, policies and practices of assessment, such as for e.g. which methods will be used, how to ensure objectivity in assessment and consistency of the criteria from one teacher to another, how they will inform pupils and parents/guardians, how to support pupils who have difficulty in achieving the expected results, how to analyze and use the results obtained from the assessment conducted by teachers, but also from the assessment obtained by external testing

When planning teaching, each teacher includes elements of assessment: from monitoring the progress of each pupil by using different methods of formative assessment with or without the involvement of pupils, to determine the methods and instruments for summative assessment. He/she then uses the results of the assessment he/she receives during and after the teaching to evaluate his/her own teaching and incorporates the knowledge that will be obtained later on in the next teaching planning.

Assessment is aimed at achieving and checking the degree of achievement of the prescribed assessment standards contained in the curricula. In order for pupils to show what and how much they have achieved, the assessment uses a wide range of procedures and methods (such as essay assignments, tests, quizzes, problem assignments, projects), and pupils are given the opportunity to present their achievements through written products, practical products, oral presentations, performances, etc. Care is taken to ensure that the method of verification is as compliant as possible with the appropriate assessment standard and at the same time that the achievement of the standard is assessed using different methods. This ensures greater certainty in concluding whether and to what extent a standard has been achieved.

Schools have a clearly established system for informing pupils and parents about the methods used in assessment, the standards and criteria for assessment, the principles of respect for the privacy and dignity of pupils and parents, as well as the willingness to provide additional information.

Formative and summative assessment

To enable each individual pupil to achieve the expected results, teachers apply formative assessment, also known as learning assessment. It requires the teacher to monitor the learning and progress of each pupil in all teaching situations, to give timely feedback on learning and achievement, to encourage self-reflection and self-assessment, to help him/her set goals for learning and to give him directions how to achieve them. It helps the pupil to learn how to learn: to have a clear understanding of what he/she needs to learn, to set his/her own learning goals, to understand what he/she needs to do to achieve the

goals (how to use the learning materials, how to apply the information, analyze, synthesize and evaluate and how to use practical skills), to asses to what extent he/she achieved the goals, to understand why he/she was successful in one thing, and not in another, to improve his/her own learning based on that self-reflection. In this way pupils have control over learning, which makes them more responsible for their own achievements and they gain greater self-confidence and belief that they can learn and be successful.

Keeping track of and documenting pupils' progress and achievement allows teachers to reflect on their own work, evaluating the effectiveness of individual teaching approaches in terms of their contribution to achieving the set learning objectives. Teachers use such knowledge to adapt their teaching to the needs of pupils and thus motivate them to learn and ultimately, to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes. Documenting pupils' progress and achievement allows teachers to involve parents/guardians in a more objective analysis of their children's learning achievements and next steps.

Summative assessment is related to certain periods in the school year (end of a particular topic, quarter, semester and end of the school year) and aims to indicate how much the pupil managed to learn, i.e. how much he/she achieved the expected results for a specific topic or period or to what extent he/she has achieved the assessment standards set for the end of the year. All information about the achievements is given in the form of a short description (in descriptive grades) or in the form of a number (in numerical grades) or as a category *Exemplary knowledge, Satisfactory* or *Not satisfactory knowledge* (for free elective subjects)[15]. The grades are derived from the results obtained using predetermined procedures and instruments, based on clear evaluation criteria.

A special challenge is the summative assessment in the subjects in which several scientific disciplines are integrated (such as *Natural Sciences* and *History and society*). When several teachers carry them out, they all together plan the teaching process, and agree on the manner of the summative tests (tests, essay assignments, oral presentations) and problem solving tasks which require linking knowledge from several modules. Each teacher gives a summative assessment of the level of achievement of a certain assessment standard related to their module. Final summative grades for each module are entered into the addendum to the certificate, while a joint grade calculated by the teachers teaching the respective subject will be entered into the certificate for completed grade.

