

# Kazakhstan

*Information and Analytical Center*

## Introduction

### Overview of Education System

In accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the State guarantees free compulsory secondary education<sup>a</sup> in public schools for all citizens.<sup>1</sup> For students who are unable to attend secondary education organizations due to health issues, free individual education is arranged at home or in organizations that provide inpatient care, restorative treatment, and medical rehabilitation. In locations with a small population, the functioning of small schools<sup>b</sup> (40.1 percent of the total number of public schools) is guaranteed to ensure equal access for students to secondary education.

The Kazakhstani education system is centralized. State policy on the development of education and key initiatives are formed and implemented by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES)<sup>c</sup> is responsible for the implementation of the unified State education policy and overall coordination of activities of local executive bodies of education. The MoES also facilitates cross-sector coordination; adopts standard curricula, admission, and assessment criteria for students and requirements for the structure and content of textbooks of primary, basic secondary, and general secondary education; ensures quality maintenance of services provided by educational organizations; and oversees the execution of State legislation and compulsory education standards.<sup>2</sup> The organization of the textbook examination for secondary education organizations, as well as methodological and scientific support of the education process (compulsory education standards, standard curriculum), belongs to the State monopoly.

Local representative bodies in regions are responsible for implementation of the State education policy. They also provide the material and technical support for State educational organizations; carry out education monitoring; develop and adopt internal regulation standards for the educational organizations; and provide in-service teacher education and methodological, pedagogical, psychological, and medical consulting services to schools. In 2021, a new model of

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<sup>a</sup> Secondary education includes general education programs of primary, basic secondary, and general secondary education.

<sup>b</sup> A small school (also known as ungraded school) is a general education school with a specific form of organization of instruction. Small schools are recognized as a special group of schools in Kazakhstan's legislation, and are allowed to provide multigrade teaching and are characterized by having a very small number of students and low student-teacher ratios.

<sup>c</sup> According to the June 11, 2022, decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan on modernization and improving the efficiency of the public administration system, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan was reorganized and divided into the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

education system management in regions was introduced, according to which the education departments located in oblast districts, cities, and city boroughs of oblast and State significance are directly accountable to education departments of oblasts and cities of the State significance. Consequently, all financial issues were transferred from local *akimats* to the regional education authorities, allowing the formation of a unified education policy, regardless of the location, material, and financial resources of localities.<sup>3</sup>

Although schools in Kazakhstan have low levels of autonomy, they still have some independence to implement the education process and scientific, financial, and economic activities within established limits; recruit and arrange teaching staff; and allocate resources for students in classes. Public education organizations are financed from the State budget in accordance with State legislation.

The education system in the Republic of Kazakhstan is based on the principles of consistency and continuity and includes the following levels:<sup>4</sup>

- Early childhood education and care
- Primary education (Grades 1 to 4)
- Basic secondary education (Grades 5 to 9)
- Secondary education (general secondary education [Grades 10 and 11], technical and professional education)
- Postsecondary education
- Higher education
- Postgraduate education

According to the United Nations Partnership Framework for Development (UNPDFD), “Kazakhstan has achieved near universal enrolment in primary and secondary levels of education, and the Government is committed to continuing investing in pre-school and school programs.”<sup>5</sup> The net primary school enrollment ratio (children ages 7 to 10) was 99.76 percent in 2020.

### Use and Impact of PIRLS

International comparative surveys play a key role in the modernization of Kazakhstan’s education system. The results of the surveys in which Kazakhstan participates (Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA], PISA-Based Test for Schools [PBTS], Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study [TIMSS], PIRLS, International Computer and Information Literacy Study [ICILS], Teaching and Learning International Survey [TALIS]) are widely used by researchers to assess education outcomes and analyze trends in the development of the education system.

Kazakhstan has been participating in PIRLS since 2016. This allowed the country to obtain reliable data on the reading competency of fourth grade students, including information about education inequality and the impact of contextual factors on student achievement. These data help

the country to identify strengths and weaknesses of educational programs and provide insights to develop new teaching methods and technologies to improve the reading skills of schoolchildren.

The National Report prepared on PIRLS 2016 results presents key recommendations for improving the quality of primary education related to language and literature. Items in the PIRLS format were introduced into instruction in a number of schools. Moreover, as a result of conducted international comparative surveys, the MoES has set several tasks to increase students' interest in reading and shape activities of school libraries to support reading.

## The Language/Reading Curriculum in Primary Grades

Since academic year 2016–2017, schools began a phased transition to the curricula and educational programs based on updated content. The updated educational programs include specific training objectives that focus on an integrated learning approach, intrasubject communication, and inclusion of cross-cutting themes. The new standards include a wide range of social and emotional skills: functional literacy and creative application of knowledge, critical thinking, research, computer literacy, the ability to use different methods of communication, the ability to work in a group and individually, problem solving, decision making, etc.

