



The Swedish School System

The Swedish public school system is made up of compulsory and non-compulsory schooling. Compulsory schooling includes regular compulsory school, Sami school, special school, and programs for pupils with learning disabilities. Non-compulsory schooling includes the preschool class, upper secondary school, upper secondary school for pupils with learning disabilities, municipal adult education, and adult education for adults with learning disabilities.

All education throughout the public school system is free. There is usually no charge to students or their parents for teaching materials, school meals, health services or transport.

The Education Act

According to the Swedish Education Act, all children and youths shall have equal access to education. All children shall enjoy this right, regardless of gender, where they live, or social or economic factors. The Education Act states that the education shall “provide the pupils with knowledge and, in co-operation with the homes, promote their harmonious development into responsible human beings and members of the community.” Consideration shall also be given to students with special needs.

The Education Act also extends the right of education to adults. This can be provided through municipally run adult education (Komvux), or in adult education for adults with learning disabilities (Särvux).

Responsibility and governance

The curriculum, national objectives and guidelines for the public education system are laid down by Swedish Parliament and Government. The federal budget provides municipalities with a sum of money to carry out the various municipal activities.

Within the objectives and framework established by Government and Parliament, the individual municipality may determine how its schools are to be run. A local school plan describing the funding, organization, development and evaluation of school activities shall be adopted. Using the approved curriculum, national objectives and the local school plan, the principal of each school draws up a local work plan. This shall be done in consultation with the school's teachers and other personnel.

The National Agency for Education shall evaluate, follow up and supervise the public school system in Sweden. Every three years, the National Agency for Education presents a current overview of the school system to Government and Parliament. This forms the basis of a national development plan for schools. The National Agency for Education has a supervisory role to ensure that the provisions of the Education Act are being complied with and that the rights of the individual student are respected.

The school year

The school (academic) year normally begins at the end of August and runs to the beginning of June the following year, comprising a total of about 40 weeks. The regular school week is five days long, Monday through Friday. A longer holiday of just over two weeks is taken from around the 20th December to the beginning of January.

Preschool Class

Municipalities are obligated to provide a place in a preschool class for all children beginning the fall term of the year the child turns 6. The preschool class program shall comprise a minimum of 525 hours per year and stimulate the learning and development of each child, as well as lay the foundations for continued schooling.

How the preschool class is arranged may differ between municipalities. Most often, it is organized and located in connection to a compulsory school, leisure-time centre and/or preschool.

Compulsory Education

Included in compulsory schooling are the regular compulsory school, Sami school, special school, and programs for pupils with learning disabilities. The 9-year compulsory school program is for all children between the ages of 7-16 years. Upon the request of the parents, a child may begin school one year earlier, at the age of 6.

Sami children can receive education in Sami School that covers grades 1-6. This schooling corresponds to the first 6 years of compulsory school. Special schools offer a 10-year program for the deaf and hard of hearing. Programs for pupils with learning disabilities include compulsory school and training school for pupils with severe learning disabilities.

Upper Secondary Education

Almost all compulsory school students continue on directly to upper secondary school and the majority of these complete their upper secondary education in 3 years.

Upper secondary education is divided into 17 national 3-year programs. All of the programs shall offer a broad general education and basic eligibility to continue studies at the post-secondary level. Alongside the national programs, are also a number of specially designed- and individual study programs.

Upper secondary education for the learning disabled offers vocational training in the form of national-, specially designed- or individual programs, similar to those of regular upper secondary. The national programs for the learning disabled are however fewer in number and specially oriented to vocational training. Upper secondary programs for the learning disabled are 4 years in length.

Adult Education

A person has the right to begin an upper secondary education in a regular upper secondary school up until the year he/she has turns 20. After that, there are different types of municipally run adult education programs. Among these are municipal adult education (Komvux) and education for adults with learning disabilities (Särvux). Komvux and Särvux are basic education, corresponding to compulsory school and programs for pupils with learning disabilities, respectively, and non-compulsory education, corresponding to regular upper secondary and upper secondary courses for pupils with learning disabilities, respectively.

Komvux also offers continuing education programs, that give specialized skills in a particular occupational field.

The Swedish Agency for Flexible Learning serves as a complement to municipal adult programs for people who are unable to study in the town or community where they live. Part of the program is done by distance, in addition to students making regular visits to the school for teacher-directed instruction. The Agency for Flexible Learning has schools in Norrköping and Härnösand.

Swedish for immigrants (SFI) is designed to provide newcomers with a knowledge of the Swedish language and Swedish society. Municipalities have an obligation to offer SFI to new adult immigrants. SFI programs may be organized in different ways depending on the municipality.

University and Post-secondary Education

More than one third (38 %) of students continue on to study at the post-secondary level within three years of completing upper secondary school (2001). Universities and institutions of higher education offer students specific programs or individual courses of study. Most universities and post-secondary institutions in Sweden are state-run, and are located in more than 20 towns and cities across the country.

The right to choose one's school and independent schools

Most children attend a municipal school close to their home. However, students and their parents have the right to choose another municipal school, or a privately run (independent) school. About 4 % of compulsory school students attend one of the country's approved independent schools (2001).

Independent schools are open to everyone and must be approved by the National Agency for Education. The municipality in which the student resides pays the school a per student/per year grant. The education of independent schools shall have the same basic objectives as municipal schools, but may have a profile that distinguishes it from the municipal school. For example, schools may have a particular religious character or use a special educational approach such as Montessori or Waldorf. If an independent school does not comply with applicable regulations, the National Agency for Education may withdraw its approval.

Independent schools above the compulsory school level can be one of two kinds: those that correspond to municipal upper secondary, i.e., those that offer upper secondary programs and receive municipal grants, or those that offer supplementary programs. Among the latter, are schools with programs in fine arts and handicrafts.

In addition to the types of schools mentioned, there are also a number of international schools in Sweden that receive partial government funding. These schools are intended primarily for the children of foreign nationals whose stay in Sweden is temporary.