

## 2.4 GERMAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

### ? FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- How does a nation prepare its children for the future?
- What skills and knowledge are necessary to become active citizens in an ever-changing interdependent global society?
- How are schools organized to meet the needs of a society?

**STANDARD #1 CULTURE.**

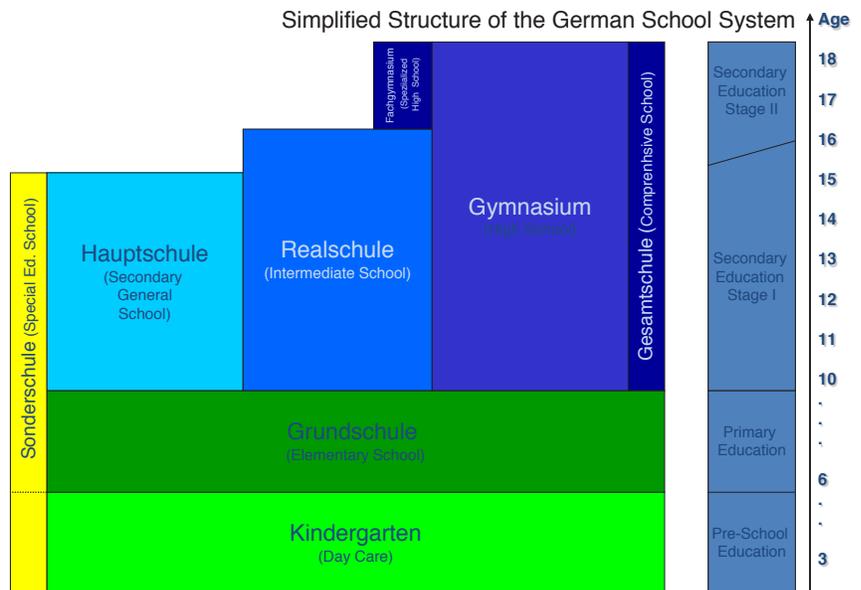
**STANDARD #5 INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS AND INSTITUTIONS.**

### LESSON OVERVIEW:

This lesson is focused on the educational system of Germany and in particular, the organization of schools to meet the needs of the society. The students will be able to compare their school setting with that of contemporaries in different parts of Germany. They will read about the challenges that German students face in their schools and the different paths that students may follow in their education, either culminating in attending a university, or vocational school, or preparing for a career through an apprenticeship program. They will have the opportunity to participate in a simulation that will highlight the differences between education in Germany and that of the United States.

### TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Like all nations of the world, Germany is challenged by meeting higher standards so that its students can be more competitive in international measures of performance, such as the PISA studies (<http://www.oecd.org/pisa/>). As Germany experiences an increased pluralism, the educational program, which, like the United States is the responsibility of each the sixteen federal states, has had to undergo changes to meet greater diversity. In addition, as a member of the European Union, Germany is required to alter its educational program to meet EU criteria. Other Nations have been critical of the decision that students and their families must make early (as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> grade) in a German student's career as to which of the traditional three-tiered secondary schools the student will attend, which, in many cases, will determine his/her future. School-reform may alter this traditional structure and institute a system with greater egalitarianism and flexibility. Before beginning this lesson, the teacher may want to become more familiar with the German educational system by reading the German Education Instructional Resources (**Handout 2.4.4 on Instructional Resource Disc**) and the German Education System PowerPoint (**PowerPoint 2.4.2 on Instructional Resource Disc**), some of which may be used with the students.



**TIME:****(2-3) 45 minute class periods****INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES:**

- Model Timetables - Berlin, Schwerin and Freiburg (**Handout 2.4.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- The German Education System PowerPoint (**PowerPoint 2.4.2 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- Teacher PowerPoint Resource: The German Education System (**Handout 2.4.3 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- German Education Instructional Resources (**Handout 2.4.4 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- *Failing Grade: Three-Tiered System Hinders Turk's Success* Article (**Handout 2.4.5 on Instructional Resource Disc**)

**PROCEDURE:****DAY 1:**

**Anticipatory Set:** Students should highlight their school experiences. Since they are immersed in the life of an American high school student, they will use their own experiences as a frame of reference in this lesson. The teacher might give the students the following direction: if you had to describe the American school system, what are three features that stand out?

Next, the teacher should introduce the German education system by sharing the weekly schedule/timetables of *Gymnasium* students in Berlin, Schwerin and Freiburg (**Handout 2.4.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**) and asking them to compare and contrast the subjects and frequency of instruction with their own schedules. Next, the teacher should point out that these are students in a *Gymnasium* and that there are other “tiers.” The teacher should either show parts of the German Education System PowerPoint (**PowerPoint 2.4.2 on Instructional Resource Disc**) or distribute the German Education Instructional Resources (**Handout 2.4.4 on Instructional Resource Disc**) and discuss the other school tiers (*Hauptschule* and *Realschule*). Students should reflect on the different system and discuss how it is similar and different from their own educational program. The teacher might want to ask students to participate in a role-play activity as a twelve year old German and his/her parents planning the students’ educational future. How would this be different from a similar conversation between the American student and his/her parents?

For homework, the teacher should assign *Failing Grade: Three-Tiered System Hinders Turks’ Success* by Kateylyn Kerkhove (**Handout 2.4.5 on Instructional Resource Disc**).

**DAY 2:**

Using the homework reading as a starting point, the teacher should facilitate a discussion of the challenges that German education faces and relate this to the problems of American education, too. Who else has difficulties in schools in Germany and the United States besides immigrant populations and at-risk students?

**WHOLE GROUP REFLECTION:**

- The teacher should ask the students to summarize the challenges in German and American schools today and propose ways to improve schools to better prepare students to become productive citizens.

**EXTENSIONS:**

- Another approach would be to focus on student life in German high schools and share the following information for discussion:
  - Every Bundesland has its own school system (as each state has its own system in the US).
  - Most subjects (except PE, art, sciences, music and the subjects which are taught in courses, like French) are taught in the pupils' own classroom (similar to a "home room"); the pupils stay in their room whilst the teachers move from class to class.
  - In German state schools, class periods are exactly 45 minutes. Each subject is usually taught for two to three periods every week (main subjects like mathematics, German or foreign languages are taught for four to six periods) and usually no more than two periods consecutively. Exams (which are always supervised) are usually essays, rather than multiple choice.
  - At every type of school, students study one world language, usually for at least five years. In the *Gymnasium*, they will study other languages, too.
  - Schools in Germany usually do not have sports teams. Students join community sports clubs to compete athletically.
  - All secondary students in Germany are required to take a religion or ethics class each year.
  - In-class technology is not as widespread as in the United States.
  - At the end of their schooling, *Gymnasium* students take a cumulative written and oral examination called the *Abitur*. This exam in four key subjects, serves as both a high school exit and college entrance exam.
- Students could prepare a multi-media presentation comparing/contrasting aspects of the German and American high school experiences.
- Through the Transatlantic Outreach Program (TOP), the teacher may inquire about ways to connect with a German high school and begin a cross-cultural dialogue either using video conferencing or social networking software.