The State compulsory education standards define a set of general requirements for each level of education with a focus on learning outcomes, maximum academic workload, level of student preparedness, and duration.<sup>6</sup>

The primary education curriculum includes the field Language and Literature, which is implemented within the following academic subjects:

- Literacy, Kazakh language (in classes with Kazakh as the language of instruction)
- Russian language (in classes with Russian as the language of instruction)
- Kazakh language (in classes with a non-Kazakh language of instruction)
- Russian language (in classes with a non-Russian language of instruction)
- Literature reading
- Foreign language

The content of these subjects covers ideas about the unity and diversity of national cultures of Kazakhstan and the State language as the basis of national self-awareness. It also comprises a communicative approach aimed at developing reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills and comprehension ability to develop students' interest and positive attitude to language learning, form initial communication skills for information exchange, develop the ability to work with a text as speech material, and actively participate in social life.<sup>7</sup>

In educational organizations with the language of instruction of an ethnic minority, the education field Language and Literature also contains the subject Mother Tongue of the ethnic

group. In educational organizations with the Uighur/Uzbek/Tajik language of instruction, this subject is included in the invariant, or mandatory, component of standard curriculum.

First grade students with Kazakh language of instruction study basic literacy using the textbook *Alippe* (ABC book) in the first half of the academic year and the textbook *Ana tili* (mother tongue) in the second half of the academic year. Students with Russian language of instruction study literacy using the textbooks *ABC book* and *Literacy* in the first and second half of the academic year, respectively.<sup>8</sup> The subject includes teaching of literacy, reading and writing, and the comprehension of basic linguistic concepts and types of speech as a preparatory stage for further language and literacy education (see Exhibit 1).

**Exhibit 1: Standard Curriculum (updated content) of Primary Education (invariant component)**

Language of Instruction	Academic Subjects	Number of Hours per Week by Class				Total Academic Load (Hours)	
						Weekly	Annual
Kazakh	Alippe, Ana tili	6	–	–	–	6	198
	Kazakh language	–	4	4	4	12	408
	Literature reading	–	3	3	3	9	306
	Russian language (second language)	2	2	2	2	8	270
	Foreign language	2	2	2	2	8	270
Russian	ABC book, Literacy	6	–	–	–	6	198
	Russian language	–	4	4	4	12	408
	Literature reading	–	3	3	3	9	306
	Kazakh language (second language)	2	3	3	4	12	406
	Foreign language	2	2	2	2	8	270

Note: As of September 1, 2022, the study of Russian language in schools with Kazakh as the language of instruction is planned to begin in second grade, and the study of English language in schools with Kazakh/Russian as the language of instruction is planned to begin in third grade.

The study of Kazakh/Russian/mother tongue as the language of instruction is based on the use of literary texts to develop students' speech skills and the ability to work independently with different types of texts. The study of the second language (Kazakh or Russian, depending on the language of instruction) and the third language (foreign) is focused on the organization of language acquisition at different levels. By the end of primary school, students with a non-Kazakh/non-Russian language of instruction should master Kazakh/Russian language at the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) elementary level A1/A2.

## **Kazakh Language Curriculum for Fourth Grade of Primary School (with Kazakh as the Language of Instruction)**

The purpose of teaching the subject Kazakh language in primary school is to promote initial comprehension of the language through developing speech activities such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and practicing the language in the educational process and everyday life in compliance with language norms.<sup>9</sup> The basic content of the subject is as follows:

- Language and speech: expanding knowledge about oral and written speech; composing a monologue using reference words and a plan
- Speech culture: using the purpose and situation of the conversation for making a dialogue on a certain topic, considering the age, condition, and mood of the interlocutor; attracting the listener by using intonation, nonverbal language tools (gestures, facial expressions), introductory words, interjections
- Phonetics: forming a vowel harmony of the syllable; pronouncing and spelling vowels in a word considering hardness and softness of the vowel harmony; using the vowel harmony law when connecting endings
- Text: expanding information about the types of text (story, description, reasoning); analyzing text structure; determining the relationship between the topic and content of a text; defining the informative and structural features of reasoning (explanation, proof, conclusion); wording questions and preparing answers to them; performing comparative analysis of different texts on the same topic
- Making notes of the main points of material that is heard and retelling the text based on them; determining the content of a text on a given topic and proving it through a diagram, chart, table; self-assessing of the audiovisual content
- Phrase and sentence: repeating material about the sentences; phrases in sentence; homogeneous parts of sentence and punctuation marks; simple and complex sentences; composing a complex sentence according to the scheme
- Punctuation marks used in dialogue
- General information about compound words: fused words and their common types; paired words and their composition; meaning and spelling of paired words; abbreviated words and their spelling; combining words
- The word and its meaning: giving information about stable phrases and distinguishing them by context; searching for necessary information from various sources (text, dictionary, diagram, map, chart); determining the meaning of new words by context; summarizing and evaluating information
- Parts of speech: repeating materials about the noun; declension of nouns; spelling of case endings; declension of words with possessive, plural endings; singular and plural forms of personal endings; repeating materials about verbs: verb conjugation, tenses of verbs; adjectives; numerals: simple and compound numerals; general information about pronouns: personal pronouns and their declension; the concept of adverbs; the concept of service words

and their meaning; interjections and their spelling; the concept of imitative words, their meaning and spelling

