

Overview of K-12 Schooling in Denmark

I. Structure of the Education System

A. The Education Index, published with the UN's Human Development Index in 2008, based on data from 2006, lists Denmark as 0.993, amongst the highest in the world for quality of education, tied for first with Australia, Finland and New Zealand.¹

B. Schooling Options

1. The options for education in Denmark are public, private, homeschool, and youth schools, an alternative school form known as efterskole.²
2. 15.6% of all children at basic school level attend private schools, which is supported by the voucher system.¹ Vouchers in Denmark pay about 75% of the full cost of sending a child to private school.³

C. School Divisions

1. The six levels of school are kindergarten (ages 1-5), pre-school (6), primary/lower secondary (7-15), 10th grade (16), upper secondary (16-19), and higher education (19+).²
2. The Danish school system is organized into three distinct stages: day care for children from age 0-5, compulsory primary and lower secondary education for children from age 6-16, and upper secondary education for young people aged 16-19.⁴
3. Primary and lower secondary education for children ages 6-16 is compulsory.⁵
4. All children under the age of 16 have access to tuition-free government Folkeskole (public school).⁵

D. Grading and Calendar

1. The school year lasts 200 days of the year, and the grading system is either a 7 point scale or pass/fail.⁵

E. Post-Folkeskole Education

1. About 82% of young people pursue further education after Folkeskole, which is the school years from age six to fifteen/sixteen.¹

¹ Glavin, Chris. "Education in Denmark." *K12 Academics*, Easton Country Day School, 26 Jan. 2017, www.k12academics.com/Education%20Worldwide/education-denmark.

² "Education in Denmark." *International Schools and the Education System in Denmark | InterNations GO!*, 24 Apr. 2020, www.internations.org/go/moving-to-denmark/education.

³ "Vouchers Rule In Denmark." *Frontier Centre For Public Policy*, 3 Dec. 1999, fcpp.org/1999/12/06/vouchers-rule-in-denmark/.

⁴ OECD (2016), "School education in Denmark", in *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Denmark 2016*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264262430-5-en>.

II. Government Programs

- A. The Ministry of Children, Gender Equality, Integration and Social Affairs steers Early Childhood Education and Care, while the Ministry of Education steers compulsory and post-compulsory education.⁵
- B. In November 2011, the government released a program entitled *A Denmark that Stands Together*, which established the key priorities for education, such as improving early childhood education and care and reforming primary and lower secondary schools in cooperation with teachers and parents.⁶
- C. Denmark aims to set clearer and more measurable goals for its education system that will be followed up by annual status reports, as part of the 2013 reform of Danish public schools.⁶
- D. The program stated that by 2020, 95% of a cohort should achieve an upper secondary education, 60% of a cohort should achieve a tertiary education, and 25% of a cohort should achieve a long tertiary education.⁷
- E. In June 2015, the newly elected government administration published a new government program with the name Together for the Future, which focused on improving day care by emphasizing smoother transitions from day care to early childhood education and care/preschool and by placing day care under the responsibility of the Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality.⁵

III. Gymnasium in Denmark

- A. Gymnasium offers a 3-year general academically-oriented upper secondary program which builds on the 9th-10th form of the Folkeskole and leads to the upper secondary school exit examination.¹
- B. In order to be admitted to the first year of the Gymnasium, students must have completed the 9th year of primary school.¹
- C. When a student is admitted to a gymnasium, he or she chooses a specialized study program (“studieretning”) between a number of different programs with different subjects, and each school offers at least 4 different programs, with at least one focusing on mathematics and natural science, one focusing on foreign languages, and one focusing on social studies.¹
- D. Instruction is usually organized as a combination of lecture, group work, practical experiments, and homework.¹

⁵ “Education Policy Outlook: Denmark.” *OECD*, 2013, www.oecd.org/edu/policyoutlook.htm.

⁶ OECD (2016), “School education in Denmark”, in *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Denmark 2016*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264262430-5-en>.

⁷ OECD (2016), “School education in Denmark”, in *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Denmark 2016*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264262430-5-en>.

IV. Gammel Hellerup Gymnasium

- A. Originally a boys' school, Gammel Hellerup Gymnasium is a mixed school with more than 900 students from approximately 120 primary and lower secondary schools in Greater Copenhagen and 100 teaching and administrative staff.⁸
- B. Gammel Hellerup Gymnasium offers extracurricular activities such as sports, music and drama.⁹
- C. "The school aims at combining informality and an adult approach to education, thereby creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and a strong sense of community among students and staff."⁹

COVID-19 and Denmark Schools

I. Remote Learning

1. Denmark was among the first countries in Europe to impose a lockdown. Schools closed on March 12, 2020.¹⁰
2. Home learning, or "fjernundervisning," became the norm for Danish schools. Many schools, such as Skt. Josef's School, a Danish private school and international school with one-thousand students, began using Microsoft Teams to communicate with students.⁹
3. The government asked schools to provide emergency care, for example, if the parents worked in the health care system.⁹
4. One challenge that some schools faced was extreme traffic on many websites. One website was placing children in a queue, "You are 5835th in the queue, your waiting time is 11 minutes".⁹

II. Return to School

- A. As of April 15, 2020, the day Danish primary schools reopened, Denmark had reported 299 deaths and 6,681 positive cases, although many more were thought to be infected.¹⁰
- B. The Danish government made the decision to send children up to 11 years old back to school first.¹¹

⁸ "English." *Gammel Hellerup Gymnasium*, www.ghg.dk/international/english/.

