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## **FRENCH NURSERY SCHOOLS IMPLEMENT CHANGES FOR SEPTEMBER 2015**

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- **Five teaching** categories give language acquisition a primary place.
- **Reorganized class time** takes into account children's natural rhythms.
- **Educational programs for children** under three have been increased.
- **A redesigned evaluation process** shares critical information with parents.

Following the enactment of a July 8, 2013 law to reform French schools, an important step took place this September with the implementation of a new nursery school program. Its main mission is to give children the desire to go to school to learn, and to affirm and develop their personality. This special time establishes the pedagogical foundations on which students' future education is built.

**“***We decided to carry out major educational reforms that give priority to primary school and early education,”* said French Education Minister Najat Vallaud-Belkacem. *“This fall we increased our efforts in this direction with the implementation of a new nursery school program, a reorganization of class time and increased educational services that enable the reception of children under three years old.”***”**

More than 900 new classes were created for this under-three age group since 2012.

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### **Nursery School Reconceived**

With the new school reform law, nursery school has been re-envisioned as the first step in guaranteeing the educational success of all pupils. The new program conceives of nursery school as a single cycle, which takes account of children's development and establishes a link between family and school. Learning modalities are organized around problem solving, drills

and memory exercises; play has a special place in learning at this stage. Nursery school also allows children to live and learn, providing a place to begin to acquire the principles of social life and allowing the child build an identity as an individual in a group.

## Reorganized Class Time Prioritizes Children's Natural Rhythms

For all schoolchildren, teaching time is now better distributed throughout the week to provide a better learning environment and foster success. For nursery school pupils, there are two important factors to consider:

- the biological rhythm of the child;
- the activities and schedules of their parents.

Better organization of schooltime for children, taking into account these two key elements, therefore helps to:

- reduce tension and fatigue of the child;
- establish a better quality of life at school;
- improve learning conditions.

## Lessons Organized Under Five Teaching Categories

Each of five teaching areas is essential to the development of the child and must find its place in students' daily schedule:

- all types of language usage;
- acting, expressing oneself, understanding through physical activity;
- acting, expressing oneself, understanding through artistic activities;
- starting to develop the tools to structure thoughts;
- exploring the world.

The primary place of language is affirmed as essential for the success of all. The practice of physical and artistic activities helps develop relations between actions, sensations, imagination, sensitivity and thought. The time devoted to structuring thoughts and exploring the world focuses on developing an initial understanding of numbers and mathematical tools, the children's environment and encouraging their curiosity. Nursery school helps children to order the world around them, and gives them access to knowledge that they will build on in elementary school.

## Resources to Help Teachers

To help the teaching staff put the new nursery school program in place, national and local training seminars are being held. The Ministry also produced teachers' resources on the needs of young children and the schooling of children under three years old. In addition, teachers received a digital book produced by Canopé, in the ePub format, which contains content of different types: text, images, audio commentaries, slide shows and videos.

## Redesigned Evaluation Process

To facilitate the continuity of students' education during the transition to elementary school, nursery school teachers pass on to elementary school teachers a summary of their students' achievements at the end of their nursery school education. Two tools are used to monitor learning and communicate student progress: a booklet that is updated throughout nursery school and a summary of the student's achievements, completed at the end of nursery school.

Both documents are shared with the student's parent or legal guardian.

Like the transmission of the monitoring booklet throughout nursery school, the summary informs parents of their child's educational progress. It presents an opportunity to interact positively with families. It also allows, if necessary, the opportunity to assure parents that the needs of their child will be addressed, so that the transition to elementary school can proceed smoothly.

For more information on nursery schools, consult these links:

<http://eduscol.education.fr/pid33040/programme-et-ressources-pour-le-cycle-1.html>

[http://cache.media.eduscol.education.fr/file/maternelle/49/9/2015\\_rythmes\\_maternelle\\_d\\_ocmaternelle\\_458499.pdf](http://cache.media.eduscol.education.fr/file/maternelle/49/9/2015_rythmes_maternelle_d_ocmaternelle_458499.pdf)

<http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid166/l-ecole-maternelle-organisation-programme-et-fonctionnement.html>

## Specific features of French Nursery Schools

- A service available to all children
- A service that is free for families
- Commitments by the state and local authorities in a non-compulsory part of schooling

## Key Figures

### In 2014

- **2,574,900** students enrolled in public or private nursery schools (Metropolitan France + French overseas departments, including Mayotte)
- **15,079** public nursery schools and 137 private nursery schools in France (Metropolitan France + French overseas departments, including Mayotte)

### Since 2012

- More than **900** new classes were created for this under-three age group since 2012.
- **500** nursery school jobs were created under the "More Teachers than Classrooms" initiative.

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If you would like more information about this topic, please contact the Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Research at +33 (0)1 55 55 30 10 or [spresse@education.gouv.fr](mailto:spresse@education.gouv.fr)