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**Reshaping Education for an Open Society
in Romania 1990-2000:
Case Studies in Large-Scale Education Reform**

Dakmara Georgescu
Eugen Palade



THE WORLD BANK

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Acronyms

CITO	Netherlands National Institute for Educational Management
CIVED	Civic Education Study
COSA	Council of Occupational Standards and Assessment
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
DIA	Data Interchange Agreement
DOES-MINK	Department of Education and Science
EDC	Education Development Centre
EMIS	Education Management and Information System
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
GOR	Government of Romania
HDN/ERM	Human Development Network/Education Reform Management
HEB	Higher Education Bodies
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
IES	Institute for Education Sciences
NAES	National Assessment and Examination Agency
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCDC	National Council for Curriculum Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSF	National Salvation Front
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSI	Open Society Institute
PHARE-VET	Reform Program of the Secondary Vocational Education and Training
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
PMU	Project Management Unit
PSD	National Democratic Party
SNEE	National Service for Assessment and Evaluation
SON	Open Society Foundation
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
USIA	United States Information Agency
WB	World Bank

Executive Summary

Romania was part of the Socialist Block from 1947 to 1989. After enduring almost half a century of Communist rule, the country experienced a bloody revolution in December 1989. Since then Romania has gone through an extremely difficult period of transition toward a liberal democracy and a market economy. Despite these difficulties, Romania was among the first Central and Eastern European countries that initiated a comprehensive, large-scale reform process over the last decade.

The Romanian education system has been directed by seven different ministers in the last twelve years. The ministers came from diverse political orientations ranging from social-democratic to liberal. Due to the lack of a clear direction for change in Romanian society as a whole, the central administration was not able to elaborate a coherent reform vision in the early nineties. Comprehensive efforts to reform education became more apparent in the late nineties and were based on previous (incremental) developments, especially in terms of capacity building and new approaches in management, financing, curriculum, and textbook development.

Large-scale education reform efforts in Romania have been very unique in that they were not based on a shared vision for a need for change among education stakeholders. Reform goals were better clarified and refined in the process of developing different sub-sector-based reforms initiated as a result of needs analyses and strategic planning by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with specific partners and donors. International partnerships have been of crucial importance for the success of the Romanian education reform. Education projects undertaken in cooperation with international bodies have not only ensured the necessary financial resources, but have also provided important technical assistance and tremendously contributed to local personnel and institutional capacity building.

Reform Goals

The overall goal of the Romanian reform was to reshape education in accordance with the values and principles of an open society. Subsequent goals included:

- adjusting the education system's structure and content in line with current progressive trends (good practices) in international education;
- fostering the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for successfully coping with global social, economic, and communication challenges;
- improving quality, equity, and accountability in education at all levels;
- increasing the competitiveness of pre-academic and academic qualifications;
- increasing the impact of primary, secondary, and tertiary education on social changes and living standards in Romanian society (transforming education into an instrument for social change);
- increasing professional creativity in both pre-tertiary and tertiary education; and
- preparing highly qualified professional, self-reliant, and accomplished individuals able to embrace joint projects and activities successfully.

As in many other societies under Communist control, public consultation on education matters was virtually nonexistent before 1989. The public debates initiated after 1989 focused on building consensus on the need for a large-scale education reform as well as on promoting the understanding that education reform must be linked with overall political, economic, and social change in the Romanian society. Trade unions, professional associations, parents, representatives of political parties, and students were widely involved in this discussion.

Reform Phases

Romania's education reform can probably be best understood as "reform by accretion"—it is not easy to distinguish specific phases and accompanying goals. The case study views the reform in four phases: a first exploratory and preparatory phase (1990-94), followed by a capacity-building and institutional development phase (1995-97). The period from 1998-2000 represents the third phase, where the reform program accelerated the pace of implementation. Thereafter came a period of stability, quality control, and focus on equity issues.

During the first two reform phases, more emphasis was placed on issues of quality assurance (changes in the curriculum, assessment and evaluation, and new concepts of teaching and learning embedded in alternative textbooks, etc.) and on human and material resources (capacity building and logistic preparation). Strategic objectives were formulated in the following phases (1997-2000 and 2001 onwards) as quality assurance mechanisms began to take hold in primary schools. More emphasis was placed on equity issues, including programs fostering equal opportunities, and increasing access and retention rates. Efficiency issues were also addressed and included implementation of new mechanisms for financing and management, strengthening quality control, and promoting new relationships between school and community based on accountability and effective partnerships.

