

THE CURRENT STATE OF GENERAL EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

INTRODUCTION

Taking into consideration the major role played by education in the development of human resources, it is present in every district social development project as an essential vector. Education is one of the principal tools through which the administration and the community stimulates, conducts and controls development processes. Thus we can infer that there is an educational dimension to social development.

The analysis and interpretation of social development only through its instrumental, technical-economic dimensions are simplistic and originate in the overestimation of “to have” to the prejudice of “to be”. Therefore, social development should correlate economic logic (global dominant) with social logic (national dominant) and with the cultural-educational one.

The school, as an essential axis of the human dimension of social development, stimulates and asserts human energies of the society. It is part of what we could call a set of endogenous capacities of social development. The quality of schooling and the quality of social development are strongly connected, interdependent aspects. This is why school problems should be listed among the most strategic issues and options of any society.

These are only a few reasons that determined me to conduct a study aiming at the social and educational analysis of schools. In order to cope in an optimal way with new social challenges and pressures, the educational system must enhance its performance and achievements, must adopt structural changes for this purpose, thus becoming established as an organization of functional mechanisms.

The educational system analysis from the social-organizational point of view can be considered at a superficial glance a less common approach, taking into account the specific nature of the educational system, its fundamental human dimension. This kind of analyses have been made on various occasions, but sporadically, they often being incomplete, fragmentary and lopsided. The social-organizational analysis will allow for an emphasis on essential aspects related to variables whose knowledge and influence could ensure an optimal operation and a directed development of the educational system at district level.

Is school an organization? Which are its essential features? Which are the suppositions and values that shape a school’s culture? How does its culture influence the school itself? Why certain changes are slow to come, are hindered or drift away from their original intentions? What are the means by which we could intervene? What is the

relation between the educational system at district and school levels and the community's needs for educational services?

These are just a few questions to which we attempted to find an answer in this study. Certainly these answers are not final, they are only meant to create a more comprehensive image of the educational system, which is known mostly through the pedagogical processes (training and educational) that it involves.

It is important that the results of this study be interpreted in connection with the local conditions of socioeconomic development, with local customs and with their influence on the development of the educational system as a sub-system of the whole social system.

The analyses and the conclusions drawn within the framework of this study could serve as benchmarks for the elaboration of educational system development strategies at district or school level. It is important that people working in schools know better their institution in order to make full use of its different dimensions with a view to a high quality performance.

Although the formulation of a strategy is not a pre-requisite for the management of a school, very few school managers pay the necessary attention to this activity. The motives cited are diverse: unpredictable problems emerged in routine activities, urgent modifications in the educational process, financial problems, complicated circumstances, need to take emergency and non-standard decisions, disagreements or disputes between partners, subordinates, employees, beneficiaries, etc.

1.BASIC EDUCATION GENERAL POLICY

1.1. The Fundamental Objectives of Education

The educational system of the Republic of Moldova is the social establishment for training and education of children and youth for their professional and social-cultural adjustment, for the preservation and development of the nation's spiritual potential. Based on democratic, human, humanitarian and equal opportunity principles, as well as on formative training, unity and diversity principles, education has to achieve the objective of training the young generations which will constitute one of the major premises for the consolidation of the state's independence, of its economic and cultural potential, and for the integration into the European socioeconomic space.

The state policy in the education field, sanctioned by law as national priority, is determined by the fundamental educational objectives that are specified in the main legislative acts: the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, the Concept of Education Development in the Republic of Moldova and the Education Law.

PRINCIPLES OF EDUCATION

From the conceptual point of view education represents a unitary system consisting of a series of diverse educational structures, forms, contents and technologies. The state educational policy is founded on humanitarian, equal opportunity, adaptability, creativity and diversity principles. Education is democratic and humanistic, open, flexible and formative and is based on national and world culture values. Public education is secular and refractory to ideological/party, political, racist and national discrimination. Pupils and students can take an optional course tackling problems of moral and religious education, and starting from the year 2001 primary school pupils will be offered a compulsory school subject - "moral and spiritual education".

Public education is free of charge.

The fundamental objectives of education consist in : insurance of equal opportunities for all categories of population, training of citizens in the spirit of fundamental rights and liberties observance, differentiation of qualifications adjusted to the current and future labor market, contributing to the individual development of the student.

The general education objectives of the Republic of Moldova are established in article 5 of the Education Law. The main educational objective at school level lies in the free and harmonious individual development, in the formation of creative persons which can adapt to the changing conditions of life (Article 5 (1), Education Law of the Republic of Moldova).

The right to education is guaranteed irrespective of nationality, sex, race, age, origin and social status, political or religious beliefs and criminal record. The state provides equal opportunities of enrollment in public upper secondary, vocational and higher education institutions according to one's abilities and capacities.

The educational system is based on public educational standards. These standards establish the minimal obligatory requirements for different levels and stages of education. The procedure of educational standards' development, approval and implementation is established by the Government.

Educational standards represent the foundation of objective assessment of the general or vocational training level of graduates, irrespective of the type and form of education.

Statistical indices of literacy and training of the population of the Republic of Moldova are considered to be satisfactory. According to the latest census (1989), the level of literacy among the adult population constitutes 96.4%. The level of education of the population and the number of students, enrolled in educational establishments corresponding to their age, are similar to those of neighboring countries. The secondary and higher education reserve is estimated at 70% of the adult population. Approximately 4/5 of the population aged 25-40 have completed secondary or higher education.

The main problem of education consists in the contents and quality of the educational process occurring in our society. The reality proves that the population's training and capacity to adequately respond to new challenges brought about by the transition to other organization models and types of social behavior are limited.

1.2. THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM STRUCTURE

The educational system, given the need for continuity in education and the psycho-physiological age peculiarities, is organized by levels and stages and has the following structure:

- I. Preschool education
- II. Primary education
- III. Secondary education:
 - General secondary education:
 - a) Gymnasium schooling(lower secondary)
 - b) Lyceum schooling (upper secondary); Comprehensive general education schooling.
 - Vocational secondary education
- IV. Higher education:
 - 1.Colleges (short-term)
 2. Universities
- V. Post-university education

The educational system also includes other forms of education:

- Special education;
- Complementary education;
- Education for adults .

Basic education consists of grades 1-9, including mandatory school training groups for five year old children.

Preschool education constitutes the first stage in the educational and training system. It represents a system of different ante-preschool and preschool establishments, state-owned or private, with different working hours, corresponding to educational standards.

Education of children that have not attained the age of 3, usually takes place in the family, which benefits in this case from state support, pursuant to the effective legislation.

Preschool education for children aged between 3 – 6(7) years occurs in institutions of different types and forms of ownership or in kindergarten-primary schools having different activity programs based on the level of development of the child and on the parents' option. Preparation of preschool children for school is mandatory from the age of 5 and is carried out in preparatory groups in kindergartens or in schools, or upon parents' request - in the family.

Primary education includes grades 1-4 and is organized as day instruction in primary schools functioning as separate entities or within general secondary schools.

In grade 1 are admitted children aged 6-7 on the date of commencement. Enrollment becomes mandatory at the age of 7.

The beginning of schooling for 6 year old children is determined with the parents' consent, based on the degree of the child's psycho-somatic maturity, according to the procedure established by the Ministry of Education.

Gymnasium education is compulsory and is organized as day instruction for grades 5 - 9. In gymnasiums all pupils are admitted upon finishing primary school, without any selection tests.

Gymnasium schooling is completed with a graduation examination comprising several tests, following which a gymnasium studies certificate is issued in accordance with the procedure established by the Ministry of Education.

Lyceum schooling provides fundamental theoretical training and all-round education necessary for the continuation of studies at higher education institutions or secondary vocational training schools.

Lyceum schooling is organized as day instruction in general theoretical and theoretical lyceums with emphasis on one or more subjects, or in lyceum level grades within general schools, as well as within vocational polyvalent schools.

Lyceum education lasts 3 years (grades 10- 12).

Admission in lyceums is contest-based for graduates of gymnasiums or polyvalent vocational schools of the corresponding level in compliance with the conditions set forth by the Ministry of Education.

Upon passing the Bacculaureate examination, a Bacculaureate diploma is issued, conferring the right to enroll in a higher education establishment.

In the event of failing the Bacculaureate examination, it could be taken again at most twice during the next three years. Lyceums are founded and closed down by Government decision, at the proposal of the Ministry of Education, by joint agreement with the local public authorities, teaching staff and parents.

Lyceums may be established or founded within universities or other higher education establishments, usually for people with special abilities and achievements.

Secondary vocational education provides training in a trade (profession), as well as retraining and refresher courses for qualified workers and laid off people.