The grade is a product of fair and transparent assessment – pupils are assessed for the knowledge and skills they have been taught and know how they are expected to present that knowledge and skills. Since the assessment standards given in the curriculum mainly refer to the use of higher cognitive processes and application skills, teaching uses methods that enable the acquisition of such knowledge (such as: solving problem situations or open tasks, working on projects, learning with the help of ICT tools). The same methods, in combination with the methods previously used for formative assessment (such as different types of test questions/tasks, or projects) are used in summative assessment. Knowing the assessment methods and criteria makes summative assessment less stressful for pupils and allows them to present their highest achievement.

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[15] The summative assessment for free elective subjects is calculated based on: (a) regular attendance, (b) engagement and (c) progress in acquiring knowledge, skills and values/attitudes set by the curricula. More detailed information can be found in the Guide on free elective subjects.

Assessment in distance learning using information technology is a special challenge. In formative assessment due to the limited possibilities for direct observation of the work and giving immediate feedback the focus shifts to formative assessment of written products, using different types of test tasks, essay assignments, while summative assessment shifts the focus to using more complex tasks, to limit response time and to undertake other procedures to reduce the possibility of falsification of responses. Adapting formative and summative assessment to distance learning conditions is described in detail in the Concept for Distance Learning.

Setting assessment criteria

It is very important that the assessment, especially the summative one, is objective and fair and that the assessment provides real information about the pupils' achievements in the specific subject. For that purpose, the assessment/evaluation of the achievements is done in relation to the assessment standards, using methods that as much as possible enable the pupils to show how much they have learned, i.e. what they have really achieved. Objectivity is ensured by establishing clear evaluation criteria for each subject, but also for each specific task. Establishing clear assessment criteria that are publicly available also ensures the transparency of the assessment. When the assessment grade is accompanied by an appropriate explanation and the pupil's progress is documented through his/her papers, the possibility of unprincipled influences on the grade is reduced and consequently, the objectivity of the grade itself is increased.

Assessment criteria for each subject are necessary when grading numerically. These criteria are formulated in the form of brief descriptions of the quality and quantity of learning outcomes defined by a particular curriculum, often followed by examples of solved tasks. They are prepared at the state level or at the school level (teaching staff group), and the levels of achievement that are set on the state tests, as well as the tasks that are used on the state and international tests help in their preparation.

Additionally, clear and well-known assessment criteria are established for each specific task, for each test (objective or essay) and for each answer that is graded. In addition, the test assignment administered by the State Examination Center can be of great help to the teachers who define the criteria (independently or within the teaching staff groups), especially because all the tasks included in it are accompanied by information about their complexity.

The key achievements of the assessment standards are used as criteria in descriptive assessment, whereby the attitude towards work and learning is taken into account as a separate element of the descriptive grade. Although not included in the numerical grade, the attitude towards work and learning is included as part of information about pupil behavior.

Summative grades, especially numerical grades, make it easy to present learning outcomes at the class, school, state level and are used for different types of analyses that lay the foundations for educational policy-making (such as subject success analyses, by age, by language of instruction and in relation to other socio-demographic characteristics). This is an additional reason why it is very important for the grades to be objective, i.e. to be based on assessment criteria in order to be able to express the real achievement of the pupils.

Short-term/Long-term effects

- The assessment is more transparent, more reliable and more objective.
- The teaching is of better quality and the pupils' achievements are improved.
- For pupils, the assessment is less stressful.

PROVIDING QUALITY

A prerequisite for quality education is a coherent educational system, with provided conditions for successful conduct of all processes in education. In order to achieve that, it is necessary to invest in the development of the system, as well as to make decisions based on evidence collected by continuously monitoring the achievements of pupils at the system level, but also at the school level.

National and international testing

Regular, objective and relevant information on pupil achievement across the country is primarily provided through national testing. According to the *Concept note for National Testing*, it is administered at the end of the third, fifth and ninth grade, assessing language and math literacy. If necessary, achievements in other areas are identified to provide a more accurate and broader picture and to establish a sound basis by which pupils' future progress can be monitored.