The reform's primary focus on quality issues generated some unintended equity or efficiency problems. For instance, the need for new and high-quality curricula and textbooks, and the desire for these to be more attractive in layout and design, increased the cost of textbooks and contributed to equity concerns, particularly in upper-secondary education where textbooks have to be purchased by students. Thus, in the pursuit of goals it was sometimes difficult to harmonize different needs and to foresee outcomes and consequences of different decisions.

Reform Implementation

The first years after 1989 represented the so-called "stabilization reform" (Birzea 1994), during which the Romanian education system reached a new balance by giving up most of its (explicit) former Communist features. For instance, a more balanced share between general academic and vocational streams was reached in upper-secondary education. Private education institutions were re-established, especially at pre-school and higher education levels. Religion was re-introduced in schools, and a new philosophy of student-teacher relationships and school missions was adopted by education stakeholders. These advances were made possible through legislative and institutional changes, reinforcement of local capacity, and national and international partnerships. As with any other reform, the

Romanian effort was influenced by reform politics and public perception and debate over the reform goals.

Throughout the 1990s the link between the formulation of reform goals in education and the process of Romania's European and Euro-Atlantic integration grew stronger, as did clear references to values and principles of an open society based on democratization and transition to a functional and balanced market economy. In the first years after the revolution, "reform technicians" (top experts leading different sub-sector-based reforms) largely promoted the vision of a comprehensive reform in accordance with new challenges facing people and the society as a whole. By the end of the 1990s this vision was strongly promoted by the Ministry of Education and by important education stakeholders in the Romanian society, including parliamentarians, media representatives, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), parents, and representatives of the business world.

Sub-sector reforms were carried out in the following areas: curriculum development, textbook development, teacher training, rural education, assessment and examination, management and financing, occupational standards, vocational education, higher education, and school rehabilitation programs. Structural delays in economic reforms and legislative changes made it impossible to implement reform measures in each of the sub-sectors at one time. Each of the sub-sectors followed their own implementation processes and created institutional frameworks to ensure that specific reform measures were carried out. Although coordination between the newly created institutional frameworks was difficult at first, reorganization of the departments in the late 1990s facilitated the creation of a more organized and efficient education system.

In 1999 substantial modifications were brought to the Education Act of 1995. The management and financing functions of education departments and institutions were granted increased autonomy and achieved better accountability. Quality assurance issues had also been tackled, with a new and better mechanism for equal access and fair distribution in place. As a result of these ongoing processes and lessons learned in reforming the education system, continued debates via the media, and lessons learned from international comparisons and analyses, it was now clearer what had to be changed in the law. These directives for change are now considered as making way for good practices in education, such as learner-centeredness, modern evaluation and assessment tools and procedures, modern management and financing schemes based on decentralization, and better links between school and community. In addition, orders and regulations issued by the Ministry of Education aimed at providing more incentives for teachers and education stakeholders to address issues of equity, quality, and accountability creatively and efficiently in their local environment.

Lessons Learned

Romania's experience is an excellent example of reforming education in line with the values and principles of an open society. Despite scarce resources and poor economic conditions, the reform has nevertheless led to several important changes (see Part 4). Its success and sustainability will depend upon the development of a coherent vision and corresponding priorities. The following lessons have been learned during the last decade of reform efforts:

Learning by doing. If one compares the quality of the analyses and discussion on education in 1990 with today, the richness of the current dialogue is impressive. Reform goals and orientations were not clearly mapped out at the start. Goals and objectives were muddled and often conflicting among stakeholders. Still, the leadership moved ahead with change, tackling it where it was possible. The reform evolved by doing as stakeholders' experience and awareness of new needs, opportunities, challenges, and solutions grew.

The importance of a shared vision of education reform goals. There are two issues related to developing a shared vision: (i) agreement of the need for change, and (ii) clear and commonly agreed-upon reform goals and priorities. After the fall of Communism in the early 1990s, only a few people linked education reform with the values of an open society. Over an iterative learning process, a general agreement on the need for reform took hold. The second issue was a lack of a clear and common vision of education goals. The key lesson learned is that a shared view on education reform goals should be fostered as early as possible in the form of an "education pact," also known as a White Paper. In Romania's case the White Paper that was prepared led to a part of the society agreeing with it. A more substantial communication and awareness building in the reform's early stages would probably have had a positive effect on reform dynamics.