- Creative work: planning and writing an exposition according to read, listened to, and audiovisual material; writing an essay using reference words; composing a text on a given topic with elements of story, description, and reasoning; writing an article, advertisement, news in a newspaper; identifying mistakes (punctuation, spelling, grammatical, stylistic), correcting them with the help of a spelling dictionary and reference books

### **Russian Language Curriculum for Fourth Grade of Primary School (with Russian as the Language of Instruction)**

The main purposes of the subject Russian language are to lay the foundation for functional literacy formation and to ensure the development of all types of speech activity—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—as indicators of general culture. The basic content of the subject is as follows:

- Listening and speaking: accepting the meaning of the speech addressed to learner; obtaining information from the oral speech that includes two or three micro themes; perceiving the intonation pattern of a sentence and phrase; defining the meaningful words highlighted by the speaker through logical accents, raising tone, repetitions; understanding the means of expressiveness of verbal and nonverbal types of communication (figurative words, intonation, facial expressions, gestures); analyzing and evaluating the content of information heard, and determining its linguistic features and structure
- Speaking: formulating and transmitting thoughts, information, feelings; oral generalization of textbook material according to diagrams, tables, graphs, or other sources of information; deepening the idea about speech as a way of communication; learning the quality of speech: informative, logical, correct, relevant, rich, imagery, pure, emotional; using proverbs and sayings as examples of brief, figurative, accurate, lively speech and national character of the Russian people; constructing speech based on information heard and notes; predicting the content through the title and diagram/graph/table; conducting a dialogue, expressing one’s point of view, persuasion, rational use of nonverbal means of communication during conversation; constructing and appropriately using etiquette statements: apology, request, gratitude, congratulations, evaluation, and advice
- Reading: extracting information from the text that includes two or three micro themes; selective reading in order to find the necessary material; formulating simple conclusions based on the information in the text; reading aloud and silently showing author’s intention and own attitude toward the content; identifying incomprehensible words, expressions, and images and clarifying their meanings by using questions, vocabulary, context, and other available sources; navigating across the content and parts of the text via headings and table of contents; determining the topic and the main idea of a text through title, keywords, and main parts; “reading between the lines”—determining the main idea not directly expressed in the text; finding information from several sources (dictionaries, reference books, encyclopedias, and magazines for children) on a specific topic

- Writing: detailed and brief presentation of the descriptive and narrative texts, reproductive or creative essays based on the plan made collectively and independently on a given topic and life experience of students (observations, excursions, games) with preliminary preparation; using reference and special literature, dictionaries, magazines; creating descriptions of portraits, reasoning texts, texts with diagrams, graphs, tables; creating nonfiction texts: article, note, characteristic, report, instruction, interview, advertisement, statement, announcement
- Repetition of the third grade materials: requirements for an oral and written speech; various types of speech activity; writing technique, culture of writing; sounds and letters; syllable, stress; analyzing words with a more complex syllabic structure
- The composition of the word: spelling of vowels and consonants in root words, spelling of prefixes and suffixes; separating hard sign
- Parts of speech: the concept of parts of speech: adverbs, numerals, pronouns, prepositions, and conjunctions; distributing words into parts of speech based on their common lexical and grammatical meanings and by asking questions of them (What? Where? When? Why? How? Etc.); nouns: general grammatical meaning, morphological features, role in the sentence
- Sentence: types of sentences according to the purpose of speech and intonation; punctuation marks at the end of the sentence; principal and secondary parts of the sentence; connecting words in the sentence; forming questions from the main to the dependent word; phraseological units; homogeneous members of a sentence with and without conjunction; appeals in the beginning, middle, and end of the sentence; constructing sentences based on a given sample or scheme; syntactic analysis of a sentence
- Text: types and styles of text; literary and nonliterary text; defining the theme and main idea of the text; semantic connection between text parts; features and structure of different text types: narrative, descriptive, reasoning, story, fairy tale, article, note, announcement, reportage, characteristics, instructions, interviews, advertisement

### **Literature Reading Curriculum for Fourth Grade of Primary School (with Kazakh as the Language of Instruction)**

The formation of reading skills is one of the most important functions of primary school. There are four stages of reading skill formation: correct reading (correlation of sounds and letters, merging into syllables); focused reading (understanding and explaining the meaning of the word); fluent reading (correct and focused reading of the information); expressive reading (correct, focused, and fluent reading and expressing own attitude to the content of information).<sup>10</sup>

The purposes of the Literature reading subject are to promote the personality development of children by means of literature; to educate them so they can communicate with art; to introduce students to the world of fiction, making them aware of the spiritual experience of humankind; and to form students' functional literacy skills in the process of reading.