⁹ Maher, Dom. *How Skt. Josef International School in Denmark Is Adapting to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Situation*, www.international-schools-database.com/news/how-skt-josef-international-school-denmark-is-adapting-to-coronavirus.

¹⁰ "Coronavirus: Denmark Lets Young Children Return to School." *BBC News*, BBC, 15 Apr. 2020, www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52291326.

¹¹ Fantini, Maria P., et al. "COVID-19 and the Re-Opening of Schools: A Policy maker's Dilemma." *Italian Journal of Pediatrics*, vol. 46, 2020, pp. 1-3. *ProQuest*, <http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/2414615371?accountid=14244>, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/libproxy.lib.unc.edu/10.1186/s13052-020-00844-1>.

- C. Denmark was the first country in Europe to send children back to schools and daycares.¹²
- D. Primary school children returned first in Denmark.¹³ Primary school reopening was prioritized “to address childcare for parents who need to return to work. Such an approach can be appealing to decision makers who believe young children are among the lowest-risk groups for both infection and transmission.”¹⁴
- E. Techniques to Avoid Spread
1. A system was in place to keep children in small groups with little to no contact with others.¹⁴
 2. Initially, elementary schools were limited to 10 students and one teacher, and many schools reassigned single-subject teachers to act as homeroom teachers so students would not need to move from class to class. Instead, they have one teacher that facilitates all subjects.¹⁵
 3. There was space to spread out in classrooms since most schools are structured where you have primary and lower secondary in the same school, and only primary school students were attending school initially.¹⁴
 4. Adopted measures include the creation of small groups of children for lessons and playtime, frequent hand washing (about once an hour), student desks spaced 6 feet apart, and classes held outside whenever possible.¹⁶
 5. There are no face masks- either for pupils or teachers.¹⁴
 6. Stengaard School in Denmark does not check temperature, but parents are told to keep their children home if they display any symptoms of COVID-19.¹⁶
- F. High school seniors did not return, as they had already met their graduation requirements.¹⁶
- G. Controversy
1. Parents of young students created a Facebook group to share reservations about their children’s return to school.¹⁴

¹² Mortensen, Andreas, and Nikolaj Skydsgaard. “Reopening Schools in Denmark Did Not Worsen Outbreak, Data Shows.” *Reuters*, 28 May 2020, www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-denmark-reopening/reopening-schools-in-denmark-did-not-worsen-outbreak-data-shows-idUSKB N2341N7.

¹³ Coughlan, Sean. “How Reopened Schools in Denmark Keep Children Safely Apart.” *BBC News*, BBC, 12 May 2020, www.bbc.com/news/education-52550470.

¹⁴ Bryant, Jake, et al. “Safely Back to School After Coronavirus Closures.” *McKinsey Insights*, Apr 29, 2020. *ProQuest*, <http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/2396019007?accountid=14244>.

¹⁵ Will, Madeline. “How Schools in Other Countries Have Reopened.” *Education Week*, 30 June 2020, www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/06/11/how-schools-in-other-countries-have-reopened.html.

¹⁶ Fantini, Maria P., et al. “COVID-19 and the Re-Opening of Schools: A Policy maker’s Dilemma.” *Italian Journal of Pediatrics*, vol. 46, 2020, pp. 1-3. *ProQuest*, <http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/2414615371?accountid=14244>, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/libproxy.lib.unc.edu/10.1186/s13052-020-00844-1>.

2. Parents are concerned that with primary schools reopening, children are being treated as guinea pigs.¹⁷
3. Some parents, concerned that students returning to school could cause a second wave, chose to keep their children at home.¹⁸

III. Result of Return

- A. After a month, the precautions taken during the return to school seem to be effective.¹⁹
- B. Based on five weeks' worth of data, health authorities are saying the reopening did not make the virus proliferate, according to a Reuters report.²⁰
- C. According to Peter Andersen, doctor of infectious disease epidemiology and prevention at the Danish Serum Institute, there have not been any negative effects from the reopening of schools.²¹
- D. The number of infected children ages 1-19 has declined steadily since late April, following a slight uptick immediately after the reopening of schools, although it was too early to have anything to do with the reopening. The uptick could be explained by an increase in tests performed.²²

¹⁷ Coughlan, Sean. "How Reopened Schools in Denmark Keep Children Safely Apart." *BBC News*, BBC, 12 May 2020, www.bbc.com/news/education-52550470.

¹⁸ Gronholt-Pedersen, Jacob. "Danish Parents Are Refusing to Send Their Children Back to School as COVID-19 Lockdown Lifts." *We Forum*, World Economic Forum, 17 Apr. 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-covid19-denmark-lockdown-school-education-children/>.

¹⁹ Fantini, Maria P., et al. "COVID-19 and the Re-Opening of Schools: A Policy maker's Dilemma." *Italian Journal of Pediatrics*, vol. 46, 2020, pp. 1-3. *ProQuest*, <http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/2414615371?accountid=14244>, doi:<http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/10.1186/s13052-020-00844-1>.

²⁰ Mortensen, Andreas, and Nikolaj Skydsgaard. "Reopening Schools in Denmark Did Not Worsen Outbreak, Data Shows." *Reuters*, 28 May 2020, www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-denmark-reopening/reopening-schools-in-denmark-did-not-worsen-outbreak-data-shows-idUSKBN2341N7.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*