Continuity and sustainability of reform efforts in a transition country. With five ministers of education and several secretaries of state rotating over the last decade, continuity in governance has not been possible. Still, Romania has been able to identify and train top and local-level education experts with the support of international bodies. By the mid 1990s the reform vision was being carried out by these Romanian experts, acting as technocrats in the framework of a consistent reform program irrespective of political changes occurring at the level of top decision-makers. Growing from the debates and experience in the first half of the nineties, numerous policy papers were issued from 1997 to 2000. These documents helped to clarify reform goals, orientations, and priorities, and articulated the various components and dimensions of the reform for the technocrats.

An iterative implementation process. Decentralization and new economic and social practices, such as local and institutional autonomy, were slow to take hold. It was easiest to start with changes in curriculum and assessment/evaluation, two components in which significant new developments have taken place. As changes in curriculum and assessment evolved, it became clearer that school and institutional autonomy (of curriculum and assessment bodies) would be an important asset for the sustainability of reform measures. In addition, the reform of education management and financing could only keep pace with broader processes in legislation and the economy.

Timing of reform measures. Better coordination between legislation, management and financing procedures, and curriculum guidelines could have contributed to a more efficient implementation of the new National Curriculum. At the time curriculum reforms were implemented in 1998, the Ministry of Education created ad-hoc legislation for granting schools autonomy in relation to curriculum decisions. These were later incorporated into the new 1999 Education Act. Coordination of curriculum

development and assessment/evaluation processes with pre- and in-service teacher training practices and management procedures remains to be established. While the implementation of reform components on different timelines has benefits, if the process is not coordinated it can produce substantial implementation delays.

Need for informed research and decision-making. Research and informed decision-making was virtually absent before 1989, and much of the education reform effort was based on political exigency. Romania has gradually begun to change this by using comparative research from international student assessment research projects. Results from these studies have been discussed in public forums where debates have influenced reform content and pace. Continued efforts at building Romania's research capacity should further improve decision-making.

Timely identification of challenges and constructive solutions. One of the main recommendations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report on Romania (2000) refers to the need to carefully identify potential obstacles and elaborate proactive strategies to overcome them. Unfortunately controversial reform issues have not been addressed in a timely manner, and meaningful partnerships among stakeholders have been weak. Thus sometimes reform champions have found themselves alone in the storm, able only to provoke reactionary responses and strategies.

Combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches and grassroots efforts. Top-down approaches to reforming the education system were unavoidable at first given Romania's political and historical background. Over the years, however, as capacity-building efforts reached more schools, teachers, and communities, private initiatives and devolution of authority in education have begun to strengthen Romania's bottom-up capacity.

Adequate time to prepare for and carry out reform. As illustrated by Romania's experience, at least a decade was needed for designing, developing, and implementing the decisions that constitute large-scale education reform and the process continues, even after fifteen years. It is significant, for example, that the major policy papers felt impact in the field only became apparent after 1997, almost ten years into the initiation of the reform idea. Had the context allowed it, the reform pace could have been better balanced. In some periods there were probably too many moments of calm compared to other periods in which reform turmoil was manifested.

Essential partnerships. International partnerships and partnerships with civil society bodies have been of crucial importance for the success of the Romanian education reform. NGOs with international connections have provided support for comprehensive reform measures at the grassroots level, and education projects in cooperation with international bodies have provided not only the necessary financial resources, but also important technical assistance, local personnel, and institutional capacity-building.

Introduction

This case study of the Romanian education reform synthesizes the first decade of the reform's design and implementation process, from 1990-2000. It seeks to clarify the intricacies of a long and complex reform process and summarizes recent studies produced in Romania and abroad.

The study is composed of five sections. Part 1 presents a general background of Romania and its political and socioeconomic characteristics, and synthesizes the education system's history. Part 2 traces the reform's goals and phases, and analyzes the implementation process. Part 3 includes an analysis of sub-sector reform implementation and highlights major changes in:

- curriculum development,
- textbook development,
- teacher training,
- rural education,
- assessment and examination,
- management and financing,
- occupational standards,
- vocational education,
- higher education, and
- school rehabilitation programs.

Part 4 analyzes the effectiveness and sustainability of reform measures and presents the study's main conclusions. Part 5 distills lessons learned from the Romanian experience that may be useful for other transition countries.