The reading technique is a key principle for building an algorithm for further reading skill formation. The norm for reading technique on the Literature reading subject is:

- Read 75 to 80 words per minute at the end of the first half of the academic year
- Read 80 to 90 words per minute at the end of the second half of the academic year

The basic content of the subject is as follows:

- Genres of folklore: fragments of heroic epic, legends and myths, elocutionary words, fairy tales, fables; recommended works (poems, fairy tales, fables, stories of specific writers and poets); scientific and educational works: articles, essays, memoirs, biography, diaries; works of outstanding representatives of world literature for children: stories, fables, fairy tales
- Literary and theoretical knowledge: landscape description in literary texts; portrait characteristics; composition of dialogue, monologue, hyperbole, comparison, personification, epithet, metaphor, and their role; expressing one's own ideas, feelings, thoughts; defining science fiction, lyrics, creation of a plot, characteristics of a hero, facial expressions, gesture
- Working with the text: comparing own and author's assessment of a text; formulating creative, interpretative, evaluative questions; determining the theme and the main idea of the work of literature; determining the composition of the text (introduction, plot twist, development, culmination, denouement, conclusion); choosing the right intonation, explaining the meaning of words in the text, using words of fiction; defining and analyzing the events underlying the episode, comparing the episode with its illustration/cartoon/music/movie; extracting and processing the received information; conducting a "dialogue with the author"; predicting the theme and the main idea of the fiction work, dividing them into sections, drawing up a plan for each section; retelling the text according to a plan; reading by roles; writing fiction by adding new characters and plot in the form of a film, brochure, diagram, interview, review, note, announcement, poster
- Reading skills: reading aloud; fluent, focused, and expressive reading; reading by roles; selective/viewing/studying/searching/analytical reading; reading with notes; reading schemes/diagrams

### **Literature Reading Curriculum for Fourth Grade of Primary School (with Russian as the Language of Instruction)**

The required level of reading skill formation at fourth grade is:

- Read 80 to 90 words per minute at the end of the first half of the academic year
- Read 90 to 105 words per minute at the end of the second half of the academic year

The potential level of reading skill formation at fourth grade is:

- Read 90 to 100 words per minute at the end of the first half of the academic year
- Read 100 to 120 words per minute at the end of the second half of the academic year

The basic content of the subject is as follows:

- The content of the program consists of Kazakh, Russian, and world literature for children



(poems, fairy tales, fables, stories by specific writers and poets); if necessary, the list can include other fiction works of the teacher's choice depending on the preparedness level and age characteristics of students.

- Section 1, Listening and speaking: formulating questions to establish cause-effect relationship, phenomena, actions, answers to open questions; free, brief, detailed, selective, and creative retelling; predicting by the title and the final part of the text; using proverbs and sayings/excerpts from poems/fables; nonverbal communication; accompanying speech with illustrations/visibility/demonstration of photographs/paintings; expressing one's ideas, feelings, thoughts; comparing with similar life events/past materials
- Section 2, Reading: reading aloud; fluent, focused, and expressive reading; reading by roles; selective/viewing/studying/searching/analytical reading; reading with notes; reading diagrams/graphs; formulating creative, interpretative, evaluative questions and answers to them; defining the theme and the main idea of the fiction work; defining the genre features of myth, fiction, legend, fable, fairy tale, story, poem, epic, parable, heroic epic; techniques for creating an image (portrait, characteristics of the hero, actions and speech, facial expressions, gestures); determining the author's attitude to a hero; hyperbole, comparison, personification, epithet, metaphor, and their role; comparing the events and the feelings of heroes; defining and analyzing the events that underlie the episode; comparing the episode with its illustration/cartoon/music/film; extracting and processing received information; forming conclusions; presenting received information in the form of diagram
- Section 3, Writing: drawing up a plan based on the sequence of events; dividing fiction work into several parts; writing creative works by adding new characters and plot in the form of a film, brochure, diagram, interview, review, note, announcement, or poster; correcting lexical and stylistic inaccuracies, spelling errors, and punctuation errors

The teacher can carry out various types of additional tasks such as creating a book, salad from fairy tales (creating fairy tales by combining different plots and characters from other favorite fairy tales), and an unfinished story (continuing the story according to the introduction, determining the sequence of story events, completing a story).<sup>11</sup>

Exhibit 2 shows the expected learning results for students at the end of fourth grade.

