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INFORMATION NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Council

Subject: Primary School as Whole-day School: A balanced, fair, efficient and sustainable education system

- Information from the Croatian delegation

Delegations will find attached an information note from the Croatian delegation on the above subject, which has been put on the agenda under 'Any other business' of the next Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting on 16 May 2023.

PRIMARY SCHOOL AS WHOLE-DAY SCHOOL: A balanced, fair, efficient and sustainable education system

Background note from the Croatian delegation

A NEEDS ASSESSMENT: DETERMINING AND ADDRESSING NEEDS

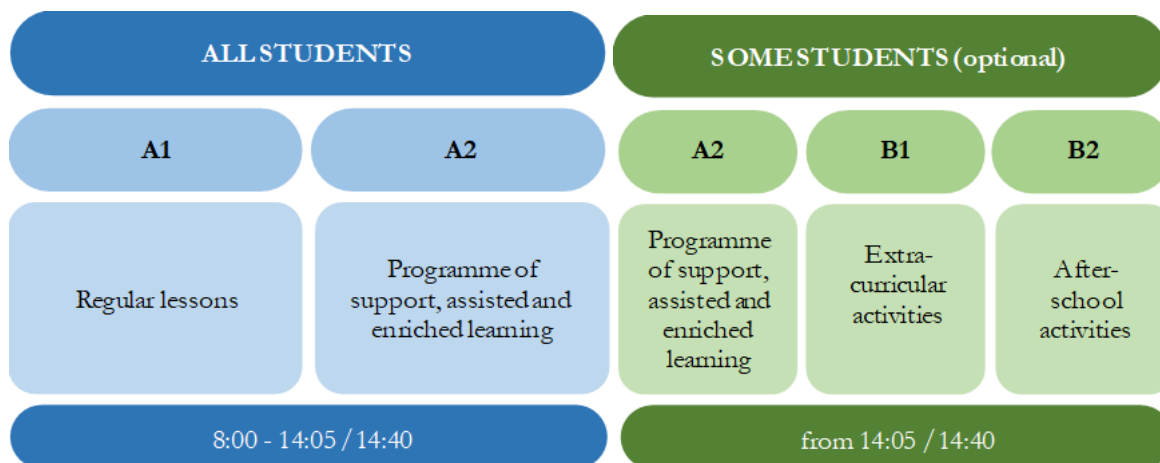
The primary education system in the Republic of Croatia has undergone numerous changes over the last thirty years. Indicators from various areas have shown that the implemented reforms have led to improving the effectiveness and quality of education. On the other hand, according to system monitoring and available indicators primary schools are still facing several challenges, such as:

- *Double-shift work in which 40% of schools still operate in two shifts, covering 60% of the total number of students and facing many educational and organizational shortcomings related to double-shift work.*
- *Below-average educational achievement and outcomes in key literacies (e.g. PISA).*
- *Visible differences in school achievements, educational outcomes, and education pathways among diverse groups of students, including a significant need to improve equality, equity and fairness in education in primary schools.*
- *Harmonizing Croatian primary schools with the EU average with regard to duration of compulsory instruction time in which all students participate (compulsory part).*
- *Improving initial teacher education (ITE) and continuous professional development (CPD).*

- *Designing and providing a new teaching framework, where teachers could have greater autonomy, flexibility, and new professional opportunities.*
- *Addressing a challenge of teachers' shortages through various initiatives: a substantial salary increase, a new primary school model as a frame for greater attractiveness of the teaching profession, and greater social recognition of teachers' work.*
- *Overcoming the existing curriculum challenges related to the overall framework, which should lead to greater curriculum flexibility.*
- *Insufficient autonomy in work of schools including schools' and teachers' reduced flexibility to adjust their work to the needs and interests of all students.*
- *Need for improving the system and practice related to students' educational transitions between different levels (ECEC to primary school; primary school to secondary school).*
- *Weak and not fully integrated system of student career counselling and career guidance as well as system targeted at gifted students in both school and out-of-school environments.*
- *Insufficiently developed national network of out-of-school care for children, as well as an insufficiently developed system of school and after-school activities for children.*
- *Regional differences within the country with regard to access to and availability of after-school care as well as structured educational programmes for children and parents/guardians.*

MEASURES AND CHANGES

The new framework and model of primary school as whole-day school (WDS) is composed of four education programmes (A1, A2, B1, B2), of which two (A programmes) are compulsory for all students, and two (B programmes) are elective and offered to those students and parents who wish to participate.



With a view to improving student outcomes within the WDS, specific changes have been introduced into the National Curriculum (A1 programme) – more instruction time for lessons in the Croatian Language, Mathematics, and Art at the in-class teaching level. Science lessons have been strongly reconceptualized through the new Science subject in primary schools, as subject-specific teaching used to be a practice. Physical activity and well-being of students will be strongly addressed through providing more instruction time for the Physical Education subject, and combining in-class teaching which implies using student physical activity in all subjects and domains and teaching provided by kinesiology teachers. The Information and Digital Competences subject will be complemented by the opportunity for new out-of-class activities through workshops, project work and extra-curricular activities. The technology facet of STEM education will be further highlighted.

The new A2 programme is a strong modernization element, which offers more time and opportunity for teachers and schools to differentiate and adapt teaching to heterogeneity in the class, at the same time providing extended opportunity for every student to develop their own potential. The A2 programme does not introduce new learning outcomes, but only provides more flexibility for all to achieve the existing outcomes and goals (as proposed by the A1 programme). The B1 and B2 programmes are offered to all students and parents and they are funded by the state. Extra-curricular activities for all students have been provided so that they would be accessible in all parts of the country and lead to better schools in every community.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

Through various supported measures, the WDS will be implemented in the first phase as a four-year pilot project, where all programmes, elements and activities will be prepared and externally evaluated. The full implementation of the WDS is expected as of the 2027/2028 school year in all primary schools. The WDS is expected to lead to better school achievement of all students, smaller social differences, better conditions for teachers' work, more modern and dynamic primary schools, better public services for all parents, improved well-being and quality of life for students, teachers and parents. It should transform the existing primary schools into new schools that provide education of better quality as well as education which is fair, efficient and part of a balanced and sustainable education system in Croatia, which has more commonalities with current European education systems.