Context

Geography and People

Romania occupies a large territory of over 237,500 square kilometers. Considered a medium-sized European country, it has a population of approximately 22 million inhabitants. The population is generally balanced in terms of gender and age. According to available data from the last census (March 2002), 89.5 percent of the population are Romanians, followed by 6.6 percent Hungarians, 2.5 percent Roma, .3 percent Germans, .3 percent Ukrainians, and .8 percent other (Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks, Russians, Tartars, Jews, etc.). There are a total of 23 ethnic minorities, representing 10.5 percent of the population. In terms of religion, 86.7 percent are Christian Orthodox, 4.7 percent Roman-Catholic, 3.4 percent Protestant, and 5.2 percent represent other religions.

Economy

As a result of long-term political and economic weaknesses, the last ten years have been characterized by a slow process of structural reforms, political struggles, and dramatic declines in living standards, especially for vulnerable populations. In particular, poverty levels increased until recently when the pattern was reversed. Although the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita is low in general and living standards are among the lowest in Europe, disparities among different regions are sometimes immense. Eastern and Southern Romania, the so-called "poverty belt," are the least developed parts of the country. The Gross National Product (GNP) per capita (US\$1,480 in 1995, 1,800 Euro in 2003),¹ as well as the poverty rate of 28.89 percent in 2002 places Romania among the less-developed countries in Europe.

An increasing poverty rate continues to be a major concern in Romania. Poverty is closely linked to unemployment. In 2000 the unemployment rate was as high as 10.5 percent,² with women comprising 48 percent of the unemployed. In February 2002 the unemployment rate increased to 13.2 percent. This increase was mainly triggered by a greater registration of people requesting the minimum guaranteed income and by layoffs in industry. In December 2002 the unemployment rate decreased to 8.1 percent. As of February 2002 the net average wage is 120 Euro per month, with a minimum wage held constant at 75 Euro.³ In Romania, unlike in other transition countries,⁴ there is still a huge percentage of the active population working in the agricultural sector (approximately 30 percent) and a large percentage (46.6) of the population living in rural areas (in 2002).

¹ See Country Profile by the European Commission, updated on 11 November 2003 (www.europa.eu.int).

² According to the Country Profile, updated on 11 November 2003.

³ According to the latest agreements between the government and trade unions (2002).

⁴ The exception is Poland where 27 percent of the population works in the agricultural sector.

After a decade of poor economic performance, some positive results from previous macro-economic stabilization efforts became apparent between 2000 and 2002. For the first time after more than a decade since the 1989 revolution, economic growth was apparent (5.4 percent in 2001), and the inflation rate decreased to 25 percent in 2002 (from approximately 300 percent in 1994). Optimistic forecasts for the near future predict an even more radical decrease to 7.5 percent in 2007. In 2001 new steps were taken toward privatizing the state-owned industry, and several new chapters of negotiation were opened with the European Union. For example, although the state still owns approximately 50 percent of the economy, the contribution of the private sector to the national income now exceeds 60 percent. In the fall of 2002 Romania was invited to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The country is planning for accession to the European Union in 2007.

Government

The modern Romanian state was founded in the second part of the 19th century and declared its independence from the Turkish Ottoman Empire in 1877. Between 1866 and 1947 Romania was a constitutional monarchy, except for a period of royal dictatorship from 1938-1940 and the military dictatorship of Ion Antonescu's wartime regime. Following the Second World War it fell under Soviet control. After enduring almost a half a century of a totalitarian Communist regime, Romania experienced a bloody revolution in December 1989.

Since then Romania has gone through an extremely difficult period of transition toward a liberal democracy and a market economy. The National Salvation Front (NSF) was created after the revolution in December 1989 and formed the basis for new democratic developments in Romania. Although initially intended to act as the organizing force of the first free elections in Romania after World War II, in the spring of 1990 the NSF transformed itself into a political party and won the first post-revolutionary elections in May 1990. Its major contribution to the development of a new political framework in Romania was the establishment of new democratic institutions and procedures, among which was the adoption of the first democratic constitution in November 1991 after a half a century of totalitarianism. The parliamentary opposition consisted of historical and nationalist parties. A number of subsequent events in 1990 and 1991 (such as the recurring violence on the part of the miners in Bucharest) demonstrated that the transition toward democracy was far from complete and would be much more difficult than originally thought.

The period 1992-1996 is also known as a major phase in the resurrection of the Romanian civil society. Numerous important NGOs and other civic bodies as well as private television channels and other mass-media bodies contributed significantly to the development of a culture of democracy in Romania by coordinating criticism of the government with proactive campaigns.

