Kosovo

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Introduction

Overview of Education System

Kosovo's Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) has the primary responsibility for planning the preuniversity education system, setting standards, and ensuring the quality of preuniversity education.[1] MESTI promotes a nondiscriminatory education system with lifelong learning opportunities and encourages the inclusion of special needs students and the protection of vulnerable groups within the education system. MESTI is responsible for drafting policies and implementing legislation for education development, including the development of higher education and science in Kosovo. It determines the outcomes of the various levels of preuniversity education and provides qualifications to those who have completed preuniversity programs. It is also responsible for the development of the Kosovo curriculum framework, core curricula, and subject programs.[2] It approves school textbooks and other teaching resources to ensure materials used in publicly funded education and training institutions meet appropriate education and quality standards. In addition, MESTI defines the criteria for all teachers and manages a licensing and certification system.

MESTI is also responsible for planning and managing policies, as well as monitoring the education system, where decision-making based on data is essential. MESTI oversees several agencies and supporting authorities, including the Division for Quality Assurance, Standards, Assessment and Licensing (DQASAL); Education Management Information Systems (EMIS); the Education Inspectorate (EI); the Kosovo Pedagogical Institute (KPI); the Division for Curriculum and Teacher Support; the National Qualifications Authority (NQA); and the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVETAE). These organizations continue to have institutional roles based on their fields of action to prepare analysis, research, and reports related to system evaluation. Primary legislation (laws) and secondary legislation (regulations and sublegal acts) regulate the competencies of these agencies to assess the system and to use the assessment results. MESTI is obliged to improve the quality, importance, and efficiency of education at all levels and to facilitate the qualitative development and improvement of the education system through quality assurance mechanisms, such as the EI.[3,4,5]

Municipalities enroll and accept students. They monitor and report student progress to parents and other authorities. They oversee and inspect the education process in accordance

with instructions from MESTI. Municipalities are also responsible for hiring teachers and other school staff in accordance with the legal recruitment, selection, and employment procedures of public employees and for selecting directors.

In accordance with the guidelines, principles, and standards of MESTI, municipalities also take care of the training of educators and other professional staff. They pay management and other staff.

Other responsibilities of municipalities that are organized and supervised by the respective municipal directorate of education (MED) include supporting schools and teachers in implementing curricular reform and implementing school autonomy according to legal regulations.[6]

The Kosovo education system, which is in line with the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), consists of preschool education, primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education, and tertiary education:

- Preschool education (ISCED 0) is for children from birth to age 5.
- Primary education (ISCED 1) lasts 5 years from Grade 1 to Grade 5 (ages 6 to 10).
- Lower secondary education (ISCED 2) lasts 4 years from Grade 6 to Grade 9 (ages 11 to 14).
- Upper secondary education (ISCED 3) students can attend general secondary education (gymnasium) or vocational education for 3 years from Grades 10 to 12.
- After completing secondary education, students can attend tertiary education or enter the labor market.

In Kosovo, primary education and lower secondary education are mandatory. An external assessment is conducted at the end of primary education, at the end of lower secondary education, and at the end of upper secondary education. At the end of gymnasium, students take the Matura exam. Students of vocational education who have passed the final exam may also take the Matura exam. Throughout the formal three-level education phase, students are being continually prepared for lifelong learning, as well as for the labor market.

Exhibit 1 presents the overall structure of the education system in Kosovo, and Exhibit 2 presents the levels of education.