**Exhibit 2: Expected Results by the End of Primary Education (Grade 4)**

Language and Literature	Speech Activities	Results
<b>Kazakh Language/Russian Language/Mother Tongue, Literature Reading</b>	Listening and Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Determines how the speaker’s point of view is presented, draws conclusions</li> <li>▪ Understands the topic of discussion and participates in it, following speech norms</li> <li>▪ Consciously uses synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, and words with direct and figurative meanings in speech</li> <li>▪ Uses various techniques of retelling the content of narrative and descriptive texts, using emotionally tinged means of expression</li> <li>▪ Applies various techniques of retelling the content of fiction</li> <li>▪ Discusses what he or she has read and heard, shares opinions and emotions</li> <li>▪ Argues point of view in a logical sequence</li> <li>▪ Independently makes coherent, logical, reasoned statements in accordance with the proposed topic and objective</li> <li>▪ Participates in a dialogue using various methods of verbal communication</li> <li>▪ Analyzes ideas of spiritual and moral values based on information that is read or heard</li> </ul>
	Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reads folklore and children’s literature, analyzes the characteristics of heroes and evaluates their actions</li> <li>▪ Distinguishes fiction from nonfiction</li> <li>▪ Determines the main idea and composition of fiction</li> <li>▪ Determines the genre of the fiction, justifies answer/choice</li> <li>▪ Determines the figurative and expressive means used by the author to create an image</li> <li>▪ Draws conclusions about the writer’s attitude to heroes</li> <li>▪ Reads texts using certain types and strategies of reading</li> <li>▪ Predicts the course of events in fiction</li> <li>▪ Defines the types of text (descriptive, narrative, and discursive)</li> <li>▪ Reads stories/poems expressively</li> <li>▪ Recites poems by heart expressively</li> <li>▪ Defines universal human values in works of fiction</li> </ul>
	Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Writes own texts of various types, genres, and styles, choosing the appropriate words</li> <li>▪ Writes in accordance with the learned grammatical, spelling, and punctuation norms</li> <li>▪ Writes texts using various forms of presentation (illustrations, diagrams, graphs, tables)</li> <li>▪ Follows hygienic and calligraphic handwriting skills</li> <li>▪ Synthesizes small texts into the topics related to national customs and culture, expressing moral position</li> </ul>

Language and Literature	Speech Activities	Results
<b>Kazakh Language (in classes with non-Kazakh language of instruction)/Russian Language (in classes with non-Russian language of instruction)</b>	Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understands the meaning of audiovisual material relevant to the social, local, and cultural spheres of communication</li> <li>Understands the topic, main idea, and main and secondary information of a text with sufficient completeness, depth, and accuracy</li> <li>Understands how the style of speech changes depending on the situation, place, and participants of communication</li> <li>Predicts the content of a story considering different opinions</li> </ul>
	Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conveys the content of stories, using preliminary notes and plan</li> <li>Formulates questions and expresses point of view on what he or she has read or heard</li> <li>Independently makes coherent, logical statements in accordance with the proposed topic and objective</li> <li>Participates in a dialogue, expressing communicative intention in various situations of social, local, and cultural spheres of communication</li> </ul>
	Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reads texts using different types and strategies of reading</li> <li>Understands key information, conclusion, and evaluation of the author in text that contains unfamiliar words</li> <li>Distinguishes fiction from nonfiction</li> <li>Finds the necessary information from various sources</li> <li>Demonstrates an understanding of ideas, events, and motives of heroes' actions</li> <li>Finds out the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases from dictionaries and reference books</li> <li>Determines universal human values in Kazakh and world literature</li> </ul>
	Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Makes brief notes of the text listened to, the information read, and the event seen (headlines, single facts, opinions)</li> <li>Uses appropriate lexical units to create narrative/non-narrative texts considering grammatical, spelling, and punctuation norms</li> </ul>
<b>Foreign Language</b>	Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understands the main content of a short conversation on a familiar topic, recognizes the sound of familiar words and phrases</li> <li>Understands short questions about colors and numbers</li> <li>Uses contextual hints to predict the content and meaning of a short conversation on a familiar topic</li> <li>Understands the general meaning of short stories that sound slow and distinct</li> </ul>
	Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formulates questions and basic statements about him- or herself</li> <li>Answers questions</li> <li>Pronounces key words and phrases with correct intonation and emphasis when describing objects and events</li> <li>Expresses likes and dislikes</li> </ul>

Language and Literature	Speech Activities	Results
Foreign Language	Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses an illustrated dictionary</li> <li>Reads and understands short fiction and nonfiction texts on social and everyday topics</li> <li>Determines a core meaning of short texts</li> <li>Determines specific information and details in short texts</li> </ul>
	Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Correctly writes frequently used words, demonstrating knowledge of the differences between their spelling and pronunciation</li> <li>Writes short sentences under dictation</li> <li>Correctly puts punctuation marks at the end of sentences</li> </ul>

## Professional Development Requirements and Programs

Teacher development is a central priority in improving the quality of education in Kazakhstan. According to the Law on Education, teachers should undertake professional development at least once every five years to improve their qualifications.<sup>12</sup> Article 15 of the Law on Teacher Status (2019) also requires teachers to improve their professional, research, intellectual, and creative skills continually by confirming and enhancing their qualification level at least once every five years.<sup>13</sup> The required professional development programs for teachers of all levels of education are organized and financed by the Government. The courses mainly are provided by 17 regional branches of the joint-stock company (JSC) National Center for Professional Development (NCPD) “Orleu”; the Center of Excellence of the Autonomous Educational Organization (AEO) Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools; the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs (Atameken); National Scientific, Practical, Educational and Health Improvement Center “Bobek”; the National Scientific and Practical Center of Correctional Pedagogy; higher education institutions; regional methodological offices; as well as through teaching internships under the Bolashak international scholarship.