A second peaceful transition of power took place following the general elections of November 1996. The Democratic Convention won the elections and formed a democratic coalition of four parties. However the last elections held in 2000 generated turmoil in the Romanian society because extreme nationalistic voices (Greater Romania Party and its leader) garnered great support. The Romanian Socialist Democrat Party (later renamed the Social Democratic Party or PSD) obtained the most

votes for Parliament and is currently ruling the country in coalition with the Democratic Union of Hungarians from Romania.

Education

The Socialist period (1947-1989) deeply affected the Romanian education system. Soviet advisers, who held key posts in every ministry, made education secular and handed over control of the entire school system to the state. As a result, all private schools were banned. Two primary periods can be distinguished in this deconstruction process:

- 1948-1955, when reforms centered on changing educational content. Soviet advisors omitted curricula that did not support their ideology. History and social studies were revised to match the Communist ideology.
- 1974-79, when reforms primarily affected the structure of the education system. Directives issued by the Secretary General of the Romanian Communist Party, Nicolae Ceausescu, abolished the academic high schools, replacing them with industrial schools whose main purpose was to train “highly skilled” workers.

In 1978 a new education law favored industrial and specialized schools over academic (general knowledge) lyceums (divided into lyceums of mathematics and physics, natural sciences and philology, and history). The reasons for this measure were fairly complex:

- ***The tendency to demonstrate the superiority of the Romanian educational system during the Socialist period.*** Quality assurance indicators from this period have to be approached carefully given the Communist regime’s tendency to misrepresent reality. For example, every year there were some Romanian students who won international contests in different school subjects (especially in mathematics and sciences). Statistics in the 1980s indicated that every year over 90 percent of students in final years were declared to have passed the baccalaureate exam. School attendance was also reported to be extremely high (more than 95 percent even in upper-secondary education). While statistics were forced to look good, teachers had to struggle with absenteeism and functional illiteracy. Consequently the statistical data for this period does not provide a realistic picture of the state of Romanian education. Schools had to ensure that almost all the school population passed. Failing schools and drop-outs were considered incompatible with the role of schools in training the labor force. As a result, it was common that schools reported false data regarding education achievements. The misreporting of educational achievement data was not scrutinized as it was much more a question of national pride to report that the school population in Romania was capable of superior performances.
- ***The principle of the close link between education and training on the one hand and life and production on the other.*** This was one of the slogans of the era, stating that the ultimate goal of schooling should be the formation of skilled workers who will contribute to the economic growth of the country, based on the newest “discoveries in science and technology.” In addition, academic training was considered bourgeois, while technological training was considered more in line with the ideals of a classless society in which the working class was seen to have a leading role.

In the late 1980s another policy gradually advocated making the second lyceum cycle compulsory (grades 10 to 12/13). The compulsory nature of the ten-year general knowledge education (extended to grades 12/13 in 1989) and the promise of an easily obtainable baccalaureate degree (that was little more than a formality) served to undermine the status of students and teachers, and led to a dangerous increase of drop-outs and functional illiteracy in schools.

The following characterized the education system at the end of the Communist regime:

Management and Finance

- Education management was highly centralized and only top-down approaches in decision-making were permitted. Education was mostly supply-driven. There were only a few examples of responses to demand, notably art schools or computer science.
- Financing was provided by the state with approximately 3.3 percent of the GDP being allocated annually.⁵ Students and parents were asked to make contributions. There were no private or alternative education institution.
- Although strengthening education infrastructure was one of the priorities of the Communist regime, school facilities were still insufficient, especially in the new “labor” neighborhoods of big cities in which students had to learn in two or three (and sometimes four) crowded school shifts.

Access

- The system apparently succeeded in addressing equity issues. There were no significant differences between the schooling of boys and girls, and numerous upper-secondary schools were created in rural areas. A significant number of the students in higher education came from small towns or rural areas, and they were provided with accommodation facilities.⁶ According to official data, even in upper-secondary education enrollment rates exceeded 90 percent. Education in minority languages was provided from kindergarten to higher education.

Quality

- Schools became one of the vehicles the regime used for promoting ideology and demagoguery, and for shaping conformist attitudes. “The new multilaterally developed personality” (another slogan of the late 1970s and 1980s) was seen as the most important outcome of the successful mass education strategy for a developed Socialist society.
- Owing to the traditional influences of German and French education of the late 19th century and early 20th century, teaching and learning in Romanian schools were academic and achievement-oriented, highly conceptual, and with little relevance for daily life experiences. Teaching and learning were focused on stimulation of lower-level intellectual skills, such as rote memorizing and reproduction, while higher level intellectual, emotional, and social skills were more or less neglected. This approach continued through the Communist rule and was even nurtured as a dimension of national pride.