Exhibit 1: Overall Structure of the Education System

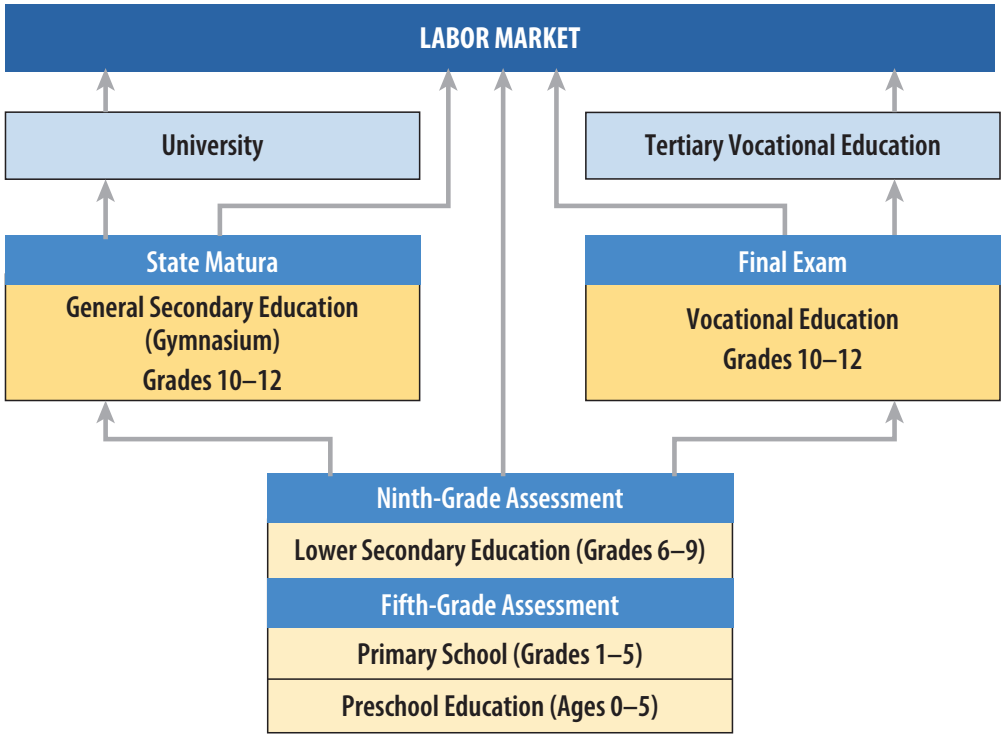

Exhibit 2: Levels of Education in Kosovo

ISCED Level		Formal Level of Education		Ages
0		preschool education		birth–5
		preparatory grade		5–6
1		primary education Grades 1–5		6–10
2		lower secondary education Grades 6–9 preparatory class		11–14
3	Level 3 National Qualifications Framework	upper secondary education gymnasium (Grades 10–12) vocational education (Grades 10–12)	Matura	15–17
	Level 4 National Qualifications Framework	upper secondary education vocational education (Grades 10–11)		15–16

Exhibit 2: Levels of Education in Kosovo (Continued)

ISCED Level		Formal Level of Education	Ages
4	Level 5 National Qualifications Framework	postsecondary education (nonuniversity)	18+
5		university education	
6		postgraduate education	23/24+
		adult education/full-scale, lifelong learning (formal and informal)	23/24+

The official languages in the Republic of Kosovo are Albanian and Serbian. Members of national minorities are guaranteed the right to education in their native language. The minority languages in Kosovo are Serbian, Bosnian, and Turkish.

Overview of the Curriculum

The curriculum is a fundamental document that regulates preuniversity education in Kosovo.[7] It is competency based to provide a sound basis for education, foster lifelong learning, improve the quality of education, and build a knowledge society. Following this basic document, the core curricula were developed for the three levels of preuniversity education. These curricula aim to increase autonomy and accountability at the school level for defining and distributing education content.

The following principles underpin curricular development and implementation in preuniversity education in Kosovo: inclusion, integrated and coherent learning that enables autonomous and flexible implementation of the curriculum at the school level, and responsibility and accountability reflected in the creation of a culture of continuous assessment and the development of key competencies.

Key competencies determine the main learning outcomes that students must achieve progressively and sustainably throughout the preuniversity education system. Competencies refer to an interrelated set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that are applicable and transferable, which enable students to cope with the challenges of the digital era and knowledge-based labor market in an interdependent world. The Kosovo curriculum framework includes competencies in the following areas: communication and expression; thinking; learning; life, work, and environment; personal; and civic.

The curriculum framework has six main stages that represent time periods with common characteristics in terms of child/student development and curricular requirements. Each level of preuniversity education comprises two curriculum stages, as shown in Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3: Main Stages of the Curriculum

ISCED Level	Formal Level of Preuniversity Education	Key Curriculum Stage
0	preschool education	early childhood education preparatory
	preparatory grade	Stage 1: Basic acquisition
1	primary education Grades 1–2	
	primary education Grades 3–5	Stage 2: Reinforcement and development
2	lower secondary education Grades 6–7	Stage 3: Further development and orientation
	lower secondary education Grades 8–9	Stage 4: Reinforcement and orientation
3	upper secondary education Grades 10–11	Stage 5: Basic general and professional development
	upper secondary education Grade 12	Stage 6: Consolidation and specialization