Participation in international tests provides the country with insight into the achievements of our pupils compared to internationally defined levels of achievement. Our country regularly participates in the measurements of mathematical literacy and literacy in natural sciences (TIMSS), in the measurements of comprehension reading (PIRLS) and in the tests that measure the ability of pupils at the age of 15 to use the knowledge and skills of reading, mathematics and natural sciences in real life situations (PISA). The country can be involved in other, already established, international measurements, such as those in the field of civic education (CIVED), or information literacy (ICILS).

National and international tests also provide information on various background factors of demographic nature (such as age, ethnicity, language of instruction), socioeconomic nature (such as family income, parental education), location of the school (by regions, rural/urban area) and pedagogical and psychological nature (such as school equipment, teaching and learning strategies, pupils' attitudes towards school and learning), and their relation to pupils' achievements. Such information serves to assess the effectiveness of the undertaken investments, the use of resources, the appropriateness of the applied learning and teaching strategies, etc. The results of such analyzes are used in decision-making to improve the quality of education and to implement activities aimed at using resources and teaching approaches for which there is evidence that they are more effective when it comes to pupil achievement. The effectiveness of the undertaken activities is then shown in the following cycles of national and international tests.

The high standards set by international and national testing in terms of the instruments and procedures used in their implementation are a good model for all schools that want to improve their own practice. Using the free test assignments available in the website of the State Examinations Centre (SEC), as well

as the descriptions of the achievement levels covered by those assignments, allows schools to improve the quality of their own pupils' assessment.

The results of the national and international tests are made available to the participating schools so that they can compare the achievements at the school level with the achievements at the national and/or international level and gain additional knowledge about the quality and effectiveness of their own work. Based on the analyzes made, schools can take action to improve their own practice (such as making changes in the organization of work, use of resources, methods and strategies of learning and teaching). In this way, the schools participating in the national and international testing are given the opportunity to improve teaching and improve pupils' achievement.

Evaluation of schools

The integral evaluation of schools is carried out by the State Education Inspectorate, through the application of standardized procedures that provide data on the quality of school work in key areas: *Curricula and syllabi, Pupil Achievement, Learning and Teaching, Pupil Support, School Climate and School Relationships, Resources and Management, Governing and Policy Making.* Schools receive a detailed report of the findings of the conducted evaluation with recommendations included. In addition, the SEI prepares annual reports on the quality of work in education and upbringing and/or on certain aspects thereof that were of particular interest in the reporting period. The state uses the knowledge from the integral evaluation for planning the investments in the schools, for planning the staff, for improving the management, for introducing innovations in education. The schools perform a detailed analysis of the integral evaluation reports which helps them in the development planning and in the improvement of the work and the achievements.

Self-evaluation is a key part of the quality monitoring system at the individual school level. Schools conduct it periodically and systematically in order to obtain information from all stakeholders (pupils, teachers, parents, local community) on various aspects of school work. The self-evaluation areas are aligned with the integral evaluation areas. The results of the self-evaluation serve the schools as a basis for development planning, which incorporates the findings of the integrated evaluation, and takes into account the results of the school's participation in national and international tests, as well as data from advisory support that schools receive from the Bureau for Development of Education.

Short-term/Long-term effects

- Pupils' achievement in national tests is improved from cycle to cycle
- Pupils' achievement in international measurements has improved
- State education policies are evidence-based
- School development plans are based on relevant information regarding their work

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TEACHING STAFF, PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATES AND PRINCIPALS

Professional competencies

The quality of the realization of the educational process in the schools primarily depends on the competencies of the entire teaching staff in the school, including the professional associates and the principal. Their core professional competencies include the knowledge, abilities and skills they need to succeed in key areas of their work in the school. Knowledge refers to the familiarity with and understanding of education in general, as well as familiarity with and understanding of specific areas. Abilities and skills relate to the application of that knowledge in relevant areas of work.

Most of the professional competencies are expected to be acquired by teachers in the initial education[16] and to be further developed in the first years of their work in a school. Competent teachers and professional associates are also expected to be guided in their work by a system of values characterized by the belief that every pupil can learn and develop, and the teacher has a responsibility to enable this, that primary education should enable the pupil for lifelong learning, that cooperation with pupils and colleagues is a prerequisite for quality teaching, that in the school and outside it they must strive to respect human rights and the rights of the child and to actively respect diversity on all grounds in all spheres of social life. They have professional integrity, are committed to their profession and the school in which they work, and are aware at all times that they represent models of identification for pupils.

