

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN FRANCE

PRIMARY LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Primary level education is taught in nursery schools and primary schools.

- Nursery school

Pre-primary education (nursery school) created in 1881 is for children aged 3 to 6.

Although it is not compulsory, **virtually all 3-year-old children attend nursery school**, the majority in the public school system. With a dual educational and pedagogical objective,

children learn how to live among others, shape their own personality and develop language skills. Nursery school is the **strong point of the French education system and what sets**

it apart from other systems. It also makes primary education more effective. Nursery school teachers have the same training as primary school teachers and can teach in all primary education grades.

- Primary school

Primary school is compulsory for all students, French and foreign alike, starting at age six. It is for children from aged six to 11. It aims to teach children some degree of autonomy and the basics about citizenship.

SECONDARY LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Secondary level of education includes lower and higher secondary schools.

- Lower secondary education (*collège*)

Children aged 11 to 15 attend *collège*, taking them from form 6 (*sixième*) to form 3 (*troisième*). *Collèges* are considered comprehensive because theoretically children study the same core curriculum. A diploma awarded upon the successful completion of an exam at the end of form 3 marks the conclusion of *collège*.

- Higher secondary education (*lycée*)

Adolescents aged 15 to 18 attend the *lycée*, taking them from form 2 (*seconde*) to their final year (*terminale*). *Lycées* offer a large range of education and training possibilities.

There are **two types** of *lycées*. General and technical education *lycées* culminate in a "general series" *baccalauréat*.

Vocational *lycées* culminate in a *certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* (CAP- which sanctions training in a specific vocational skill), a *brevet d'études professionnelles* (BEP - which sanctions the completion of adequate training within a range of technical skills in a particular trade, industrial, commercial or social field) or a "vocational" *baccalauréat*. For more information see the "vocational education" section below.

- The *baccalauréat*

Created in 1808, the *baccalauréat* is a diploma in the French education system that has two special features. **It marks the successful conclusion of secondary studies and opens access to higher education.**

Source : French Ministry of Foreign Affairs



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HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education entails all studies after the *baccalauréat*.

Two systems exist side by side:

- **An open system in the universities.** Most students study under this system. All *baccalauréat* holders have the right to enter this system without any prior selection procedure. Universities offer an extremely wide range of studies;
- **A selective system with a limited number of places.** Admission is by competitive examination, entrance examination or applications, sometimes accompanied by an interview. This is the system in use in post-secondary establishments such as the *instituts d'études politiques* (political science institutes), engineering and business schools, *instituts universitaires de technologie* (IUTs- university institutes of technology) and the *instituts universitaires professionnalisés* (IUPs – university institutes of vocational education) and “top tier” establishments such as the *grandes écoles*, (prestigious higher education institutions with competitive entrance exams) such as the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* (ENA – which trains top civil servants) the *écoles normales supérieures* (ENS - which prepare students specializing in fundamental or applied scientific research to teach at university level and preparatory programs for entrance examinations to the *grandes écoles*) and Polytechnique. These institutions mainly train public-sector and private-sector senior and middle leaders and managers.

INITIAL VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Initial vocational training or the vocational track offers concrete studies in relation with enterprises and their trades so that students can gain knowledge and expertise in an occupational field. After completing form 3, students can study in a vocational *lycée* to obtain a CAP or a BEP in two years. Students enrolled in initial vocational training courses can obtain a degree quickly to help them integrate into working life.

EDUCATION FOR SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

Some students have special educational needs because of their physical disabilities, language and health problems, but also if they have severe learning difficulties. There are structures that respond to these students' needs which work to integrate them into mainstream schools.

Source : French Ministry of Foreign Affairs