All students who participated in TIMSS 2023 were taught with the revised competency-based curriculum. Implementation of the revised competency-based curriculum for preuniversity education began during the 2017–2018 academic year but not in all schools and classes. In 2014, the pilot phase of implementing the revised curriculum began in Kosovo, though the curriculum has not been implemented as planned (according to the report *Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2011–2016*).[8] The revised curriculum was first implemented during academic year 2014–2015 in 10 schools; after 1 year, implementation was expanded to 92 schools in 30 municipalities. After the pilot and in collaboration with working groups, MESTI reviewed all curriculum documents that were approved by the Ministry in 2016. During academic year 2017–2018, implementation of the revised curriculum began in all schools, starting with the preparatory grade and Grades 1, 6, and 10. Curriculum implementation in the other grades is continuing based on the guidelines for curriculum implementation for 2016–2021, as well as the *Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017–2021*.[9,10] Grade 5 is the final grade of primary education.

Use and Impact of TIMSS

One impact of TIMSS has been organized trainings for teachers of mathematics and natural sciences, including 400 teachers being trained in the field of mathematics and information and communications technology (ICT) for Grades 1 to 5. A training project for natural sciences for Grades 1 to 5 is under review.

The Mathematics Curriculum in Primary and Lower Secondary Grades

Fourth-Grade Mathematics Curriculum

The mathematics curriculum is in harmony with the principles defined in the curriculum framework. The mathematics curriculum outlines the competencies to be taught and specifies how to assess and report on student performance. The mathematics curriculum allows students to develop essential skills in mathematics while fostering their creativity and providing the guaranteed right to learn. The curriculum itself is carefully designed to protect cultural knowledge and experiences while also being flexible so that teachers can inspire their students to engage with the pleasure of learning. Mathematics is taught at all stages of the curriculum. In primary school, the mathematics curriculum emphasizes numbers and algebra; shape, space, measurement, and geometry; statistics and probability; and the use and application of mathematics.

The revised curriculum for preuniversity education in Kosovo is competency based and is organized in a way that supports student development in competencies, learning areas, and learning outcomes for each subject. Total instruction time devoted to mathematics is 20.83%. Mathematics is taught in 5 lesson hours per week and 185 hours per school year. In Grades 1 to 5, mathematics is taught by the class teacher (except in some private schools).

According to the revised curriculum, learning topics in the subjects for fourth grade are no longer calculated with percentages but are demonstrated through learning outcomes. The acquisition of subject content by the student is demonstrated as relevant knowledge that is presented to the student in relation to the student's age and the skills that the student demonstrates, which include skills, abilities, techniques, and methods for applying knowledge in achieving the planned learning outcomes. In the mathematics subject for fourth grade, the following general concepts are developed and acquired:

- numbers, algorithms, and algebra
- measurements
- space and form
- data and probability

The general concepts are broken down into topics and for each topic, learning outcomes are presented that support the learning outcomes for each grade. Through simple life situations and various games, the student naturally learns the concepts of counting numbers up to 10,000; comparison of quantities, decimal numbers, fractions, measurements, time, and modeling; concepts of figures, geometric bodies, orientation, and location of objects in space for the method of data collection; and the concept of the occurrence of an event (as in probability). Exhibit 4 shows the concepts and topics in the mathematics curriculum for Grade 4 students.

Exhibit 4: Concepts and Topics for Mathematics, Grade 4[11]

Concept	Topic
Number, algorithms, and algebra	• natural numbers • fractions • models • linear equations and inequalities with one unknown • communities and relationships • letter expressions
Measurements	• measurement units
Space and form	• geometric shapes • geometric solids
Data and probability	• data • probability

Eighth-Grade Mathematics Curriculum

The eighth-grade mathematics curriculum has the following goals for the student: selecting and applying problem-solving strategies; making observations, investigating, and researching, which help in understanding knowledge and mastering mathematical skills; communicating mathematical thinking by using mathematical symbols; and creating representations of math concepts by linking them together and applying them to problem-solving.

The purpose of the mathematics subject in eighth grade is to promote further development and reinforcement of mathematical concepts, which is done through

- integrated learning and in the context of everyday life, and
- learning through the acquisition of elementary concepts and constructed concepts of mathematics.