The short-term courses last at least 36 academic hours while the duration of long-term courses is at least 108 academic hours.<sup>14</sup> Teachers are assigned to courses by educational organizations and departments. The administration of the educational organization monitors the teacher’s application of acquired competencies upon completion of the course. In 2021, around 4,000 teachers across the country completed short-term courses on primary class subjects at JSC NCPD “Orleu.” The Center of Excellence of the AEO Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools provided professional development courses on development and examination of assessment tasks and advancement of teachers’ subject competencies for 5,101 primary class teachers.<sup>15</sup>

There are several professional development programs in language and reading that are available to primary class teachers:

- The Center of Excellence of the AEO Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools organizes 35-hour recessional school for primary school teachers on the topic Formation of Reading Literacy Skills in Primary School. The purpose of the program is to increase teachers’ professional

competency in developing reading literacy skills of primary school students by introducing theoretical aspects of reading literacy, various approaches of reading literacy assessment based on the results of PIRLS, and the development of educational assignments aimed at the formation of reading literacy.<sup>16</sup>

- The regional branches of the JSC NCPD “Orleu” conduct short-term 80-hour online courses on the topics Mastering Complex Topics of the Primary School Subjects and Development of Professional Competencies of Russian Language and Literature Teacher for primary school teachers in secondary education organizations with the Kazakh language of instruction.

Kazakhstani teachers benefit from a teacher certification process known as teacher attestation. Attestation is a process that determines the qualification level of teachers, the results of which are used to award a category. Primary class teachers take a national qualification test under the attestation process on subject content (Kazakh or Russian language, literature, reading, mathematics) at least once every five years to be qualified in one of five categories: teacher, teacher-moderator, teacher-expert, teacher-researcher, and teacher-master.<sup>17</sup> Qualification in each successive category leads to a salary increase and promotion.

## Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

### The Internal Assessment

To assess students, educational organizations monitor progress and conduct intermediate certification of students in accordance with independently chosen forms, procedures, and frequency. The evaluation criteria of student achievement (summative evaluation with scoring, and formative assessment with feedback provision) were adopted as a part of the transition to the updated education content considering the special education needs and individual abilities of students. The criteria-based assessment, introduced in 2016, allows educators to assess students’ achievement based on clearly measurable criteria, to form students’ capacity to monitor and evaluate their own learning activities, to adjust the learning process, and to identify and eliminate difficulties in the learning process. The evaluation criteria of students’ educational achievement in language subjects are based on assessment of the following domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Each lesson starts with demonstrating learning objectives (to observe, analyze, compare, identify essential features, recognize, define, model, explain, etc.) and criteria for achieving them. The evaluation criteria should correspond to the learning objectives (see Exhibit 3).

Summative and formative assessments of primary class students start in second grade. Summative assessment is carried out at the end of an academic period (term) or after finishing certain module/cross-cutting topics in accordance with the curriculum. For language subjects, two types of speech activity are combined (for example, listening and speaking, or reading and writing)

for summative assessment. The items are developed by teachers based on the curriculum content of the section/quarter/half-year using creative items, practical tasks, projects, essays, etc.

The assignment structure includes:

- Multiple-choice items
- Open questions with short answers
- Open questions with expanded answers
- Creative/practical/research items with specific evaluation criteria

Formative assessment is carried out during the daily work in the classroom as an actual indicator of students’ progress, providing an operative relationship and feedback between student and teacher and allowing for improvement of the education process. During formative assessment, the teacher independently determines the number of students to assess and the frequency of providing feedback with consideration of the number of performed tasks. The expanded feedback can be provided through comments, headings, and recommendations. The scores of formative assessments and summative assessments for the section (SAS) and for the quarter (SAQ) are displayed in electronic journals. Annual assessment at the end of the academic year includes the results of both formative (25 percent) and summative assessment (SAS: 25 percent, SAQ: 50 percent).