The state provides vocational training in a certain vocational field for gymnasium graduates under sixteen that do not study in lyceums or comprehensive general education schools.

Secondary vocational education is organized as day study or by correspondence in polyvalent vocational schools and apprentice schools.

The nomenclature of trades/professions in which students are trained is approved by the Government at the proposal of the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection and the Ministry of Education in common with other ministries and departments.

Polyvalent vocational schooling occurs at three completion levels. It offers sequential vocational training in a wide field of qualifications -- from worker to technician, at the same time providing lyceum studies.

Admission in polyvalent vocational schools is contest-based, without any restrictions for graduates of gymnasiums, comprehensive general education schools and lyceums, with or without a Baccalaureate diploma.

The duration of studies in polyvalent vocational schools is under five years for graduates of gymnasiums and incomplete secondary schools, and under three years - for graduates of lyceums and comprehensive general education schools.

The first level in polyvalent schools provides training in a certain field as skilled worker and is completed upon issuance of a qualification certificate entitling graduates to take a job or to continue studies at the second stage or in the last grade of lyceum.

The second level provides further vocational training to the qualification of foreman, as well as vocational initiation in entrepreneurial activity. It terminates with qualification examinations, upon which is issued a qualification certificate entitling graduates to take a job or to continue studies at the third level or in the last grade of lyceum.

The third level extends vocational training to the technician (technologist) qualification, and is completed upon passing qualification examinations and issuing a technician (technologist) certificate.

General lyceum training carried out in polyvalent vocational schools terminates with a Baccalaureate examination and the issuance of the Baccalaureate diploma.

Apprentice schools provide vocational training in a profession or in several related trades. These schools accept gymnasium, lyceum and comprehensive school graduates. As an exception, there can be formed groups of students that have not finished grade 9 but have reached the age of 16, upon approval of the Ministry of Education. Apprentice schools studies are of 0.5 – 1.5 years in duration. The program is completed upon passing examinations and issuance of a qualification certificate allowing to practice the respective profession.

Sports and arts education is provided for children with abilities in the field of music, choreography, plastic arts, stage craft and sports in lyceums, grades 1-12 or 4-12 according to the profile. Admission to artistic schooling is based on testing the profile specific abilities and on selection examination.

Higher education is carried out in higher education establishments: colleges, universities and institutes. Enrollment in the higher education establishments is competition-based and requires a Baccalaureate diploma, a secondary education certificate or an equivalent certificate of studies, according to general criteria established by the Ministry of Education. Higher education may offer day, evening and by correspondence studies. The duration of day studies is 2-3 years in colleges and 4-6 years in universities. Studies by correspondence last a year more than day instruction.

Higher education terminates with graduation examinations in specialty subjects, upon which a university degree certificate is issued. Post-university education includes doctoral studies, post-doctoral studies, internships, specialization, refresher and special courses organized in higher educational institutions accredited for this purpose, or in scientific research institutions.

Completion of post-university education:

- specialized and refresher courses
- passing of several tests and issuance of graduation certificate
- doctor's degree – public defense of a thesis and awarding of a doctor of science degree in the respective scientific field
- post-doctoral studies - public defense of a thesis and awarding of a “qualified” doctor of science degree.

Special training is an integral part of the educational system, its objective being the education, preparation, rehabilitation and social integration of preschool children and pupils with mental, physical, sensorial, speech, socio-affective and behavior disabilities or with mixed disabilities. Special training is carried out in special educational institutions of boarding or extended-day school type. The duration of compulsory special education depends on the handicap type and degree and constitutes eight years for children with mental deficiencies and 10-12 years for children with physical and sensorial deficiencies.

The current organizational structure of Moldova 's educational system can be considered satisfactory and corresponding to a society willing to be integrated in the European and World educational community. The best indicator of the actual functioning of the educational system is children's enrollment rate.

1.3. EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM MANAGEMENT

The Ministry of Education is the central public administration body in the field of education. The Ministry of Education develops the educational strategy and promotes the public educational policy, participates in the development of the state policy on children and youth issues.

The specialized educational management bodies are the education directorates, operating in the districts and in Chisinau municipality. The organizational structure of the Educational Directorates is established by the Government at the proposal of the Ministry of Education.

Within education directorates operates a school inspectorate based on a regulation to be approved by the Ministry of Education. In each district and municipality there are methodology departments, medical and psycho-pedagogical centers subordinated to education directorates. The structure and responsibilities of these units are established by regulations approved by the Government.

The following management and consulting authorities function within the educational system:

a) at republican level: the Board of the Ministry of Education, chaired by the Minister. The members of the Board are appointed by Government decision.

b) at local level: the Management Council and the Consulting Council of the General District (municipality) Directorate.

Local management and consulting authorities operate in accordance with the regulation and are chaired by the General Director of the Education Directorate, which is also the chairman of these councils.

c) at school level:

Teaching Council.

School Management Council.

The educational system staff consists of teachers, scientific workers, non-teaching staff and managers. The conditions of holding a teaching position in the educational sector are set forth by the Ministry of Education. The teaching work load of the educational staff is established by the Government at the proposal of the Ministry of Education together with the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. The remuneration of teaching staff depends on the level of studies, position held, educational degree or title, scientific title, as well as on the length of service. The preparation of teaching staff constitutes a priority, anticipates the development of the educational system and is carried out only at university level.

Decision Making and Management

Until recently, according to the traditions which are generally stipulated in the main document, the Education Law, all the issues related to the development of policies, strategies and implementation mechanisms are addressed at central level without really consulting social partners. It is true that today this approach, taking into account the transition to the market economy with all its repercussions on the educational system, is more and more complicated and the educational system's results are becoming increasingly discouraging and in some respects are negative. The current Education Law was developed in this context (1995). However, at present, a significant part of its provisions are not functioning due to the lack of mechanisms that would allow the creation of a participatory educational system, having clear responsibilities horizontally and vertically, especially in the case of local communities. Several amendments, that could partially clear certain obstacles in the development of the educational system, have been proposed for Parliament's approval, but obviously the efforts made have been greater than the results obtained. Political instability is a major impediment for the promotion of a consistent educational policy.

In the context of the territorial-administrative reform and function decentralization, in particular of those concerning the organization and functioning of basic compulsory education, new strategies related to the revision of functions and responsibilities are devised at this educational level. The state will develop the policy and strategy of education development at curriculum, standards and teaching staff level. In addition, given the new expectations, the state will gradually relinquish the monopoly on financing

and strict control over the educational system. A great deal of functions will be delegated to district education directorates as well as to local mayor's offices. At present this process is underway involving consultation at all educational management levels which will increase social awareness in general, as well as the awareness of local communities regarding their responsibility towards the education.

Taking into consideration that before the 90's the enrollment of all children of the respective age in compulsory education generally was not an issue, at present there is no special body responsible for universal enrollment. The National Council for Educational Reform, consisting of representatives of all interested ministries and departments, local public authorities, employers' associations and trade unions, mostly coordinates educational reform problems with a view to vertical and horizontal adjustment of actions, synchronizing the improvement of curricular components, staff retraining, assessment and financing. Economic development tendencies, the migration of labor force from rural to urban areas widens even more the cultural and economic gap between villages and cities. Therefore a growing part of school age population from villages stays out of the educational system, not to mention its quality in rural areas. The creation of a specialized mechanism at national and local levels in charge of issues related to insurance of equal learning opportunities for all children is today a very topical issue, hence political decisions and, the central and local governments' will must be transformed into specific actions and specific responsibilities.

1.4. EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM FINANCING

The education system financing is a high priority in accordance with the Education Law. The educational system is mainly financed from budgetary resources.

The state guarantees by law an yearly share of public spending on education in the amount of at least 7% of the GDP, including foreign currency resources, and insures the protection of budget expenditure items.

Budgetary resources allocated to the educational system and the revenues of educational-training institutions generated from legal sources are intangible.

The Republic of Moldova, as a country going through transition, is facing tremendous difficulties in adequately financing the educational sector, given the pressing need to maximize investments made from an increasingly tight budget.

Public allocations are much beneath expectations, while the impoverishment of the population does not permit the official establishment of mechanisms for parents' financial participation in order to compensate the deficit, although such attempts have been made. Consequently, schools are deteriorating, no new facilities are being built, repairs and current maintenance (sanitation, heating, electricity, etc) and school equipment do not meet the basic amenities requirements, with few exceptions. It suffices to say that budget allocations cover only 40% of the current educational expenditures and for the most part are used for the payment of salaries to employees, of scholarships to students and for expenses on electricity, heating, water and sewage.