In the mathematics subject for eighth grade, the following general concepts are developed and acquired:

- numbers, algebra, and function
- shape, space, measurements, and geometry
- note processing and probability

The general concepts are divided into topics and for each topic, learning outcomes are presented that are supported by the learning outcomes for each grade. Mathematics is taught four times a week in eighth grade with a total of 148 instruction hours per school year. Total instruction time devoted to mathematics is 13.32%. According to the revised curriculum, learning topics in the subjects for eighth grade are no longer calculated with percentages but are demonstrated through learning outcomes. Also, the topics, together with the learning outcomes, contribute to the development of the competencies that are presented in the core curriculum for this grade.

The Science Curriculum in Primary and Lower Secondary Grades

Fourth-Grade Science Curriculum

At the primary and lower secondary levels, the science curriculum falls under the umbrella of natural sciences. The aim of the natural sciences curriculum is to enable students to recognize, understand, and research living and nonliving systems, such as food production and other material goods, medicine, transportation, communication, energy production, use of natural resources, preservation of the living environment, and innovation. All content in the natural sciences curriculum falls under one of six main concepts: scientific research; application of science and technology; matter and its characteristics and transformations; physical processes; life processes; and Earth and the universe.

The main focus of learning about natural sciences in fourth grade in Kosovo is understanding the world through the subject *Njeriu dhe Natyra* (Man and Nature), which is explained within the framework of integrated subjects within the natural sciences field. In the preparatory class and primary education, students learn about essential aspects of the knowledge, methods, processes, and uses of science. They are encouraged to understand how science can be used to explain what is happening around them and to analyze the causes.

In the subject *Njeriu dhe Natyra* for fourth grade, the following concepts are acquired and developed:

- matter, properties, and transformations
- the living world
- physical processes
- Earth, the environment, and the universe

Also, the topics, together with the learning outcomes, contribute to the development of the competencies that are presented in the core curriculum for this grade. Exhibit 5 shows the concepts and topics in the natural sciences curriculum for Grade 4 students.

Exhibit 5: Concepts and Topics for Science, Grade 4[12]

Concept	Topic
Matter, properties, and transformations	• materials, their origin, composition, and properties • pure substances, mixed substances, and solutions • air and its components
The living world	• reproduction of living beings • food preservation and poisonous subtances • we live and grow • puberty and adaptation

Exhibit 5: Concepts and Topics for Science, Grade 4 (Continued)

Concept	Topic
Physical processes	• interactions and movements • electric and magnetic interaction
Earth, the environment, and the universe	• place and space • physical systems • human/nature cooperation

Total instruction time devoted to science in fourth grade is 8.33%. Science is taught in 2 lesson hours per week with a total of 70 instruction hours per school year. At Grades 1 to 5, science is taught by the classroom teacher. According to the revised curriculum, learning topics in the subjects for fourth grade are no longer calculated with percentages but are demonstrated through learning outcomes.

Eighth-Grade Science Curriculum

The main focus of learning about natural sciences in eighth grade is deepening the understanding of concepts and ideas through the subjects of chemistry, biology, and physics. This helps students to understand the connections between these subjects and concepts in order to discuss scientific phenomena and their impact on the functioning of society and nature.

The general concepts in the field of natural sciences for eighth grade are as follows:

- matter, properties, and transformations
- the living world
- physical processes
- Earth, the environment, and the universe

Total instruction time devoted to science in eighth grade is 6.66% in each subject separately (biology, chemistry, and physics) for 2 hours per week with a total of 74 instruction hours per school year for each subject. According to the revised curriculum, learning topics in the subjects for eighth grade are no longer calculated with percentages but are demonstrated through learning outcomes.

Teacher Professional Development Requirements and Programs[13]

The licensing system is among the main mechanisms for developing the quality of teaching and motivating teachers to excel at their job, as well as for addressing cases when a teacher's performance needs support.

Professional development of teachers aims to develop their competencies by improving and advancing the practices of teaching and learning in the classroom, thereby providing quality educational services to all students in accordance with the demands of society. The teacher licensing system is structured according to the following four stages:

1. career education—In this stage, the required skills focus on mastering subject content; expanding the repertoire of pedagogical skills, teaching methodologies, and techniques; evaluating students and using the evaluation results to adapt teaching to students and motivate students; and demonstrating teamwork with colleagues, parents, and the community.
2. advanced teacher—At this stage, the competencies that the teacher must achieve focus on mastering the subject content; demonstrating expertise in a wide spectrum of pedagogical skills, teaching methodologies, and techniques; evaluating students and using evaluation results to adapt teaching to students; demonstrating high motivation of students and positive results of evaluation and promotion; and demonstrating teamwork with colleagues and other professional staff, parents, and the community.
3. master teacher—This stage includes facilitating school-based professional development sessions, mentoring students and new teachers doing internships, and managing internships, among other activities. A master teacher has additional responsibilities and roles as a mentor or coach and serves as an example of good practice and mentoring.
4. meritorious teacher—At this stage, the teacher must take on a leading and advisory role as he or she serves as a moderator in meetings with staff and during workshops and designs the curriculum.