According to the State education standards, students are also given homework assignments, which take no more than 50 minutes for second grade and no more than 1 hour 10 minutes for Grades 3 and 4.<sup>18</sup>

**Exhibit 3: Skills to Be Assessed During Criteria-Based Assessment**

Skill	Description
<b>Knowledge</b>	Knowledge and reproduction of specific facts, information, and their description
<b>Comprehension</b>	Demonstration of comprehension through correct reproduction, assumption, or interpretation of information
<b>Application</b>	The use and application of information and previously acquired knowledge in a new or unfamiliar context or situation
<b>Analysis</b>	Demonstration of the ability to divide informational material into component parts, analyzing the information to obtain various conclusions by determining motives or reasons, and/or finding evidence to explain general rules
<b>Synthesis</b>	Demonstration of the ability to reconstruct various parts of previously acquired knowledge into a new context
<b>Evaluation</b>	Forming a judgment about the significance of ideas or facts according to a certain criterion

**The External Assessment**

Monitoring of students’ educational achievements (MSEA) is a systematic independent control of the quality of education at the national level. It measures the quality of students’ basic knowledge for compliance with State compulsory standards of primary and basic secondary education. The

test is presented in digital format. According to the Regulations for Monitoring Students' Educational Achievements, the MoES prepares and conducts assessment; processes and analyzes test results; and provides methodological assistance and recommendations by regions and specific schools for ensuring the quality of education.<sup>19</sup> The analytical report on test results reflects the current situation in the Kazakhstani education system and is used broadly by research organizations to conduct comparative studies. The results identify factors affecting the quality of education (study difficulties, training gaps, needs for teacher professional development); determine educational organizations that need methodological support; and strengthen the pedagogical potential of the educational organizations.

The target groups of MSEA assessment are students in fourth grade and ninth grade. For fourth grade students, MSEA is conducted on an annual basis in the form of a comprehensive test that measures functional literacy (application of knowledge and skills, analytical and logical thinking) within three areas: reading literacy, mathematical literacy, and science literacy. The MoES determines the list of educational organizations for monitoring via random sampling according to their location (urban/rural), language of instruction (Kazakh/ Russian), school type (secondary school, lyceum, gymnasium), and student contingent. Twenty-five percent of schools that meet all indicated criteria are randomly sampled. The list does not include schools that participated in assessment in previous academic years. The number, content, and form of test items are determined by the test specification developed by the National Testing Center. The center also provides software and technical support for testing procedures and implements statistical processing of results. For primary educational organizations, the assessment results meet the requirements of State education standards when at least 40 percent of participants answer at no lower than the "satisfactory" level.<sup>20</sup>

## Special Reading Initiatives

The policy of developing reading competencies of the population is implemented at the national level. The republican campaign One Country - One Book, introduced in 2007 on the initiative of the National Academic Library and the Library Association with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan, promotes national literature to preserve historical, cultural, and spiritual heritage, as well as moral and patriotic education of young people.

On October 21, 2020, the MoES developed a special project called A Reading School Is a Reading Nation to last until 2023 to provide children access to fiction. The aims of this project are to develop the cultural and reading competencies of children and youth, to develop and preserve the culture of reading, to promote family reading, to replenish a library fund through interaction and social partnership, and to involve parents in building a reading community. The following measures are taken within the project: developing the human resources of school libraries through professional training; improving the material, technical, and information infrastructure of

libraries; digitalizing libraries and using gamification elements; and carrying out the annual purchase of fiction (mainly science fiction) for children. At the same time, special attention is given to ensure the availability of literature in the State language of both Kazakhstani and international authors.

The National Education Academy, in cooperation with the Literature and Languages Institutes, the Republican Scientific and Practical Center for Education Content Examination, the National Scientific Library, Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, and the Education-Innovation Lyceum, formed a list of recommended literature. About 2.5 million copies of fiction were purchased by school libraries and about 120,000 copies of children’s literature were published as part of the Reading School project. As a result, the number of young readers has increased significantly. According to the director of the Republican Scientific and Practical Center for Education Content Examination, since the implementation of the project, the number of school libraries, library seats, and library visitors has increased. Since the beginning of academic year 2021–2022, on average students have visited the library more than 10 times in four regions of Kazakhstan, and 6 to 9 times in other regions.<sup>21</sup> Centers for book borrowing have been open in schools within the framework of this project, where each student can borrow a book and leave his or her own book. A daily 20 minutes of extracurricular literature reading was introduced in all classrooms. In addition, 121 coworking centers were opened in school libraries and more than 3,700 events were organized throughout the country to enhance children’s interest in reading.<sup>22</sup>

The Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan declared 2021 the Year of Support for Children’s and Youth Reading in Kazakhstan. Within the framework of 30 Books for the 30th Anniversary of Independence, 30 of the best works of famous Kazakhstani authors in the fields of poetry, prose, drama, children’s literature, and translation were selected for national reading. Book exhibitions and thematic events were organized throughout the year in all libraries of the country to increase public interest in reading, to develop interest in researching the artistic heritage of Kazakhstan, and to contribute to the intellectual and spiritual development of the younger generation.

## Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

### Teaching and Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

On March 13, 2020, the first cases of COVID-19 were reported in Kazakhstan. The Government closed all schools on March 12, 2020, one week prior to the scheduled spring holiday.<sup>23</sup> From April 6 until May 25, 2020 (the end of the 2019–2020 academic year), schools were fully closed, and students of all grades studied remotely.