Total Public Expenditure on Education

Year	MDL (mil)	% GDP	% of the budget
1980	376		
1985	471		
1990	706	5.6	17.2
1994	426	7.4	28.9
1995	583	7.7	22.9
1996	795	9.7	28.1
1997	897.9	10.4	24.9
1998	656.8	7.5	21.7

Year	Capital investments	Total
1980	61	376
1985	74	471
1990	149	706
1994	23	426
1995	28	58
1996	26	695
1997	32	897.9
1998	26.5	656.8

The amount of public expenditures allotted to education in 1998 was smaller than in 1996 or 1997, that is respectively with 17% and 27%, representing 7.5% of GDP and 21.7% of the budget, which is more than in other countries. However, calculated per pupil/student, this amount constitutes only 752 lei per year (about 70\$US) which is by far insufficient.

Schools' material equipment continues to deteriorate. In 1999/2000 half of the schools needed capital repairs (in 1998/1999 – one third); 7% of schools were unsafe.

The absence of allocations has led to the closing down of extracurricular establishments: circles for young technicians, naturalists, tourists, etc. In the last six years, one third of all children's libraries were closed down.

Public financing of education was provided with great difficulty in 1999-2000.

For the educational institutions' activity in the first quarter (1999) were envisaged budgetary resources in the amount of 46 882.3 thousand lei, out of which were allocated only 19402.2 thousand lei or 41.38% of those earmarked for the respective period, per items and per paragraphs:

- work remuneration - 7079.9 thousand lei (41.38%);
- electricity arrears increased from 320 thousand lei to 1712 thousand lei;
- for heating – from 5436.6 thousand lei to 8627.9 thousand lei ;
- for water supply – from 3009.6 thousand lei to 4858.1 thousand lei.

Altogether, only 8% of the necessary amount were allocated for the above mentioned items. Food expenses for children from orphanages, boarding schools, and special schools have been covered in the amount of 2589.3 thousand lei or 47.82% of the required amount (Data for school year 1988-99).

The children's menu in the above-mentioned schools is very limited, the cost of food per day being 3.22 lei, while the real cost of the food products per day constitutes 10 lei.

Due to indebtedness to electricity distribution companies and heating plants, educational institutions are disconnected from the electricity networks and from the aqueduct, which affects their normal functioning.

Thus, during the school year 1999-2000, for these reasons 50 educational institutions have been disconnected from the heating system and 37 - from the aqueduct. This led to the spreading of infectious diseases and created a threat of epidemics.

The situation is even worse in terms of current and capital repairs of buildings, installation of meters, purchasing of detergents and cleaning supplies. Routine repairs at the beginning of school year have been carried out in 90% of educational institutions from special account funds and with parents' support.

It is worth mentioning that lately in preschool institutions routine repairs are made exclusively at parents' expense. However, taking into account the way salaries are paid, one can realize that many institutions are simply left without any repairs for years.

The fuel supply situation is alarming. On October 1, 2000, only 3806 tons of coal and 19 tons of fuel oil were deposited, when actually the need was for 105 thousand tons of coal and 800 tons of fuel oil.

An alternative compensating the financial deficit within the educational system was the creation of the private sector established by law. A series of normative and regulatory acts regarding the criteria and the mechanism of educational institutions' accreditation have been elaborated to ensure the development and functioning of this sector.

Currently (01.10.2000), over 200 private educational institutions are operating, in full accordance with the structure of the national educational system:

- Higher education institutions/universities –39, including under state universities – 10.
- Colleges – 21.
- Pre-university education (primary schools, gymnasiums, lyceums) – 36.
- Training courses for adults and pupils – 116.

The private school system (primary schools, comprehensive schools, gymnasiums and lyceums) covers only 0.4% of the school age population, annual tuition fees being of 1–8 thousand lei per year.

Privatization has spread to the higher education level (level III), which currently includes 17% of the student body, and continues to expand.

In secondary vocational training and public higher education, the share of contract students paying tuition fees is increasing each year. In the school year 1999/2000, 4% of vocational training students (annual fee 0.25 – 2.3 thousand lei), 33% of college students (annual fee 0.9-2.5 thousand lei) and over 50% of university students (annual fee 1.3-8 thousand lei) studied on contract basis.

One of the main problems is the provision of textbooks to schools. At present, budget didactical assistance is sufficient only for grades 1-2. As to grades 3-9, budgetary funds cover only 30-40%. Textbook funds from school libraries have become obsolete a long

time ago. The lack of finances imposed the beginning of commercialization of textbooks in specialized bookshops and the implementation of a textbook rental scheme (grades 3,4,5 in school years 1998-2000 and grades 6-9 in the following years) controlled by the Ministry of Education.

In 1997-1998 pre-university educational institutions, as well as some colleges and universities were equipped with last generation computers (885 classrooms – about 10 000 study places), which led to the creation of favorable conditions for the implementation of new informational and educational technologies in the process of training. Alas, this equipment is being used only 35-45% of the virtual operation time.

Due to insufficient classroom space, every tenth pupil goes to school in the second shift. Because of the lack of resources, the problem of teaching staff retraining remains unsolved, which is true especially in rural areas, where low and paid with delay salaries make teachers seek other subsistence sources (agricultural works, provision of services, commercial activities, unqualified work abroad etc.) Apart from the decent remuneration issue, it is necessary to establish a new mechanism of ongoing training for teaching staff.

Due to low salaries (the average salary in August, 2000 was 260 lei) and to increasing delays in salary payments, currently, secondary education has 2000 vacant teaching positions, 40 of which are in the field of foreign languages. 4860 teachers have 1.5 teaching loads, a good deal of positions being held by pensioners. There is a staff aging phenomenon in schools, which has a negative impact on the quality of education. Young specialists, university graduates, do not take jobs according to the assignment plan. In the year 2000, 2.7 thousand junior specialists in the educational field have been assigned to 1874 schools, out of which only 35% took the jobs.

Based on the above mentioned facts, it is obvious that under the current circumstances of population's impoverishment, the drastic reduction of public financing and education privatization, together with the increase in tuition fees, significantly affects equal learning opportunities and the chances of sustainable development in general.

Given its importance, the actual insurance of equitable access to education is similar to the right choice of direction in the consolidation of social security and sustainable human development. In this context, the institutionalization of new education financing mechanisms are welcomed. Such mechanisms would ensure:

- Diverse financing sources;
- Separation of training expenditures from those for the social protection of students;
- Differentiation of beneficiary fees depending on income;
- Creation of a medium and long term credit fund for university education and other types of studies;

2. FULLFILMENT OF TASKS AND ATTAINMENT OF OBJECTIVES SET FORTH IN THE PAST THREE YEARS

2.1. EDUCATION SYSTEM REFORM

Moldova's General Education Reform Project supported by the World Bank has entered the official stage of implementation on July 1, 1998, having the objective of fostering the first phase of education reforms in the country. The main project goal is the updating of

school curricula in primary school and gymnasium, the development of new textbooks based on them, teacher retraining and designing a modern assessment system.

The project comprises the following components: curriculum development, textbook development, teacher retraining and learning assessment.

In March, 1997, together with the creation of the first institutional structures within the Project (NCAC, assessment committees, working groups, etc.), the staff involved in the project implementation began to be trained. There were organized instructive seminars with the participation of experts from Great Britain, the Netherlands, the USA, Slovenia and Romania, on site meetings with teaching staff. The first regulatory documents and methodological guides for the development of curricula, as well as the school performance assessment system were designed. The first national textbook bidding competition was announced in the same year.

Unlike previous documents of the same type, the new curriculum has a markedly formative character and contains the following innovations: emphasis on objectives and not on contents, on capacities and aptitudes and not on memorized facts, component integration; acquisition of fundamental knowledge and basic skills; critical thinking and social integration techniques; choice and decision making abilities, etc., reflected in a sample of objectives and contents.

From structural point of view, each school subject curriculum includes: introduction, subject concept, reference objectives, learning contents, learning opportunities, methodological suggestions, assessment suggestions and bibliography.

School curriculum development and publishing of the respective textbooks is a coherent process, involving a significant number of specialists. Thus, in the development of a compulsory education curriculum participated approximately 140 specialists, among which 27 teaching staff from gymnasiums and lyceums, 20 specialists from the Ministry of Education and 81 from higher education institutions.

In the school textbook competition participated university professors, practicing teachers and publishers from Moldova and other countries.

Only in the pre-qualification bidding, 23 publishing houses from different countries (Moldova, Romania, Russia and Bulgaria) have participated. In tandem with the supply of new textbooks to schools, was created a mechanism of textbooks reprint upon the Project's completion. The Textbook Rental Scheme was conceived as a sustainable process of financial means' collection for the self-financing of textbook reprints in two-three years. During the first year of the scheme's implementation, over 3 million lei have been collected and transferred into the extra-budgetary textbook fund account, created for this purpose at Chisinau Treasury.