⁵ A similar percentage was allocated after 1990—see Annex 1.

⁶ In comparison to other European countries, accession and retention rates, especially in upper-secondary and higher education, are still significantly lower. For instance, while the gross enrollment rate in tertiary education in Poland was 55.5 in 2002 and 40 percent in Hungary, it was only 27.3 percent in Romania.

- Teachers' status decreased severely and not only due to low wages. Teacher training, for example, comprised of academic training in a certain cultural field, with little or no emphasis on didactics or teaching as a specific profession. In addition, because of low wages, the best graduate students have usually preferred other jobs to teaching. Over time this has contributed to a decrease in the quality of teaching staff.
- Learning resources, when available, were outdated and riddled with ideology. After World War II only one single textbook was allowed for each subject. As a consequence of these practices, only a small group of professional textbook authors existed for each subject, most of them being assigned as textbook writers by the ministry. Textbook production and distribution were the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and its subordinated publishing house, Editura Didactica si Pedagogica.

The revolution started in December 1989, right in the middle of the 1989/1990 school year. Decision-makers and other education stakeholders had to cope with two key issues. On the one hand they had to ensure a smooth continuation of the existing school year, and on the other hand, initiate the adjustment process of the Romanian education system to the new social and political realities of the country. In doing so, policymakers faced several challenges, including acknowledging that an open and democratic society requires a different type of education than one under totalitarian rule. In practice this meant that the top-down nature of educational management had to be changed and access increased. The next challenge was understanding and accepting the need for structural and comprehensive changes in the areas of curriculum and teaching methods, and not just for cosmetic adjustments in the case of some specific fields like the so-called "ideology-sensitive" subject areas. In addition, owing to the powerful myth of the excellence of the Romanian school system, there was a need to alter educators' and the public's misconceptions about the quality of education in order to make education reform a high political and social priority. Finally, the reform also had to grapple with the relatively low public expenditure on education (below 4 percent of GDP in the 1990s and below 3 percent in 1989 and 1990; see Annex 1).

Reform Goals and Phases

The challenge of reform in the Romanian education system is exemplified by the fact that it has been directed by seven different ministers over the past twelve years. The ministers came from diverse political orientations ranging from social-democratic to liberal. Due to a lack of clear direction for change in Romanian society as a whole, the central administration was unable to elaborate a coherent reform vision in the early nineties, though significant changes were initiated. Comprehensive efforts to reform the education system became more apparent in the late nineties. They were based on previous incremental developments, especially in terms of capacity building and new approaches in management, financing, curriculum, and textbook development.

Reform Goals

Large-scale education reform efforts in Romania have been very unique in that they were not based on a shared vision for a need for reform among education stakeholders.⁷ Reform goals were enriched, better clarified, and refined in the process of developing different sub-sector-based reforms, which were initiated as a result of needs analyses and strategic planning provided by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with specific partners and donors.

In discussing reform goals in Romania, two aspects have to be considered: (a) evolution over time with regard to the way reforms were approached and formulated, and (b) a similar evolution in terms of public debate and perception of reform goals in Romanian society. The most important goals that implicitly guided changes in the nineties are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Large-Scale Education Reform Goals in Romania
<p>Overall goal: Reshape education in accordance with the values and principles of an open society.</p> <p>Subsequent goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjust the structure of the education system and the content of education in line with current progressive trends and good practices in international education. • Foster the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for successfully coping with global social, economic, and communication challenges. • Improve quality, equity, and accountability in education at all levels. • Increase the impact of primary, secondary, and tertiary education on social changes and living standards in Romanian society (transforming education into an instrument of social change). • Increase professional creativity in both pre-tertiary and tertiary education. • Prepare highly qualified professional, self-reliant, and accomplished individuals to embrace joint projects and activities successfully.

⁷ These stakeholders include education specialists, decision-makers, representatives of political parties, community representatives, including parents and students, internal and external donors and education partners such as education NGOs, international organizations, and business representatives.

Key Challenges

In order to successfully implement these goals, policymakers took a number of challenges into consideration:

- The education system cannot ignore the changes in today's world and must adjust to modern economies, open societies, and global interdependencies.
- In the present context, education can and must provide equal opportunities and encourage individuals to take an active role in their communities and society at large.
- Shortages and mismanagement of resources (including financial resources) can become major obstacles in achieving reform goals.
- To successfully implement a large-scale education reform in a transition country, top-down approaches have to be balanced with encouraging grassroots initiatives, as well as local and sector-based management and accountability.
- The education system must be responsive to demand.

