

# The Swedish Education System

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A BRIEF OVERVIEW



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# My bias

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Stockholm/capital bias

- less focus on countryside issues

Background in both public and private education

High school-heavy information

# School and society

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Highly politicized relationship between school and society

- the basic tenet: equal education to everyone regardless of social class or background
  - Tension between the tenet and the reality of teaching
  - Adapting and including

Top-down approach is the most common route to change

- government agencies publish recommendations and guidelines

Educate a highly specialized workforce

# The welfare market

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The Swedish school system is a *welfare market*

i.e. competition between schools and a possibility to make a profit on education

Main difference between private and public schools

- private can even be on the stock market and make a profit
- public schools are not allowed to make a profit (or lose money)

# The welfare market

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Competition between schools:

- schools compete about students (since funds are attached to the individual student)

Grounds for competition:

- education 'flavors'
- grades
- social environment
- geographic environment

# The welfare market

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Profit in schools: two viewpoints

1. Problematic relationship with society's funds/taxes

- students should receive an equivalent education

2. Schools are run more efficiently

- students should be allowed to choose their education

# Guiding principles: part 1: Overview

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Admission-free, comprehensive and compulsory 10 year education

- Mandatory term limits: at least 178 days, at most 190 days – from August to June

Municipality-financed

- schools receive a certain amount of money for each student
- the more students, the more money
- municipalities distribute the funds
- high school: varies from 72 000 SEK per year to 170 000 SEK per year and per student

Public and private actors

- Public: municipality
- Private: different education 'companies'
  - Some for profit; some are not

# Guiding principles: part 2: National level

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## National curriculum

- from pre-school to adult education
- changes roughly every 15-20 years: latest two: 1994 and 2011

## School law

- code of law that all schools and parents must obey
- ten years of compulsory and admission-free education written in the school law

## Recommendations and guidelines from government agencies

- how to evaluate students' performances and grade students

# Guiding principles: part 3: Supervision

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Government agencies that regulate and supervise education

- Skolverket (National agency for education)
- Skolinspektionen (Swedish school inspectorate)
- Each of them oversees education to ensure all students receive equal education throughout the country

# Guiding principles: part 4: National tests

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## Government issued tests

- Schools are required to administer them on specific days
- All schools in Sweden complete them simultaneously
- Aim to ensure that all students have received the same education in accordance with the national curriculum for the subject

## Pro:

- A way for teachers to discuss and sync grading of students' performances

## Con:

- stressful situation for teachers and students

# Preschool

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A way to ensure that all parents can work and have kids

From 1 year old to school-age (six-year-olds)

Public and private and co-operate options

Fee: based on the income of the household – but there's a ceiling for the maximum fee

- Salary ceiling: 46 080 SEK (roughly 4400 Euro) – 3% (max 1382 SEK); then it decreases

National curriculum that governs what children should learn in preschool

- turn-taking

- social skills

- basic math

- basic knowledge in reading (decoding)

# Lower compulsory school

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Year 0-5

National curriculum

Mandatory attendance

– violation of law if pupils do not attend school

Free school choice – principle of nearest school

School hours: roughly 08:10-14:00/15:00

Subjects:

- Swedish, English, Math, Science, Social science, Physical education, Crafts (knitting and woodshop)

# Upper compulsory school

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Year 6-9

Mandatory attendance

Grades: (F-A) – new system since 2011

Two encompassing national syllabi:

- 4-6: ends with grades in year 6

- 7-9: ends with grades in year 9

- however: grades after each term – sub-targets to the final grades of year 9

Subjects: Swedish, English, Math, Science (chemistry, physics, biology, technology), Social science (government, geography, history, religion), PE, Home economics, Crafts (knitting/woodshop), modern languages (Spanish, French, German)

# Upper compulsory school

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End of year 9:

- all students' final grades are compared according to a numerical system
- the higher your grades, the more choices you have available for attending high school
- significant pressure on students to perform well in year 9
- significant pressure on teachers to ensure that students perform well in year 9
- grades are both cumulative and year specific – grading can become murky

# High school/upper secondary school

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Not a mandatory school form

Three years

- however: if you are enrolled in a high school you have to attend it
- students are paid a government study grant: 1250 SEK (roughly 125 Euro)
  - If attendance drops, the grant is either withheld or you have to repay parts of it

Students study courses instead of subjects

- change of perspective
  - upper compulsory school: three years of studies and then final grade
  - High school: final grades after each course

# High school/upper secondary school

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Two over-arching choices/programs:

- Vocational programs
- Theoretical programs

Vocational:

- schools which prepare students for a specific profession
- does not entitle students to higher education (college/university)

Theoretical

- schools which prepare students for higher education (college/university)

# High school/upper secondary school

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## Programs:

- national programs – that may vary from school to school
- a set of courses which constitute a high school degree
- a course can be worth 50, 100 or 150 points – 1 point equals about 1 hour of supervised teaching
- each program is divided into:
  - A core set of courses which are the same for all students regardless of school or program (such as Swedish, English, Math, PE)
  - A set of program-specific courses
  - A set of specialized courses
  - A set of individualized courses

# High school/upper secondary school

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## Courses:

- a national syllabus for each course
  - Guidelines for:
    - Grading
    - Content
    - Aim of the course
- courses run parallel during the school-year
  - First year: roughly 8 parallel courses
  - Second year: roughly 10 parallel courses
  - Third year: roughly 7 parallel courses

# High school degree

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In order to receive a high school degree a student needs to have

- 2250 out of 2500 high school points
- Passing grades in:
  - Swedish
  - English
  - Math
  - Final project
- 2250 points worth of courses

# Vocational programs

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Fewer theoretical courses – focus on becoming proficient in a profession

APL: work-placement training/learning

- a way to practically get to know your future profession
- a way to be hired after high school

Specialization courses: for higher professional proficiency

Various kinds of professions: construction, childcare, transportation, electronics

Higher education?

- add courses during high school or attend adult education after high school

# Theoretical programs

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Aims to prepare students for higher education

Although: not all programs grant the possibility to apply to all fields of higher education

- some are comprehensive and cover all fields
- some are specific and cover partial fields

For instance:

- natural science program / natural science with a focus on astronomy
- arts program / game graphics

# Adult education

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There are different forms of adult education:

- Komvux: if you failed to receive a high school degree, you may redo high school (or the courses you failed) in order to receive a high school diploma
- Adult vocational studies:
  - Short term and specific education
  - Usually there is a term fee
  - Selling-point: a job after finishing the course
- Folkuniversitetet (People's university):
  - Courses to enrich your everyday life
  - Music, language, arts etc.
  - There's a course fee as well

# SFI: Swedish for immigrants

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Courses which aim to help immigrants learn Swedish faster

All courses are free

Different levels of proficiency

Ensuring that all immigrants have basic proficiency of Swedish

# Higher education

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Free higher education

Study grants: 791 SEK/79 Euro per week for a full-time student

Student loan: 1820 SEK/180 Euro per week for a full-time student

University or college

Three ways to apply:

- using your high school grades (grades into numerical value)
- national university enrollment exam
- work-experience

# Challenges

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Segregation

Profits in welfare

Post-pandemic knowledge debt – and post-pandemic attendance

# Questions

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