The total project cost for five years constitutes approximately US \$ 20 million, out of which US\$ 5 million are provided by IDA credit, US\$ 11.8 million – by the World Bank loan and US\$ 3.2 – by the Government of the Republic of Moldova. At the same time, international, regional and local technical assistance was offered in terms of organizing curriculum expertise, nationwide consultation, courses, implementation of the rental scheme, etc.

Currently, the project has reached the phase of curriculum implementation in grades 1-5 and of curriculum approval for grades 1-11. The textbook bidding competition for grade 6 is underway and the bidding for grade 7 has been announced.

In the summer of 1999, about 8 000 primary school teachers have been retrained, thus closing the first primary teachers' training cycle, while this year 30 000 gymnasium teachers have been retrained.

The reform stages undergone by the educational system of Moldova have been determined by the need of its adjustment to the immediate requirements of the society: elimination of political doctrines and of the excessive central control of paramilitary training. The curriculum, educational technologies, and school textbooks are continuously upgraded, new institutional structures have been created, vocational training and educational management are also enhanced.

The deepening of social and economic reforms in parallel with the European tendencies imposes the promotion within the educational system of a coherent global reform, changing its organizational paradigm and logic.

The key aspects of the educational reform are the following:

- the state's role in the educational system;
- the connections between the educational system and the labor market;
- organization of the financing system;
- control of the educational system's efficiency as a whole.

The state is gradually giving up monopoly over the organization, financing and evaluation of the educational system, but on the other hand it determines the priority sectors of the educational system, establishes specific responsibilities and functions for each educational level, vertically and horizontally, in connection with the territorial-administrative reform.

A current imperative is the promotion of non-public education, the creation of favorable conditions for tripartite collaboration on the definition of occupational standards, private sector participation in the financing and management of vocational training, attraction of new financing sources in the field of education.

The Concept of the educational system development in the Republic of Moldova, the Education Law, as well as other normative documents and reform programs of the Ministry of Education defining the educational policy establish a series of educational reform priorities targeting strategic objectives of sustainable human development:

- Insurance of educational quality standards under the mandatory educational system;
- Improvement and updating of educational contents: plans, programs, textbooks, materials, accessories for all profiles and subjects;
- Reform of the assessment and examination system;
- Restructuring of the teacher training and retraining system;
- Elimination of the monopoly on textbook development and publishing, creation of a new market for this purpose;
- Restructuring of secondary vocational/technical training, gradual elimination of narrow specialization, introduction of key skills/abilities, provision of a common general training core, based on the "occupational family" principle;
- Formation and functioning of the mechanism of public and private educational institutions' assessment and accreditation;
- Development and diversification of the educational system's financing sources;

- Higher education system reform, ensuring standards of initial formation, research, teaching staff and non-teaching staff status, autonomous relations (public and private education), administrative and managerial mechanisms, institutional evaluation and accrediting, etc.
- Gradual decentralization of mechanisms of management, administration and financing of educational establishments by means of devolving functions on local authorities.

In order to attain educational objectives in terms of management and financing, also taking into account the adjustment of the general and vocational education system to international standards, and to the strategy and needs of the local and national economy, the state should adequately redistribute responsibilities and functions to public authorities at all levels (national, district, local).

In the process of elaboration of education development and reform strategies, the Republic of Moldova benefited from the financial support and contribution of the World Bank, the European Vocational Training Foundation (ETF), UNICEF and SOROS.

The most important projects underway are the following:

UNICEF Education Program, having several projects and sub-projects, among which:

- the Individualized Early Education Program, carried out according to UNICEF Cooperation Program – the Republic of Moldova. It targets pre-school education and is at mid-term of implementation.
- UNICEF CSDD Project targeting children with special educational needs, as well as institutionalized children – is underway.
- UNICEF Non-Formal Education Project, having several sub-projects:
- “The Center for Information and Documentation on Children’s Rights in Moldova ” , launched in October 1998 as a sub-project of the European Youth Exchange non-governmental organization supported by UNICEF. Its objectives are as follows:
 - dissemination among children and youth of knowledge about the Convention on Children’s Rights, and other national and international acts related to children’s rights in particular and human rights in general;
 - education of children in the spirit of democracy, intercultural and inter-personal communication, tolerance, peace and non-discrimination;
 - development and promotion of education for democracy concepts in collaboration with youth organizations from Moldova and other countries;
 - involvement of youth in activities fighting social exclusion, xenophobia, and other types of discrimination;
 - The Children’s Parliament is a form of children’s participation in exercising their rights provided by the Convention on Children’s Rights, participation, freedom of speech, information and communication.
- The project is coordinated by the European Youth Organization – Moldova, and is funded by UNICEF, USIS and SOROS, the main counterpart being the Ministry of Education.
- The General Education Reform Project, co-financed by the World Bank and targeting the first reform stage of the general mandatory education (grades 1-10).
- The TACIS Vocational Education and Training Reform Project in Moldova;

- Children's Happiness Project – "Alecu Russo" University, Balti, targeting the moral education of children in pre-school institutions;
- SOROS Foundation having the following projects and sub-projects:
 - a) Early childhood for creche children aged 1-3;
 - b) "Integration of children with special needs" for children with development disabilities;
 - c) Step-by-step program for pre-school and primary school children;
 - d) "Prodidactica" educational updating program for lyceum and gymnasium education;
 - e) Higher pedagogical education ("Ion Creanga" Pedagogical University) for students and professors from higher education establishments.

The key objective of these projects lies in the enhancement of education, its adjustment to the new social, economic and political realities through the upgrading of the curriculum, the development of new textbooks, educational materials, teacher retraining, development and implementation of new educational technologies and creation of a modern school performance assessment system.

Currently, the main educational reform trends are directed to the updating of primary and gymnasium education, consolidation and promotion of lyceum education, creation of multi-channel financing mechanisms, promotion of alternative education, implementation of the principles of formative education, updating of the curriculum and educational technologies, creation of the national assessment system, tripartite collaboration in defining occupational standards, private sector participation in the financing and management of vocational education, and last but not least, the creation of a participatory educational system supported by everyone's personal contribution.

In this context, efficient education management schemes are developed in coordination with public administrative authorities of the newly formed administrative-economic units (judets). The retraining and professional growth of the educational management will permit to put an end to the educational sector crisis. Preservation and development of the acquired valuable experience, creation of mechanisms stimulating the system's adjustment to the current conditions and future development are several issues on the agenda.

For the settlement of complex problems related to personality development, individual education and training, preparation for an active life in a constantly changing society, a set of coordinated actions is being developed at all educational management levels and at all instruction stages. In this connection, educational management consists in the management of the quality of training, organized according to educational standards and socioeconomic forecasts of professions and planning of the educational sector's development.

Given the cultural, economic and national differences of the country's population, a single educational space is created and developed to ensure equal opportunities for the social integration of the young generation.

The actions of the Ministry of Education are coordinated with other ministries in order to create optimal functioning and development conditions for the educational system, for the improvement of the legislative and normative framework of the entire system.

Taking into account the emerged impediments and the educational development tendencies, at each training level and for each activity field have been established specific reform directions adjusted to the whole system, both horizontally and vertically.

2.2. EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS NETWORK

At all levels of the educational system of Moldova are enrolled 763.4 thousand pupils and students (1999-2000), which covers 73.4% of the school aged population and one fifth of the country's population. The institutional structure of the educational system is going through a process of reformation, diversification and adjustment to Western standards. Relative to previous years, the rough education enrollment rate has experienced a slight increase, although the total number of pupils and students has decreased by 120 thousand.

Mandatory basic education lasts 9 years and includes: 1 year of preparation for school, 4 primary education grades, and 5 gymnasium grades. The overall enrollment rate for compulsory basic education constituted 92% in the school year 1999-2000, while for post-compulsory education – 45.5% of the population aged 16-22. Basic education is provided in Romanian and in other minority languages. Foreign languages are taught beginning with grade 2. In gymnasiums foreign languages are studied in all grades, while in lyceums it is mandatory to study two foreign languages. Russian is obligatorily taught in all schools from grade 5.

Currently, the preschool educational system covers 40% of all children aged 3-7. The last year of the pre-school education structure is reserved to compulsory preparation for school.

320.5 thousand pupils are enrolled in primary education, which means 96% of the respective contingent. The teacher vs. student ratio is of 22 pupils per primary school teacher. Between 1992 and 1998 the number of students and that of teaching staff grew only by 1%.