The organization of work, the motivation of teachers, the general climate in the school and the reputation that the school enjoys in the environment largely depend on the school principal. For successful performance of that role, future principals are prepared through specific training and taking an exam for principals which proves that they possess the necessary professional competencies to successfully perform their function in the school. The professional competences of the director are focused on their aptitude to solving problems in a manner which ensures a pleasant studying and working (where everyone feels as being accepted), as well as the aptitude to ensure partnership with the local community, and particularly the private sector (in order to ensure additional funds for improvement of the school's operations. In manifesting their competencies in practice, the principal should be characterized by initiative, professionalism, and commitment to school development, responsibility and work ethic. At the same time, he/she should be guided by a system of professional values which is characterized by the belief that the focus of the educational process is the pupils, due to which the work of the school should be organized in their best interest, as well as that cooperation, mutual trust and respect among all direct and indirect participants (pupils, teachers, professional associates, parents, local community) are crucial for efficient and effective implementation of the educational process in the school.

Continuous professional development

Continuous professional development is both a right and an obligation of everyone in the education system and is aimed at acquiring and transferring new knowledge about the practical aspect of work, knowledge of the details of the profession and realization of quality standards of the educational process in accordance with European trends. Continuous professional development is of particular importance if we take into account that the competencies of all profiles involved in the educational

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[16] The Concept note implies changes in the study programs of faculties for initial education of teachers, and for homeroom and specialized subject teaching.

process are not static, but that they change according to the new scientific knowledge in the field of education and the needs for development and modernization of education.

Each individual teacher can initiate their own professional development based on personal needs for professional development in areas in which they want to improve themselves. Professional development may arise from the needs of the school identified during the self-assessment or integral evaluation of the school and/or under the influence of counselors responsible for supporting teachers and teaching. The professional development of teachers can be imposed by educational policy makers and national educational institutions, in order to enable efficient and quality implementation of certain reform efforts or innovative practices, or simply to ensure quality and efficiency in accordance with the standards for the process and structure of the education system.

Teachers can be professionally trained on their own, but they can also develop professionally through participation in various forms of cooperation with colleagues within their school and/or within inter-school cooperation (at both national and international level). However, when the system imposes the professional development of teachers, then accredited trainings are organized, led by professional teams, according to a predetermined strategy. In modern conditions, internet platforms are used to organize webinars for acquiring new knowledge and conducting distance training.

A team is formed in the schools that takes care of the professional development of all employees, of harmonizing the different needs and of using all external and internal resources for professional development.

Cooperation between teachers

Caring for the quality of the school's work is the responsibility of all employees and all share a common vision and cooperate in achieving it. Given that quality and motivated staff is of key importance, the school supports, organizes and/or participates in various forms of cooperation and learning within the school, within the municipality and/or beyond.

School staff groups and other professional learning communities in the school enable professional collaboration and sharing of teachers' knowledge and experiences in a way that does not have to be very formal. School staff group usually consist of teachers from the same subject or a related group of disciplines and usually work to promote teaching (and extracurricular activities) related to those subjects/disciplines. Learning professional communities can also be formed to improve work in other wider areas and then include professional associates, tutors-volunteers, educational mediators, parents/guardians and other stakeholders. Each such community has a responsible coordinator and regular weekly meetings, and more often as needed. School staff/professional learning communities are forum for peer learning, development of locally relevant practices and joint handling of teaching challenges. Joint work of teachers and their mutual support create a sense of togetherness and contribute to improvement of the teaching process.

Teachers can virtually connect and collaborate with their peers through online platforms for sharing experiences and materials. Such platforms provide easy access to a large number of users and facilitate the exchange of different types of materials (lesson recordings, video presentations, lesson planning, pupils' work materials, assessment instruments, professional teaching materials for teachers, etc.) and the exchange of opinions and experiences (through comments, blogs). This is useful not only for teachers who have less experience, because it helps them to improve the quality of teaching, but also

for the more experienced ones, allowing them to enrich their own repertoire of teaching aids and methods.