MESTI, MED, and schools provide professional development training. Training for the curriculum includes the field of mathematics and natural sciences from first grade onward. The training for the curriculum is 6 days, during which teachers prepare portfolios that are then evaluated by the trainer and the municipal official. Teachers who achieve the intended results of the training are certified, while those who do not achieve satisfactory results are advised and given another time to complete the training in certain educational subjects according to the curriculum. The trainings for mathematics and natural sciences offered by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which are carried out by trainers in the fields related to the teaching of mathematics and natural sciences, are certified by MESTI.

Monitoring Student Progress in Mathematics and Science

During preuniversity education, the ongoing progress and achievement level of students as defined by the Kosovo curriculum framework, core curriculum for the curriculum key stages, and subject syllabi are assessed. The assessment process is based on the Kosovo curriculum framework and is oriented toward internal and external assessment. Internal, or school-based, assessment aims to support and strengthen the learning and the regular reporting of individual student progress. External assessment, on the other hand, is a standardized assessment to measure achievement in learning outcomes and competencies at the end of Levels 1, 2, and 3 of preuniversity education. Since 2012, Kosovo has participated in international education

surveys that assess the competencies and skills of students at a national level: the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2012, 2015, 2018, and 2021; TIMSS 2019 and 2023; PIRLS 2021; and the International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) 2023.

The student evaluation system in Kosovo is regulated by legislation based on the *Curriculum Framework for Preuniversity Education in the Republic of Kosovo*,[14] the core curricula for three levels of preuniversity education,[15,16,17] and the *Administrative Instruction on Student Assessment in Preuniversity Education in the Republic of Kosovo*.[18]

The system applies to all students in all public and private schools and in other educational institutions in Kosovo. It relies on learning outcomes defined in the curriculum framework, core curricula, and syllabi. Internal assessment is conducted at the school or classroom level by subject teachers according to the procedural description and criteria for each type of internal assessment.[19,20] The focus of internal assessment is to support students in learning to master competencies. Internal assessment of students is realized through continuous assessment, final assessment, and key stage assessment. Continuous assessment of students is realized through formative assessment (for learning) and summative assessment (of learning).[21] Final assessment is done for each subject at the end of the teaching/academic year. The final assessment grade in a subject at the end of a school year is achieved/set with the mathematical average of grades from the two semesters in the school year. The curriculum framework for each level of education defines the period of implementation for each type of assessment, the assessment carrier/responsible person, the main goals, and ways of documenting student achievement (see Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 6: Internal Assessment: Goals and Documenting Outcomes

Type of Assessment and Period of Implementation	Carrier	Key Goals of the Assessment	Documenting Assessment Outcomes
Continuous assessment during the learning process (formative assessment) and at the end of every learning topic, thematic unit, or learning period (summative assessment)	subject teachers	• supporting learning • information and reporting • assigning grades • planning for the support of continuous learning	• documented in the teacher's register • documented in a grade book and/or electronic journal for certain periods of the school year

Exhibit 6: Internal Assessment: Goals and Documenting Outcomes (Continued)

Type of Assessment and Period of Implementation	Carrier	Key Goals of the Assessment	Documenting Assessment Outcomes
Final assessment, conducted at the end of the school year	subject teachers	• assigning the final grade at the end of the school year • information and reporting • planning for the support of student learning in the following year	• final grades documented in the class book, school register, and/or electronic diary, as well as in the classroom certificate
Key stage assessment, conducted at the end of each curriculum stage at the end of Grades 2, 5, 7, and 11	MESTI/DQASAL/ professional team/ teachers' council within a curricular stage	• verification of the level of achievement of learning outcomes and mastery of key competencies at the level of a curriculum stage and area • planning for the support of student learning in the following year • information and reporting for parents and educational institutions	• descriptive evidencing in class books on special abstracts for the conclusive assessment of each stage being evaluated • in summary reports of professional assets and class councils

Source: *Curriculum Framework for Preuniversity Education in the Republic of Kosovo*

External assessment is standardized to measure the level of achievement of learning outcomes and competencies at the end of Levels 1, 2, and 3 of preuniversity education (see Exhibit 7). All external assessments are paper-and-pencil tests with multiple-choice questions. MESTI/DQASAL scans the answers electronically with an optical reader.