Secondary education comprises:

- general secondary education (gymnasium, lyceums, secondary comprehensive school);
- vocational secondary school.

In the school year 1999-2000, 1549 day schools operated in the country, out of which:

- 107 separate primary schools;
- 631 gymnasiums;
- 625 secondary comprehensive schools;
- 165 lyceums;
- 41 schools for children with disabilities.

420.2 thousand pupils are enrolled in secondary education, 92% of which are part of the general compulsory education system. The overall enrollment rate of school age population in compulsory general education constitutes 89.4%, with a tendency to fall due to school drop-outs.

The teacher/ student ratio is 1 to 17 in secondary education .

2.3.CURRICULUM REFORM - STAGES AND LEVELS

Pre-school Education and Training

The Republic of Moldova has had deep-rooted traditions in preschool education. Qualitative and quantitative progress occurred after the year 1959. Thus, by the end of 1976, 1786 preschool institutions with a total number of 188 000 children operated in the country (relative to 1945-46 – 25 institutions and 976 children). In the next 15 years this number continued to grow, so that in 1990 there were 2322 preschool institutions and 336500 children aged 1-7 enrolled there (Statistical data from the Ministry of Education, as of 01.01.1991).

Prior to 1990 the educational and training process was carried out based on the “Standard Program for Children Education and Training in Kindergartens”, meant for children aged 1-7 and published in Moscow. In 1990 another program was published - “Program for Children Education and Training in Kindergartens”, which actually was an adaptation of the previous one to specific cultural and national features and conditions.

Public preschool education has always been free of charge, parents covering only food expenses (50% of the actual cost of food products).

Children benefit from educational services provided by specialized teaching staff trained in pedagogical colleges and universities, employed by the state. In preschool institutions children are distributed by age groups:

- 1-3 years – creche group;
- 3-4 years – “small” group;
- 4-5 years – “medium” group;
- 5-6 years – “big” group;
- 6-7 years – preparatory group.

Usually children are grouped by age, but in rural locations, where there are few children, groups consist of children of different age, while differentiated training is carried out in sub-groups.

The preschool educational system has undergone major changes in the last ten years. The events that took place in the society during the transition period had a particularly negative impact on this system.

The number of preschool institutions and the number of children enrolled have significantly declined, food supplies for children have worsened, teaching materials and equipment are out-of-date, the closing down and the consolidation of kindergartens has given rise to unemployment among teaching staff.

Actually the phenomenon of kindergarten depopulation with all its consequences occurred due to the economic crisis.

The territorial-administrative reform devolved the financing of social institutions on local authorities, which are not capable of covering the expenditures necessary for the maintenance of preschool institutions. At the same time, family budgets are so meager that they cannot pay for children’s nutrition in kindergartens. Thus, most preschool age children do not benefit from educational programs, except for families which can afford it.

The number of preschool institutions is in continuous decline, as well as the number of educators and children. Between 1992-1998, 29% of kindergartens were closed down, the number of institutionalized children has dropped 41%, and the number of teaching staff went down by approximately 43%.

The process of closing down of kindergartens has affected especially rural areas (where 64% of preschool age children live), widening the gap between villages and cities in terms of children's access to corresponding education. As a result of the Ministry of Education survey, it was established that on January 1, 2000, 1192 preschool institutions with a contingent of 123 000 children functioned in the country (relative to 1996 – 1774 pre-school institutions and 151093 children). In preparatory groups were enrolled about 57% of the respective age contingent. The rest of the children did not attend kindergarten for different reasons, most often because of the family's poor financial situation – lack of winter clothes and footwear, no financial means to pay kindergarten fees. In some settlements kindergartens are closed for a period of 3-6 months due to the shortage of fuel.

The problem of the financial insurance of the educational process remains unsolved, there are no educational materials for children – toys, arts supplies, phono- and video- readers, etc. Food supply is in critical condition. Due to the absence of financial resources, children are deprived of such important food products as butter, milk, eggs, meat, cheese, fresh fruit and vegetables and so on.

The food purchasing mechanism in kindergartens is not streamlined, which leads to expenditures exceeding two—three times the actual ones.

Another unsolved issue is capital and routine repairs of preschool institutions. Because of scarce materials, necessary repairs are not carried out in time, kindergartens being closed for years. Preschool institutions are insufficiently supplied with fuel, detergents and disinfectants..

Under these circumstances, it is impossible to prepare for school children aged 5-7, as the Law on Education provides. School preparatory groups comprise only 57% of children of the respective age contingent. The other children cannot benefit from the compulsory preschool education system, whose mandatory character is only theoretical.

The specific features of the organizational and functioning regime of the preschool educational system requires an increase in parents' contribution for covering expenditures on kindergarten maintenance, while population impoverishment limits equal access of children to a corresponding education.

Problems connected to contents also exist. Educational contents in primary school are organized based on the mandatory preparation for school. Since preschool education contents and programs have not been changed, there is a discontinuity between preschool and primary education.

The consolidation of kindergartens has created unemployment among teachers.

Due to the low salaries that are paid with 6 month delay, teaching staff leave the educational system trying to earn their living by working in the commercial sector and abroad. Unfortunately, mostly young specialists, well trained and more receptive to educational reforms, are the ones to leave. Today, around 7000 teachers have given up their positions in the preschool educational system.

Educators have no possibility to improve their pedagogical skill, there is no specialized literature, "Preschool Education" journal is no longer published, all of this also for the lack of finances.

In the past 6-7 years, have been undertaken measures to revamp the system and for this purpose kindergartens were allowed to have flexible working hours. Instead of the 10.5 – 12 hour program, were introduced groups with 4,6,9 hour regime. New types of institutions have been established (for instance "kindergarten-school" complexes), private institutions were founded.

The "Program on early age children's education (in creches or in the family)" for early age children was published in 1996.

Curriculum and Assessment

The year 1995 is a landmark for preschool education thanks to the development and implementation of the Concept Paper on the Development of the Preschool Educational System of Moldova, and of the "Curriculum for Children's Education in Different Types of Preschool Institutions".

The defining feature of preschool education, according to this documents, is the child-centered approach, which assumes the creation of conditions for natural development, differentiated and individualized treatment of children within a inter- and interdisciplinary framework.

The curriculum comprises educational and development objectives, other structures and goals presented under three aspects: knowledge, skills and abilities with a view to children's individual development from cognitive, verbal, socio-affective, psychomotor point of view. The contents are phased in age groups and across different fields: language development and fiction, plastic arts, music, study of environmental and social phenomena, formation of basic mathematical notions, as well as of reading and writing premises.

Teachers are free to choose from the forms and means of organizing the educational process depending on the level of children's knowledge and on the teaching-learning logic.

The curriculum consists of 10 activities in the "small" age group and of 16 activities in the school preparation group.

A new curriculum was developed for children aged 5-6, and was put into practice on September 1, 2000.

Assessment is carried out at the end of each school year based on tests prepared by educators.

A standard assessment system will be developed and implemented in the year 200.

Primary Education

Primary education is free of charge and mandatory for all children that have attained the age of 7 by the first of September of each school year. Primary education is 4 years in duration, so that upon completing primary school children are 11 years old. Usually, primary schools are situated in the neighborhood, except for very small villages where no educational institutions exist.

The primary education stage occurs in lyceums, gymnasiums, autonomous institutions, as well as kindergarten-school complexes.

In 1999/2000 school year, 115 autonomous primary schools operated, having enrolled 18105 pupils (6.7%), while 99 first grade groups (3.5%) were opened in 17 kindergarten-schools. The process of establishment of these entities will continue depending on local conditions and will allow for decongestion of crowded schools. The overall contingent at this stage constitutes 232 156 pupils, which means around 40% of pupils from the compulsory pre-university educational system.

Primary schooling is organized in groups of 25-30 children.

The number of periods ranges from 20 hours per week in grade 1 to 24 hours in grade 4. There is a five-day week. Training is carried out in the mother tongue.

Curriculum

The curriculum reform was completed with the development and publishing of the School Curriculum for grades 1-4, which was put at the disposal of each teacher. Unlike previous content-based programs the curriculum is focused on objectives which represent "models" based on individual and social experience structure, generally referring to knowledge, skills and abilities, that pupils should acquire during the entire school itinerary.

The curriculum for grades 1-4 is part of the general structure of the National Curriculum. It was developed within the framework of the General Education Reform Project co-funded by the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the World Bank, and was based on the Concept of Education of the Republic of Moldova, the Education Law, the Basic Curriculum: regulatory documents, school subject concepts, data on educational experiment.

Initially the primary school curriculum envisages experiments with the development of new types of syllabi focused on objectives.