Career development of teachers and professional associates

The career development of teachers and professional associates is based on professional standards that are achieved and proven through continuous professional development (by gaining additional academic title or attending various professional trainings), through high quality work in all areas of the workplace, by helping the professional development of colleagues in the school, the wider community and the state and through the preparation (or participation in preparation) of teaching materials and scientific-professional contributions that contribute to the development of education (such as textbooks and other teaching materials, manuals, professional and scientific papers).

The system enables teachers and professional associates to advance their careers on two levels: mentor and advisor. In order to reach a certain level, the teachers, i.e. the professional associates should meet appropriate professional standards that include knowledge, abilities and skills from certain areas, determined in the bylaws that regulate the advancement in titles.

Short-term/Long-term effects

- The competencies of the teachers for realization of the teaching and of the professional associates for support of the educational process is increased
- The quality of teaching is improved
- Professional cooperation between teachers is strengthened
- Professional support of teachers is provided
- The professional development of teachers is in line with their needs and the needs of the education system
- Teachers and professional associates are more motivated

SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

Building a school culture that is encouraging for the learning and development of every pupil is of great importance for providing quality education. Schools are fully aware that children learn not only from classroom instruction, but also from "hidden" instruction in the school environment, starting with the way the school is run, through the relationships between teachers and between teachers and pupils, attitude towards parents, rules, ceremonies and traditions in the school, the appearance and maintenance of the school building, the school yard and the classrooms, all the way to the behavior of the older pupils and teachers who are perceived as a model of behavior. That is why schools make an effort what children learn in class to be confirmed by what they see and experience in the whole school environment so that the messages from the classes and teaching can be reinforced and have a meaning factor that influences the attitudes of pupils and their way of life.

The school contributes to providing a stimulating climate by sharing and supporting its vision for the goals of education, the role of the school in achieving those goals, and the common values that the school seeks to promote in its work. The school is also engaged in the continuous improvement of physical conditions, the supply of resources, the improvement of security and the creation of an overall atmosphere free from discrimination and violence.

The school policy that is committed to creating and nurturing an atmosphere of good relations between all stakeholders contributes to building a constructive climate in the school. Respect for all pupils, teachers, professional associates and other employees in the school is ensured through democratic leadership by the principal which involves the practice of transparent adoption of rules of conduct in the school (code of ethics), timely and regular flow of all relevant information and active participation of teachers and pupils (and their parents/ guardians) in school-level decision-making. The management encourages and enables a high degree of cooperation between teachers through professional staff groups and promotes active participation of teachers in the school's decision-making bodies. At the same time, the management, teachers and professional associates are actively engaged in supporting the formation of student bodies in a way that guarantees democratic participation of pupils in the protection of their rights and freedoms, in making decisions on issues of their immediate interest and in resolving the problems that affect themselves.

Teaching that is flexible, interactive, adapted to the needs and interests of pupils and stimulating for active participation of pupils also contributes to a constructive climate in the school. During the realization of the teaching, the teachers are not positioned as inviolable authorities, in the role of transmitters of knowledge, but they do everything for the pupils to experience them as partners and facilitators of the learning process. In order to achieve that goal, teachers are enabled, through continuous training and professional development, to acquire competencies for successful realization of such a role. In addition, special attention is paid to the career development of teachers, their rewarding on various grounds, as well as the support and care for their social status that they receive from the management and educational institutions in the country.

The cooperation with the parents/guardians, which is achieved through their active involvement in the life and work of the school, contributes to the constructive climate in the school, not only as representatives in the Parents' Council or the School Board, but also as volunteers in various events in the school, in the role of lecturers on topics they are experts in, or participants in joint actions and other events, together with their children.

