



Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg

Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung

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To:
School Administrators, Teachers,
Pupils, Parents,
School Office Staff, Facility Managers,
General Staff for all State Schools
and Independent School Agencies within
the Free and Hansatic City of Hamburg

Hamburg, im April 2009

Dear Pupils,
Dear Parents,
Dear Colleagues,
Dear Sir or Madam,

The initial school development committees in each district have already completed their work. By the 15th of May, all 22 districts within the City of Hamburg will have submitted their recommendations. This represents yet another major step forward for the Hamburg Educational Offensive.

On behalf of the State of Hamburg's Ministry for School and Vocational Training I would like to thank everyone involved for their tremendous commitment. In this letter I would like to address a number of controversial issues ensuing from the debate on educational reform and thus hope to provide some clarity in the matter.

The pace of reform: step by step

This educational reform is an ambitious undertaking, and thus there are those that are worried that the new system for primary schools is being introduced too fast, so that schools and teachers will not be sufficiently prepared for this new learning environment. We are proceeding cautiously and step by step in introducing the new systems for the primary schools, the regional comprehensive schools, and the six-stage grammar schools. The educational scheme will commence in 2010 with years one and four in the primary schools and year seven in the grammar and regional comprehensive schools. For the time being changes are only being introduced for these school years. Changes shall include e.g., teacher committees for the respective years, new syllabi and curricula, and new forms of performance feedback – featuring regular discussions between pupils, parents and teachers – in which the pupils' performance levels shall be discussed and individual learning goals agreed upon. Many schools have already begun planning for the reforms, which will be used by teachers for the first time in this new type of school system. Since the beginning of 2009 teachers have been specifically preparing for this event with continuing education courses. Commencing in 2010 and every year thereafter a new group of pupils shall be integrated into the new structure and culture of the primary and

secondary schools.

The lesson: homeroom or form group teachers shall remain

There has been some apprehension about abolishing form groups and homeroom teachers. The principle of the homeroom teacher will be retained in its entirety. This is formulated accordingly in § 11 of the draft bill for the new state education act. The intention is naturally to continue encouraging the important emotional bond between young pupils and their teachers. By integrating homeroom teachers and specialised teaching staff into one team over the course of a year, relationships tend to be strengthened and trust and confidence is established.

In the future, school classes can also consist of pupils from different years. In this instance the children will continue to learn as before in a constant and stable group environment and will have a regular classroom, however, not every pupil will be learning the same thing at the same time. The fact that this kind of individual education concept works can already be observed in several of Hamburg's schools today. Naturally, there will be times when a teacher must explain a lesson to the entire class using a blackboard and times when the class will be broken up into small workgroups.

The way to school: short routes for pupils

Another concern is that pupils will have to commute between school locations and will thus lose a lot of valuable time. As a rule pupils will not have to commute between school locations in the future, however, it may very well be the case that pupils will have to go to a neighbouring school in order to take advantage of particular lessons or activities just as is the case currently.

Parents' right to choose: improved feedback, more fairness

There will be new procedures for the choice of the secondary school. The aim of this policy is to achieve better and fairer forecasts for pupils' further educational prospects after the 6th year.

As there will no longer be any segmenting of pupils after the 4th year, there will correspondingly no longer be any need for parental decision-making on the form of secondary education at this specific stage. Pupils can move on to grammar school after the 6th year, if at the report card conference it is confirmed that the requirements to successfully attend grammar school have been fulfilled. This is nothing new, because even up until now grammar school attendance above the 6th year has been solely dependent on scholastic performance.

It is important that the decision at the report card conference is well-founded and comprehensible. Therefore, in the future, pupils shall receive increased and better information about their level of performance. In deciding on the pupils' further academic path, not only shall scholastic performance be taken into consideration, but also the pupils' interdisciplinary and social skills as assessed by the academic staff, as well as, the pupils' own self-evaluation. It goes without saying that there will be lengthy and detailed advisory talks with parents.

Grammar schools and regional comprehensive schools: two equivalent ways to achieve a general certificate of education – advanced level (“A”-Levels) / (Abitur)

All pupils can attend a regional comprehensive school subsequent to the 6th year and acquire all general certificates of education commencing with the general certificate of secondary education and the general certificate of education – advanced subsidiary level (“AS” – level) after successful completion of the 9th or 10th years, and even obtain an A-level certificate (Abitur) thereafter. Pupils and parents may still continue to select the specific school that is to

be attended. Those who are entitled to attend a grammar school can also choose between grammar schools and regional comprehensive schools. This choice can reflect preferences regarding particular school profiles, friends, or simply the shortest route to school.

Grammar schools: no 30% quota

An important educational reform goal is that more pupils graduate with an A-level general certificate of education / (Abitur). Hamburg needs all of its resources and wants to foster everyone in the best possible way. For that reason, there will be no restriction on the number of pupils who may transfer to grammar schools, e.g. a maximum quota of 30%. There is no intention of closing down or transforming grammar schools as part of the Hamburg Educational Offensive and this is certainly not a topic of discussion in the school development committees for each district.

School profiles: greater educational diversity

Another concern is that traditional and successful courses at individual schools, which have been established as prominent school features, and thus an important part of the school's profile, will no longer be able to be offered in the future. We are expecting just the opposite from this reform. In fact we would like the primary schools to develop their own specific school profiles in the future. Course development would take into account the specific wishes of the parents living in the respective districts for their children. This also applies to foreign languages, which children can already learn in the primary schools. Our intention is that primary schools shall closely cooperate with the grammar and regional comprehensive schools in structuring a profile in order to provide as many pupils as possible with an academic path, which is free from detours or interruptions. At the district conferences for the school development committees, representatives from all of the schools met in order to discuss sensible cooperation alternatives and essential education courses. Collaboration efforts can be intensified after the proposal for the new school sites becomes available this summer. Ultimately, this will mean more educational diversity than ever before.

The room question: good schools need good rooms

Alongside the reformation of the Hamburg school system is the opportunity to design modern educational properties. Schools are able to renovate and modernise their properties on account of the reorganisation of school buildings and additional financing from the economic stimulus packages from the City of Hamburg and the German Federal Government. Commencing with the existing stock of buildings, the school development committees are currently developing proposals for the future structure of schools within their respective districts. In some districts, however, there will be a need to construct new buildings. The Hamburg Board of Education shall review all suggestions and recommendations after the district conferences for the school development committees have concluded and adjourned. The Board shall review in particular any renovation or refurbishment needs, as well as the exigency for building renovations for specialised rooms.

The Hamburg Educational Offensive has ambitious goals and the State of Hamburg's Ministry for School and Vocational Training is now doing what is required in order to turn words into deeds. I would be delighted, if we could take this outstanding opportunity to work together in order to give Hamburg the good schools the city deserves.

Sincerely Yours,
Christa Goetsch