Starting September 1, 1996, in grade 1 of the national school began the implementation of the new educational content referring to formative effects and possible practical usage, arranging the information based on importance and value for the fields targeted by the reference objectives of each subject.

The analysis of the public opinion in all districts of the republic showed the approval and support of the new contents that stimulated the formation of cognitive, affective and psychomotor abilities in children. The proposed didactical techniques develop children's creativity and ensure the progress of the educational process through active learning methods. Constructive and sensible comments and proposals will contribute to the improvement of educational materials that support the educational process.

The issue of teacher training and retraining in view of contemporary education, the psychological factor of change acceptance, the lack of flexibility on the part of senior teaching staff, unfair and delayed remuneration of the employees are indicated as the main reasons of professional blockage.

Different approaches to teacher training put into practice in the course of the past two years have had a partial effect in insuring the formation of a competent vision on the curriculum, on new technologies and contents. At the moment, teacher training courses are provided with the World Bank's support. In all districts have been prepared local teacher trainers, that supervise the training of teaching staff in accordance with the new requirements and monitor the introduction of the new contents.

A frequent impediment involving difficulties in the implementation of the reform across all districts is the inadequate preparation for school of grade 1 children. Around half of the respective contingent did not participate in the training.

At primary school level numerous alternative programs and projects have been implemented.

In the past years, nine primary private institutions have been founded. Attraction of non-budgetary capital in the educational system through the creation of such institutions is one of the ways to facilitate the solving of the financial educational crisis.

The framework plan of the primary education comprises the following subjects:

- Romanian language and literature;
- Foreign language;
- Mathematics;
- Science;
- Romanian history;
- Music;
- Drawing;
- Technological education;
- Physical training.

Teaching Staff

The process of education is carried out by primary school teachers trained in pedagogic colleges and universities.

Out of the total number of primary school teachers, 55.1% graduated from the university, while the rest have specialized secondary studies.

Assessment

In 1999 the Ministry of Education established the procedure of the external assessment of two subjects: mathematics and the Romanian language, performed by external evaluators at the end of the primary cycle. For the first time this was accomplished in the school year 1999/2000. Upon assessment, a detailed report is distributed to schools for analyzing and straightening out the situation.

The purpose of assessment lies in the analysis of the quality of education, the establishment of the degree of objectives' achievement.

Gymnasium schooling

Gymnasium schooling is compulsory, comprises grades 5-9 and is in the form of day studies.

Gymnasium education ensures the development of intellectual abilities and capacities of pupils, conceived as a defining level in the individual formation, career guidance and preparation for lyceum or vocational training.

All pupils that finished grade 4 of primary school can enroll in gymnasiums free of charge and without passing any tests. Gymnasium schooling is finalized with graduation

examinations consisting of several tests and with the issuance of the gymnasium studies certificate.

The curriculum for gymnasium education has already been developed and must be implemented.

Until now gymnasiums were supplied with textbooks published in Romanian. The development of local textbooks for gymnasiums has already started.

Within the Ministry of Education, a Department for Examinations and Evaluation was set up and already started the assessment of certain primary school subjects. Beginning with the school year 2000/2001 it will continue this activity at gymnasium level.

Insuring the required number of teachers is difficult due to the lack of motivation among graduates of pedagogical specialties (low salaries paid with delay, no possibility of obtaining preferential low interest credits, lack of floor space etc.).

Years	No. of gymnasiums	No. of gymnasium students	Average student number in classrooms	No. of gymnasium teachers
1995-1996	619	309 062	24	19030
1996-1997	620	311 071	24	18343
1997-1998	612	315 524	24	18237
1998-1999	628	317 026	24	18189
1999-2000	642	327 026	24	18049
2000-2001	661	316 219	24	18083

The table above shows that the number of gymnasiums is constant, with few changes in the course of the past 5 years, as well as the number of pupils, while the number of teachers within gymnasium education is in decline.

Budget spending on gymnasium training per pupil has risen, but due to the devaluation of the national currency it actually went down relative to the level of 1995. Financing is centrally allocated from the national budget. Pursuant to the Education Law, public spending should not be less than 7% of the GDP. Given the fact the Moldovan Gross Domestic Product is small, the resources allocated to the educational system are insufficient.

No finances are allocated to the publishing of educational materials for different subjects, for the purchasing of school furniture. Practically, education receives financing only for salaries and still with a delay from several months to a year and more.

The curriculum and syllabi have been revised and meet modern requirements. The five-day week was adopted. The new framework plan for gymnasiums was elaborated and approved. It brings essential improvements of the curriculum.

The framework-plan:

- ensures the formation of an individual in relation with its potential and with the requirements of a democratic society;
- relates to education in view of permanent training, interdisciplinary aspect, and the curriculum as a concept;
- ensures curricular coherence across school levels and steps, establishes a minimal number of subjects and classes per week for each grade;

- establishes the invariable core (minimum number of subjects and classes) and the curriculum at school's request (maximum number of subjects and classes), and the optional curriculum;
- offers the possibility to leverage school subjects' weight within the educational system, and to integrate school subjects vertically and horizontally (the complexity principle);
- school subjects are aligned to physiological, psychological and cognitive characteristics of students, to educational standards (primary and gymnasium schooling), (the functionality principle);
- envisages the establishment of a balanced number of school subjects and time units, which would create better learning conditions at the level of students' personal potential (the decongestion principle);
- refers to the exercising of every student's right to fully develop his/her own potential at his/her own pace (equal opportunity principle);
- each educational establishment is free to develop its own curriculum, including the minimal and maximal number of hours for each subject, type of school, grade (flexibility and decentralization principle)

Gymnasiums face different problems. One of the most pressing issues is career guidance, absent in schools in general, and in gymnasiums in particular.

On September 15, 1999, 5164 children aged 7-16 were not enrolled officially in the educational system, (in 1997 – 4.5 thousand children), 80% of which living in rural areas. In fact compulsory enrollment of children is no longer under control.

Repeated study

Before 1990, the enrollment of 7 year old children was not a problem and covered 100% of the contingent, still, in the last years were registered children at this age that did not go to school. Thus, according to operational data from the Ministry of Education, dated 01.09.2000, 1993 seven year old children have not been recruited, which constitutes 29.3% of the total number of children aged 7-16 that remained outside of the educational system.

Due to the economic crisis which the Republic of Moldova is going through, economic, social and cultural disparities between rural and urban areas are increasingly noticeable. When in rural areas power cuts last up to 20 hours per day, achieving educational and training efficiency is out of the question.

School age population from rural areas has no longer access to information broadcast on the radio, TV, published in the press. The conditions in which most rural schools operate, without heating and electricity, has a negative impact on the quality of studies. The difficult financial situation of teachers and parents limits many pupils' access to education. These conditions have given rise to the drop-out phenomenon. One of the causes of drop-out is linked to the population migration issue. Having no possibility to earn their living, many people leave their families and go to work abroad. While children taken care by their grandparents and relatives, often drop their studies, beg for money or commit offences.

One of the factors leading to the decrease in the enrollment rate is the lack of school transport. School age children from rural location, where there is no educational institutions, have to walk 5-6 km to reach the nearest school.

The absence of food programs for children in most rural schools also has a negative influence on the educational and enrollment processes. Often children relied on the lunch served in school to survive.

The same is true of medical services, once provided by secondary educational institutions, but no longer offered due to the reformation of the health sector, contribute to the decrease in the overall enrollment rate. Thus, we can draw the conclusion that precarious socioeconomic conditions have a negative impact on the enrollment rate and lead to the increase in drop-outs each year.

Given the impoverishment of the population, social protection of disadvantaged families is also inadequate. The social assistance offered to such families is ridiculous relative to the excessive market prices on food stuffs and goods. Thus, social benefits, often paid with delay, cannot cover the expenditures related to children care and school enrollment.

As for the access to textbooks, it should be mentioned that before 1998, pupils and students were supplied with textbooks at no charge, both within the pre-university educational system and within the university one, except for private institutions. However, during the 90's, students from specialized colleges, universities, lyceums, and students from vocational/technical and apprentice schools had to purchase textbooks. This was caused mainly by the introduction of alternative textbooks that are not included in the free provision scheme, by the new subjects in the curriculum for lyceums, vocational and apprentice schools, colleges and universities, by the de-politicizing of education across all levels, once the communist doctrine was given up by the educational system. Another cause, and the main one, is the lack of finances that would allow the state to supplement the existing textbook funds from school and university libraries with new book titles and reprints.

Under these circumstances, in 1996 the Government of the Republic of Moldova was forced to appeal to the World Bank and to resort, not on easy terms, to taking a preferential credit for the education reform, which also envisaged the publishing of new textbooks based on the national curriculum developed within the framework of the education reform.