The schools also cooperate with the local community, which provides support for regular and additional school and extracurricular activities. In principle, this cooperation is two-way − the local community invests in the school and provides space for its own promotion, and the school reciprocates by participating in humanitarian, environmental and other actions in which, in addition to teachers, pupils are also involved. In addition, schools have the opportunity to connect with other schools in their own municipality, in the country and abroad, in order to exchange experiences and draw ideas for improving the overall working conditions. Through such cooperation, schools enrich the quality of their own development processes, provide additional support for teachers and pupils and promote their achievements outside the school itself.

Short-term/Long-term effects

- The relations between all participants in the educational process are good and the teachers and pupils feel more relaxed
- Teachers and pupils identify with the school
- A democratic climate is created in the school
- Parents and the community support the school
- The school is affirmed in the community

PRIMARY EDUCATION CURRICULUM

	GRADE																	
	I		II		III		IV		V		VI		VII		VIII		IX	
	W[i]	A	W	A	W	A	W	A	W	A	W	A	W	A	W	A	W	A
Mandatory subjects																		
Macedonian/Albanian/Turkish/Serbian/Bosnian language	5	180	5	180	5	180	5	180	5	180	4	144	4	144	4	144	4	144
Macedonian for students with a different language of instruction							2	72	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	72
Mathematics	5	180	5	180	5	180	5	180	5	180	5	180	4	144	4	144	4	144
English language	2	72	2	72	2	72	3	108	3	108	3	108	3	108	3	108	3	108
Natural sciences	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	72	3	108	5	180	5	180	5	180
Society	1	36	1	36	1	36												
History and society							2	72	2	72	3	108	4	144	4	144	4	144
Technical education and informatics							1	36	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	72
Music	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36
Arts	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36
Physical and health education	3	108	3	108	3	108	3	108	3	108	3	108	3	108	3	108	3	108
Total number of classes for mandatory subjects	**20**		**20**		**20**		**23 (25)**		**24 (26)**		**25 (27)**		**27 (29)**		**27 (29)**		**27 (29)**	
Elective subjects																		
Second Foreign Language	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	72
Free Elective subjects[ii]	2		2	72	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	72
Language of the community[iii]							(2)	(72)	(2)	(72)	(2)	(72)	(2)	(72)	(2)	(72)	(2)	(72)
Albanian Language[iv]											(2)	(72)	(2)	(72)	(2)	(72)	(2)	(72)
Language and culture of Roma, Language and culture of Vlachs, Language and culture of Bosniaks, Language and culture of Turks, and Language and culture of Serbs[v]					(1)	(36)	(2)	(72)	(2)	(72)	(2)	(72)	(2)	(72)	(2)	(72)	(2)	(72)

Total number of classes (mandatory and elective subjects)	**22**		**22**		**22 (23)**		**25 (27)**		**26 (28)**		**29 (31)**		**31 (33)**		**31 (33)**		**31 (33)**	
Total number of subjects	**9**		**9**		**9 (10)**		**9 (10)**		**9 (10)**		**11 (12)**		**11 (12)**		**11 (12)**		**11 (12)**	
Other activities																		
Societal and humanitarian activities[vi]													20 hours		20 hours		20 hours	
Homeroom class[vii]	-	-	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36
Extracurricular activities																		

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[i] W marks the weekly number of classes, and A marks the annual number of classes

[ii] Student selects two free elective subjects in the course of one school year, one in the first term, and the other in the second term from the list of free elective subjects defined by the school. Free elective activities from I to III grade are realized as free activities.

[iii] The subject offers study of the second official language in the municipality where the school is located. Students with a different language of instruction may select it as additional subject.

[iv] Subject Albanian Language may be studied as additional elective subject.

[v] Students of Vlach, Roma, Bosniak, Serbian and Turkish community are offered an opportunity to study their language and culture as an elective subject, upon given consent by parents. Students who select one of those subjects will study it continuously, as additional subject.

[vi] Student realizes 20 hours of societal and humanitarian work in the course of the school year. If the student fails to do it by participating in group activities (as actions within extracurricular activities), they may do it through individual activities.

[vii] The time of the homeroom class may vary from one to another class, and its duration may also vary, depending on the needs of the class.