Reform Phases

As mentioned above, the Romanian education reform can probably be best understood as reform by evolution. It is thus not easy to distinguish specific phases and the accompanying goals of each step. This study views the reform in four phases (Table 2).

During the first two phases of the reform (1990-1994 and 1995-1997), more emphasis was placed on issues of quality assurance (changes in the curriculum and in assessment and evaluation, new concepts of teaching and learning embedded in alternative textbooks, etc.) and on human and material resources (capacity building and logistic preparation). Strategic objectives were formulated in the following phases (1997-2000 and 2001 onwards) as quality assurance mechanisms began to take hold in primary schools. More emphasis was placed on equity issues, including programs fostering equal opportunities, increasing access and retention rates in education. Efficiency issues were also addressed and included implementation of new mechanisms for financing and management, strengthening quality control, and promoting new relationships between school and community based on accountability and effective partnerships.

The reform's primary focus on quality issues generated some unintended equity and efficiency problems. For instance, the need for new and high-quality curricula and textbooks and the desire for these to be more attractive in layout and design influenced decisions not only about technical specifications for publishing, but also contributed to cost-efficiency and equity concerns, particularly in upper-secondary education where textbooks have to be purchased by students. Thus, in the pursuit of these goals it was sometimes difficult to harmonize different needs and to foresee outcomes and consequences of different decisions. The following section discusses how the reform was implemented.

Table 2
Summary of Reform Phases

Reform Phases	Implementation Activities
1990-1994 Exploratory and Preparatory Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cosmetic adjustments/omitting ideological references • Needs analysis of education system • Initial development of reform phases and implementation activities, and drafting of new education legislation • Capacity building of management-level staff for different education sectors and establishment of institutional structure
1995-1997 Capacity Building and Institutional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Education Act of 1995 • Creation of education reform institutions to manage reform in the framework of large-scale projects⁽¹⁾ • Introduction of new curricula and alternative textbooks in primary education • Capacity building of management-level staff for different education sectors and establishment of institutional structure • School improvement programs (just begun) • Focus on quality of pedagogy
1998-2000 Reform Now Program: Acceleration of Reform and Comprehensive Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing education legislation (New Education Act of 1995) • Strengthening existing education reform⁽²⁾ to be more effective and become self-sustainable and creating new autonomous bodies • Gradual yet accelerated implementation of the New National Curriculum in primary and secondary education, with a special focus on upper-secondary education; revision of curriculum of compulsory education (primary and lower-secondary education, grades 1 to 8) accomplished in 1998 and 1999; beginning of systematic process of curriculum and textbook renewal for upper education (1999); new syllabi and textbooks implemented in grades 9 and 10 by year 2000 • Introduction of external evaluation at the end of compulsory education and upper-secondary cycle and reform of assessment and evaluation in daily school practice • Introduction of new mechanisms for management and financing based on strengthening school and university autonomy, including a movement toward decentralization of management • New links between formal education, the labor market, and life-long learning • Capacity-building efforts mixing top-down approaches with grassroots initiatives • Equity issues addressed, including second-chance projects for out-of-school youth (especially drop-outs), rural education pilot program, and school rehabilitation
2001 Onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum review • Restructuring education reform bodies • Focus on equity and quality; comprehensive preparation of the rural education project and ICT programs in schools

(1) Such as the Education Reform Project 3724-RO, co-financed by the World Bank and the Romanian government; PHARE-VET program, financed by the European Union; the PMU of the Education Reform Project 3724-RO; the National Curriculum Board, the National Council for Assessment and Evaluation, the National Council for Management and Financing, the Implementation Unit of the PHARE-VET program, etc.

(2) National Assessment and Examination Service, National Centers for Education Management and Teacher Training, etc.

Reform Implementation

The first years after 1989 represented the so-called stabilization reform (Birzea 1994), during which the Romanian education system reached a new balance by giving up most of its explicit former Communist features. For instance, a more balanced share between general academic and vocational streams was reached in upper-secondary education. Private education institutions were re-established, especially at pre-school and higher education levels. Religion was re-introduced in schools,⁸ and a new philosophy of student-teacher relationships and school mission was encouraged by education stakeholders. These advances were made possible due to legislative and institutional changes, reinforcement of local capacity, and national and international partnerships. As with any other reform, the Romanian effort was influenced by reform politics and public perception and debate over the reform goals.