Thus, pupils of grade 3, 4 and 5 are supplied with textbooks through the Textbook Rental Scheme (TRS), which was stipulated in the Education Reform Project crediting terms and conditions. TRS was implemented in 1998-1999 based on Government Decision No.448 "On the provision of textbooks to primary school and gymnasium pupils", dated April 9, 1998. By the beginning of the 1999-2000 school year, 17 book titles were published for primary grades of national and minority schools. The TRS comprises textbooks developed in line with the new curricula and published on competition basis. It allows for a textbook supply of 105% prior to their reprint, when schools are going to order the necessary number of books. Still, it does not mean that all pupils are provided with textbooks. Only those children whose parents pay the rental fee receive them. For children from socially vulnerable families, partial subsidies are provided from local budgets, a provision that actually was not put into practice for the lack of finances. Local authorities and schools resort to sponsorship, so that generally textbooks reach these children as well.

Prior to the supplementing of the fund for primary school and gymnasiums with new, newly developed textbooks, the existing books from school libraries were used. In the course of the 90's, the supplementing of the textbook funds for primary schools, gymnasiums, lyceums and vocational schools was based on educational books donations from Romania which so far has allowed the provision of textbooks for the pre-university cycle in the proportion of 93% to 105%.

Another delicate aspect of the access of all children to textbooks is the degree of wear and tear of the textbooks from the library reserve fund that have been used for over 4 years, since all books published between 1990-1998 are considered valid.

The issue of primary cycle textbooks, as well as of gymnasium ones will be solved by the year 2003, children's access to free gymnasium education being facilitated.

Another unsolved problem is the absence of textbooks for children with sight and speech impairments. Only 25%-30% of children from this category have textbooks, as the insufficiency of financial resources and specialists in this field delays the publishing of the necessary textbooks.

The textbook problem is so pressing because of the population's living standards that are steadily decreasing, so that an increasingly small number of children have access to books.

Another delicate aspect is the wear and tear degree of the school libraries' textbook funds, which have exceeded 2 to 3 times the established 4 year use term.

School libraries are not computerized, and cannot use modern informational technologies, nor can they adhere to the international informational cycle and implement international standards.

The Government of the Republic of Moldova makes consistent efforts with a view to improving the existing situation by means of increasing awareness to different issues and searching appropriate solutions. For the 1999-2001 period is intended the publishing of 116106 copies of 103 book titles of national and universal literature to supplement school library funds.

Currently school libraries are supplemented mostly from sponsorships.

Access to all types and forms of training.

Apart from the mainstream educational system there are other forms of education in the Republic of Moldova:

- out-of-school education, comprising arts, sports and technical training;
- arts education includes music schools and plastic arts schools. At the moment, many such schools are closed down in rural areas in particular, while in urban areas they can hardly hold on under the difficult circumstances.
- All sports schools, except for the national level ones have been closed. The state is undertaking revitalizing measures, but without real results;
- In towns and former district centers used to be young technicians' circles, but now they are also closing down.
- Special education. Special education occurs in special schools classified in accordance with the requirements for special needs children (data on school year 1999-2000).

Type of institutions	Their no.	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000
Children homes	3	234	179	180	175
Orphanages	5	1980	1850	1856	2248
Comprehensive boarding schools	9	3847	3931	3915	4787
Auxiliary boarding schools	30	4150	4200	4146	4221
Special boarding schools	16	2321	2318	2332	2361

Teaching Staff

Due to the fact that teachers quit their jobs, the demand for them in schools has risen. Thus, in the school year 1999-2000, the necessary number of teaching staff constituted 2200 persons, but only 1979 young specialists have been assigned to schools, out of which only 671 persons or 34% have accepted the offered positions.

The reasons for this are the following: salaries are low and paid with delay, there is no floor space provided, no benefits are established by the Government.

During the school year 1999-2000 over 2000 teachers gave up their jobs.

Today, over 4750 teaching staff have 1.5 teaching loads or more. Part of the vacant positions are held by pensioners (3125 persons).

Young people have lost interest in the teaching profession.

3. PRIORITY DIRECTIONS OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

3.1. Directing Education Development in the Republic of Moldova

In order to ensure the development of the educational system and the management of the education reform implemented in the country, the Government of the Republic of Moldova adopted in 1999 a National Program for Education Development at national level. In addition, the Ministry of Education recommended the General District Directorates for Education, Youth and Sports to approve similar programs within local public administration authorities.

The general purpose of the program lies in the creation of a legal, managerial and curricular framework for implementing the public education reform determined by the Concept paper, the Education Law and other legislative acts. The program is planned to be carried out in two stages.

The first stage (1999-2000) has the objective to determine and undertake a series of actions referring to the creation of the scientific, legal-normative, managerial and

financial basis for the education development and reform, overcoming of obstacles and negative trends within the educational sector.

The second stage (2002-2005) will carry out the education reform in the context of social and economic stabilization, following which an educational system meeting the requirements and interests of individuals and society would be established.

The general educational development directions are the following:

- developing the national education system;
- providing a single educational space open to world community values;
- establishing a formative type of education, adjusted to social and economic changes;
- creation of a modern education assessment and monitoring system;
- ensuring the democratic management of the national education system, its integration into the European educational system;

The general projected goals are the following:

- creating the national educational system;
- developing the national curriculum and implementing new educational contents and technologies;
- designing and putting into practice public educational standards, single assessment and evaluation criteria will be introduced within the educational system;
- creating a modern education management system;
- designing an efficient social protection mechanism within the educational system;
- elaborating and implementing new programs on education development for minorities;
- introducing the diversified education system;
- preparing specialists for all national economy fields in accordance with international educational standards;
- introducing the educational services marketing system.

Efficiency of the Education Development Strategy and Program

The dramatic unfolding of political, economic and social events following 1999 did not condition the creation of a special body in charge of ensuring education development. In addition, prior to 1990 the provision of mandatory basic education for the majority of school age population was virtually not an issue. The gist of the matter consists in the fact that in the process of transition to market economy the society has relinquished some of the past achievements without managing to replace former, less efficient structures, that are being gradually eliminated, with modern ones in line with the new requirements.

As to the educational system reform strategy, generally the proposed objectives were feasible, moreover they were anchored in the traditions and accumulated experience. However, the current conditions and tendencies of social development were not always taken into account unfortunately. For example, the National Education Development Program for 1995-2005, developed in 1993-1994, was approved by the Government only in 1999 without specifying the expenditures necessary for the realization of its provisions. A good deal of the provisions of the Education Law (approved in 1995) are

not being enforced or have been annulled, while the amendments proposed are not being accepted by the respective authorities.

One of the educational aspects for which little has been done in terms of a genuine reform is financing. Relative to the GDP, substantial resources have been allocated to the educational system, but they have been used with little efficiency. The financial resources did not always target the priority educational area - mandatory basic education.

Within the framework of evaluation activities, there have been found a series of objective and subjective problems, whose addressing requires specific measures for the future. Among these is the insufficient institutional capacity of the bodies involved in evaluation, especially given the fact that statistical indices (and not only) of our educational system are not comparable and compatible with the European ones. The absence of a system for collecting, processing and storing statistical data and current information has always been one of the main impediments for the objective evaluation of education.

The territorial-administrative reform underway has broken some educational management links (obsolete but still operational), without managing to create and put into operation new structures. A clear decentralization of functions within the mandatory basic education to the district and local public administration authorities level has not been accomplished so far.

It is necessary to organize training courses for staff both at ministry level and at district educational directorates level, as well as for educational institutions' personnel.

For the insurance of a constant and objective evaluation of the program's efficiency nationwide, it is essential that a Coordinating Council be established at national level, as well as a working group which will carry out evaluation on site in common with the local authorities, will collect the necessary information and prepare the respective document. With a view to this, the working group should be provided with the necessary premises and equipment.

One of the future challenges would be increasing awareness of the entire society with respect to education problems in general, and mandatory general education problems in particular. This will require a number of publicity activities meant to shed light on these issues, which involve the mass media services, as well as the optimal use of the educational system's current resources - teaching staff, pupils, educational publications, the informational network of the educational system, etc.

The attainment of educational objectives depends on the parameters that will be met in terms of equity and equal learning opportunities, education quality, organization of a democratic, open and flexible educational system, where everyone could fully develop individual abilities. An educational system can be considered fair and efficient if all the diverse channels and levels of education offered are able to cater to every student's needs and interests, so as to secure his / her future success.

The establishment of a participatory educational system, attraction of extra-budgetary financing sources, increasing local communities' accountability, are just a few of the possible solutions for ensuring social equity. It is extremely important that the state determine the priority education areas and use the budget to eliminate the growing cultural and economic differences between the urban and rural population.