On March 15, 2020, the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “On the introduction of a state of emergency in the Republic of Kazakhstan,” was announced. The MoES carried out work in collaboration with all stakeholders (mobile operators, television and radio



companies, Information and Communications Technology [ICT] companies, etc.) in education to provide free access to educational information platforms and funds for the purchase of computer equipment for students and teachers in need to use for free. Local executive authorities organized special locations that maintained all necessary sanitary conditions to provide access to the internet and a computer for students who had issues with access.<sup>24</sup>

Between June and August 2020, schools were closed for the annual summer holiday. The long summer break gave the MoES, local education authorities, school leaders, and teachers time to prepare for the new academic year. By the new academic year, mainstream schools were provided access to online platforms such as Online Mektep, Kundelik, Daryn Online, and BilimLand. Teachers have been encouraged to offer prerecorded video classes, online classes, and other online means of communication. Teachers of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, in cooperation with the specialists of the BilimLand platform, have developed more than 20,000 lessons and 550,000 interactive tasks in all subjects for all 11 grades.<sup>25</sup> Schools and education authorities distributed laptops, computers (about 500,000), and prepaid internet cards to large and low-income families. Also, a lot of work has been done on content provision and preparation of TV lessons on TV channels EL ARNA and Balapan (around 2,000 video lessons with a duration of 7 to 15 minutes each were displayed for five days a week), which provided more than half of Kazakhstani students with access to educational resources.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, audio lessons were broadcast on Radio Classic Kazakh. All paper versions of training materials were transferred through Kazpost in the absence of internet communication. The Republican Scientific and Practical Center for Education Content Examination transferred over 600 school textbooks for Grades 1 to 11 in Kazakh and Russian into electronic format and posted them on the website of the MoES in EPUB (electronic publication) format, which allowed students and teachers to obtain additional information, run tests, and watch animated training videos directly from their computers and smartphones.<sup>27</sup>

Between September 2020 and March 2021, schools were partially open. Most students (77 percent) started the new academic year via distance learning.<sup>28</sup> Only 23 percent of students switched to traditional and/or combined learning. Depending on each region's situation, the MoES allowed 3,000 small schools, mainly in rural locations, to open fully where the number of students did not exceed 300. Primary schools provided parents with an option for their children to study at home or start schooling in small groups of 15 students. About 60 percent of primary school students chose the latter option.<sup>29</sup> Later, this option was extended to fifth grade students. Grades 6, 7, 8, and 10 were taught distantly. Graduating high school students (Grades 9 and 11 [12]) were taught via a combined mode, with around 70 percent of subjects taught at schools and 30 percent distantly. The transition of Grade 9 and 11 (12) students to a combined format was due to the preparation of graduating classes for the final examination and unified national testing for admission to universities and colleges.

From March 2021 in Kazakhstan, the situation with COVID-19 was announced to be stable, and primary schools and fifth grade shifted to hybrid learning depending on the subject. Overall,

all primary grade students, fifth grade, and final graduating year students (Grades 9 and 11 [12]) had access to schools. Students in Grades 6, 7, 8, and 10 who were studying distantly were provided with the possibility to attend school in small groups outside the regular school timetable if they needed more help.

In special boarding schools for children with special education needs, instruction was organized in closed mode with no more than 12 students per class in strict observance of all sanitary standards.

### **Impact of the Pandemic on Student Learning**

To understand the impact of the transition to distance learning on the academic performance of students, monitoring and analysis of the transition of Grades 1 to 11 students to the fourth quarter of the 2019–2020 academic year were organized by the JSC Information and Analytical Center. For these purposes, summative assessment data for the third and fourth quarter of 3,116,815 students were collected from the electronic journals Kundelik, Bilimal, and IMektep, and combined with the National Education Database. An additional survey was conducted among 18,000 students, their parents, and 12,000 teachers that showed significant losses in students' knowledge. A significant gap in access to digital resources during distance learning could be one of the reasons for the widening of the gap in the quality of student learning.<sup>30</sup> As the National Education Database shows, 34.1 percent of city school students had high-speed internet access compared to 19.2 percent students at rural schools in the fourth quarter of the 2019–2020 academic year.<sup>31</sup>

In 2020, the Paper Lab Center conducted a survey on how the first months of distance learning impacted secondary school students.<sup>32</sup> Around 110 urban and rural high school students and parents of primary school students from five regions of the country kept diaries where they recorded the process of online instruction and problems they encountered. According to the survey results, the quality and speed of the internet, level of teachers' involvement with the learning process, learning gap, status quo in student assessment, and incomplete educational resources and applications were some of the most frequently encountered issues.

### **Impact of the Pandemic on PIRLS 2021**

Due to school closure during the pandemic, Kazakhstan postponed the PIRLS 2021 data collection until September–October 2021 to ensure that the data collection was carried out in a safe and healthy manner and to prevent low participation rates. The teacher questionnaire was administered to teachers who taught students in fourth grade during the previous academic year.

## Suggested Readings

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