Exhibit 7: Goals and Documentation for Each State Assessment

Standardized State Assessment	Assessment Goals	Documentation/Evidencing
State assessment at the end of Grade 5	gather research on aspects of education, identification of student support needs in lower secondary education, and improvement of primary level education. A comprehensive sample of 10 to 15% of students is assessed.	evidenced by the central/ municipal authorities for research and identification of student support needs at this level
State assessment at the end of Grade 9	measure the level of competency achievement and orientation for enrollment in upper secondary schools serving local/state authorities to develop the quality of teaching and learning	certificate at the end of Grade 9
State assessment at the end of Grade 12 State Matura examination	measure the level of competency achievement and certification for continuing opportunities in higher university studies. Students who pass the Matura examination obtain the State Matura Certificate.	State Matura Certificate

Numerical grades (1 through 5) are used per semester and school year as follows:

- 1 (insufficient): average of grades is 1.00 to 1.49
- 2 (sufficient): average of grades is 1.50 to 2.49
- 3 (good): average of grades is 2.50 to 3.49
- 4 (very good): average of grades is 3.50 to 4.49
- 5 (excellent): average of grades is 4.50 to 5.00

In 2001, the Division for Standards, Assessment and Monitoring (DSAM) was established to develop education policies and to develop and conduct national and international assessments in Kosovo. DSAM, now DQASAL, continues to be the main authority responsible for conducting national and international student assessments organized in Kosovo. DQASAL carries out professional, developmental, organizational, and technical tasks related to national and international assessments in preuniversity education. The organization of national assessments is supported by various commissions, for example, the State Matura Commission, as well as monitoring commissions established annually for national tests. Based on institutional competencies, MED and schools contribute greatly to organizing national assessments through commission representatives and the fulfillment of the legal competencies from the framework of national assessments.

Special Initiatives in Mathematics and Science Education

The assessment of talented and gifted students is done in accordance with the learning outcomes defined by the curriculum. Support of children/students with extraordinary abilities; special gifts; and talents in academic, creative, and artistic fields is done based on their individual potential needs.

Support at the school level should include the following:

- modification and support of subject curricula
- individualized plans
- additional advanced learning
- cooperation with external experts
- participation in competitions and support activities/programs at the municipal and state level, as well as programs/activities provided by specialized organizations
- advanced classes[22]

In addition to MESTI, there is the ATOMI Institute (International Institute for Extraordinary Intelligence), which is an NGO and nonprofit foundation. The ATOMI Institute aims to identify and support students with exceptional intelligence, gifts, and talent in Kosovo. Starting in 2017, the ATOMI Institute has organized the Kangaroo mathematics competition every year in order to promote mathematics and its importance in Kosovo.

If a student has not reached the learning outcomes in any subject, the student's teacher and parent/legal guardian make a plan of student support. In special cases upon request by and with the approval of the parent/legal guardian and the teacher, and in consultation with the professional active department and the director of the school, a student can repeat a class. If the student has missed more than one third of the teaching time (e.g., due to health reasons or leaving school), a class exam is organized in June or August after the student has had a consultative lesson. If the student has missed less than one third of the teaching time, the teacher must find modalities appropriate to the circumstances to make an assessment based on all available evidence. The school prepares a dynamic plan and technical procedures for the organization of the class exam and informs the student, who must adhere to the dates and procedures set by the school.[23]

An assessment of a student with special needs is done according to an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that describes whether the student attends classes with subjects or is assessed based on activities.[24]

In 2023, MESTI, in cooperation with the European Union (EU)–funded project KosEd: Support for Primary and Higher Secondary Education, started the process of revising Albanian language textbooks and mathematics textbooks used in compulsory education (Grades 1 to 9) in order to improve the quality of preuniversity education. The textbook revision process is led by the Council of Experts for Textbooks and Curricula within MESTI, with the help of international and local experts. At the request of MESTI, the revision process for 17 mathematics textbooks has begun, and the process of revising science textbooks is scheduled to start soon.

Suggested Reading

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