Social Awareness, Political Will, National Opportunities

As for these three basic aspects (social awareness, political will and national opportunities), it seems that our society has to make considerable efforts for a long period of time in order to attain at least the 90's rate of mandatory educational enrolment. Today, economic conditions that directly influence the existence and development of our society have worsened dramatically. Addressing these problems has become a priority, social and educational problems remaining in their shadow. As long as the economy does not rebound, and in the labor market there is sufficient well trained human capital, the latter will not require any efforts from the educational system, nor will they help train and prepare a new generation of qualified workers.

Taking into consideration the increasing importance and need for basic education, at the moment, social awareness is going through a positive quantitative change, more and more people expressing their concern for and interest in this level of education. Gradually parents change their views on the level and quality of their children's education. Sometimes despite very low incomes, parents do their best to cover the costs of a better level and quality of studies, so that their children can receive higher quality education.

Given the disastrous economic situation, the Government spares no effort to ensure the achievement of educational objectives. In this connection could be mentioned several provisions of the Education Law (referring to the maximum number of pupils in the classroom, public spending on education relative to GDP, low wages of teaching staff, etc.), as well as a series of normative and legislative acts subsequently adopted, among which the Public Program for Education Development. To our regret, political and economic instability did not permit the establishment of efficient mechanisms that would guarantee the enforcement of the Education Law provisions.

In comparison with the outstanding progress made in certain fields of the educational system, there are numerous major problems that require urgent solving: creating a multi-channel system for education financing, upgrading the educational management, revising the concept of initial teaching staff training, establishing an efficient assessment system.

At present, real possibilities to straighten out the situation do exist. This would require the revision of the current distribution system of goods produced in the society. The creation of an efficient mechanism for tax collection and subsidizing of persons in extreme need and not of those who "deserve it" would somewhat remedy the existing situation.

General Success Evaluation

1. The transition to market economy in the Republic of Moldova has a negative impact on the social sector, including education.
2. After 1990, the national economy is in decline, and the population is increasingly poor.
3. Poverty is aggravated by the system of revenue distribution within the society, which does not contribute to social equity.
4. Cultural and economic differences between urban and rural population are more and more noticeable.
5. These factors hinder the attainment of the main educational objective – ensuring equal learning opportunities for all categories of population.

6. Although the transition to market economy determined the foundation of the first private educational institutions (which does not always mean extra-budgetary funding, but mostly parents' contribution), mandatory general education remains the responsibility of the state with its tight budget.
7. So far government statements concerning priority education areas (including mandatory general education) have not been put into practice in terms of public spending redistribution.
8. Although the first attempts to support the educational system are being made, these extra-budgetary resources are not properly managed, moreover there is no efficient mechanism to attract them.
9. Social protection of children from disadvantaged families remains one of the most pressing issues of the society.
10. No mechanisms ensuring an active participation of the whole society have been created to address a number of topical education issues.
11. Some mechanisms of ensuring school attendance have been seriously damaged and require substantial resources to be restored: school transport, lodging, school food, school medical services.
12. School management needs ongoing upgrading and training in order to assign staff and distribute materials with a view to solving priority education areas problems.
13. As to the curriculum, textbooks and assessment, real progress has been made in terms of quality. At the same time, the mandatory general education structure is not sufficiently differentiated, so as to meet the very diverse educational needs of the school age population.
14. Increasing awareness of all members of the society to the fact that the need for and importance of the mandatory general education remains a desideratum in our society.

3.2. PRIORITY EDUCATION AREAS AND ISSUES REQUIRING URGENT ADDRESSING

1. *Increasing the efficiency of the educational management in the context of the territorial-administrative reform.* The educational management component is not covered by any project or set of activities. The distribution of functions and responsibilities among central authorities (ministries and departments) and vertical delegation – to districts, mayor's offices and communes constitute one of the main objectives of the education reform.
2. *Forecast and organization of the educational services market for different categories of beneficiaries.* At present, educational services provided by private institutions, as well as by public ones, are increasingly competitive and meet the growing demand of diverse services. The study of the educational services market (marketing) will allow the planning and organizing of an educational system that is efficient, cheap, but of high quality, and in line with the current and projected requirements of the labor market.
3. *Creation of the legislative and normative framework for organizing activities that would support school attendance.* The widening of the gap between the urban and the rural population from economic and cultural point of view, reduces the equal learning opportunities of children from villages, which represent around 60% of the school age

population. Therefore, a growing number of these children remains outside of the educational system without receiving the necessary training to cope with the labor market's requirements. Ensuring school attendance through other means – school transport, school medical services, school food program, optional courses depending on students interests – will contribute to the creation of premises for basic education, essential to social integration.

4. *Organizing commercial activities by educational institutions.* Currently, the transition to market economy imposes the allocation of limited resources for education, especially for expenditures that are not directly related to the educational process, which makes educational institutions search for extra-budgetary resources. Pushing schools into the market economy to generate extra-budgetary revenues is one of the main directions of the reform, contributing to the formation of competitive teaching bodies capable of providing quality educational services for the labor market, a great deal of expenses being covered by the labor market itself.

5. *Development and implementation of the concept on vocational education and training standards.* In order to prepare competitive qualified specialists for both the domestic and foreign markets, it is essential to train them in line with the standards of the European market.

6. *External evaluation of education from the cost–benefits versus quality perspective.* To promote a genuine, global reform, synchronized at all levels, steps and fields, it is necessary to objectively assess the current state of the education system. An objective evaluation of the system could be carried out only by an external impartial and professional team, especially when it comes to investments, cost-benefits versus quality. This will allow to plan real future activities within specific time limits.

7. *Use of new informational technologies for the implementation of new educational technologies.* The implementation of the new curriculum and of the concept on formative education requires the usage of new educational technologies (teaching – learning - assessment), which involve modern informational technologies. The batch of 10 000 computers installed in educational establishments are inefficiently used, approximately 20 % – 30 % of the available time. Computers can and should be used more efficiently by the teaching staff, which would lead to the increase in time for each subject and would enhance the quality of training.

8. *Organizing education and career guidance.* Education and career guidance activities are virtually missing, which makes it difficult for pupils to choose the future specialty or field of activity.

9. *Establishing a distance learning system.* Only the concept of distance learning has been devised. Its implementation would allow broader access to all levels of studies, in optimal terms, and with minimal costs.

10. *Creation of a national school performance assessment, separately from the teaching – learning process.* The separation of the assessment system from the teaching-learning process constitutes one of the most efficient mechanisms for significantly increasing the quality of training, for promoting competitive institutions and teaching staff. The separation would also permit the reduction of expenditures by providing assessment on a fee payment basis.

11. *Creation and management of the education informational system.* Knowing the actual state of affairs at all levels of the education system will permit to rapidly make the

decision. That could be the creation of the education informational system which will grant everyone access to the Ministry's database, but also the creation of an informational space in the education area.

12. *Creation of centers providing psycho-pedagogical services.* The market demands increasingly diverse educational services that cannot be offered by public institutions.

13. *Developing a complex medical, social and psycho-pedagogical program for the identification, support and rehabilitation of pupils from risk groups.* Children from risk groups are always a concern for the entire society, as well as for the education system. Postponing taking measures for this category of pupils can result in a steep increase in costs, still their efficiency being quite limited.

14. Creation of a mechanism to support gifted children, especially those from disadvantaged families.

15. Establishing of priority education areas, creation of a participatory educational system with logistical and material support by means of involving local communities.

Creation of mechanisms for ensuring social equity with respect to access to education.

Designing and implementation of a program on repetition and drop-out prevention.

16. *Creation of a system of training content, textbooks, equipment, school furniture evaluation.*

17. Development and implementation of an efficient multi-channel mechanism for education financing.

18. Differentiation of channels under the mandatory general education to meet different options as to levels, varieties and complex interests of students.

19. Improvement of the textbook supply mechanism, especially the provision of books for children from disadvantaged families.

CONCLUSIONS

In the context of schools' organizational analysis, I believe that the main change required as to the approach to school activities' organization is shifting focus to school level. This way, the headmaster would be able to elaborate a staff development policy for the school that he/she runs. A school-centered staff development program would be definitely necessary. Certainly, this does not exclude the existence of centralized interactive relations, based on the main school reform measures, the reform being integrated for all schools.

However, to avoid excessive centralization, red-tape and standardization of development strategies for school units or district educational systems, which could lead to already known and often outdated problems and issues discouraging schools' activity, strategies must be established based on the needs and priorities of each region. This does not mean that schools should be self-sufficient in terms of needs and resources, but it would be fair if school development strategies were focused.