Legislative and Institutional Changes

Both legal and institutional changes play a major role in the success of a reform. In January 1990 a new Institute for Educational Sciences was established. The first task of the Institute, which led most of the initial reform initiatives, was to analyze professional needs in the various areas of education. Next came the first White Paper on Education Reform. Issued in 1993, it stressed for the first time the need for a comprehensive education reform in Romania. The paper also indicated directions for reforming the system in accordance with the new challenges facing the Romanian society. However legal changes were slow to come. From 1990 to 1995 the Romanian education system continued to function on the basis of the Education Act of 1978. The government did, however, issue yearly decrees to ensure the implementation of specific changes such as the new duration of compulsory education (reduced in 1990 from ten to eight years), the duration of a school year, and the content and structure of national examinations. At the same time several important steps were taken, making it possible to approach education matters from a policy and strategic planning perspective:

- One of the first measures to reform education in 1990 was to replace the Socialist 4+4(+2)+2 system of the late 1970s and 1980s—which was considered unrealistic and financially unsustainable—with the traditional 4+4+4 structure. Compulsory education was reduced from ten to eight years. The Education Act of 1995 confirmed the 4+4+4 structure of the education system (see Annex 2). The Education Act of 1995 was amended in 1999 to extend compulsory education from eight to nine years, to establish a new structure to the education system, and to increase access to a quality basic education.⁹ The initial plan of the Ministry of Education and the Parliamentary Commission for Education was that the first generation to complete nine years of compulsory education would be fifth graders from the 1999/2000 school year. A number of challenges have blocked implementation in some areas of the reform: the lack of logistic preparation, the duration of upper-secondary education, questions

⁸ This new non-sectarian philosophy is the hardest reform to inculcate.

⁹ The 4+5+3/4 structure is considered a transitional one to 6+3+3, following international trends of extending the duration of primary education and reducing the length of upper-secondary education. In Romania, the implementation of a 6+3+3 structure of the education system depends most of all on a radical reform of pre-service teacher training.

over the best system for final examinations at the end of compulsory education, and selection for upper-secondary education. A new Education Act, passed in 2003, stipulates ten years of compulsory education under a former 4+4+2+2 structure of the education system. It is not yet clear how students will be certified in compliance with the new education structure. However since the new structure of the education system is not yet in place, this paper will mostly refer to the 4+4+4 structure established by the 1995 law.

- After several years of absence, the Faculties of Education, Psychology, and Sociology were reopened in various higher education institutions in 1990.¹⁰ The creation of institutional bodies such as the National Council for Curriculum, the National Service for Assessment and Examination, the National Council for Textbooks Approval, and the National Council for Management and Financing in Primary and Secondary Education also contributed to comprehensive educational reform.
- Curriculum changes were aimed at replacing former ideologically biased rhetoric, particularly in the humanities field. The goal was to make education content compliant with good international practices in democratic societies. One of the first decisions was to stop teaching contemporary history and other dogmatic subjects by the end of the 1989/1990 school year. Civic and technical education were introduced in grades 1-8 (compulsory education), logic and social sciences were reintroduced in high schools, and several existing subjects in the curricula were modified (such as philosophy, economy, and history). Given these changes, the next priority was to create local capacity in managing the reform and building the capacity of school managers and teachers in the areas of curriculum development and implementation and teaching and learning practices.

Reform Politics

Most drafts of the Education Law issued between 1990 and 1995 were developed by the newly established teacher trade union and by professional teachers' associations which were closely linked to different political parties. The draft laws were developed with the intention of creating appropriate legislative support for an education system within the context of the new Romanian society and were free from Communist and totalitarianism references. However with the exception of a few new ideas and principles such as autonomy of higher education institutions or private education, the draft laws did not bring about significant changes to the functioning of the education system.

Advocates of liberal measures in education, supporting the idea of a flexible and sustainable network of autonomous and specialized education institutions and mechanisms, often clashed with partisans of centralist state control. The latter continued to see the education system as one of the main instruments for ideological control and political influence. For instance, while supporters of greater centralist control in the education system advocated for the expansion of state-owned (public) educa-

¹⁰ The Higher Education Schools for education, psychology, and sociology ceased admission of new students in 1977, Romania being the only Central and Eastern European country in which academic training in the respective fields was denied for more than a decade. In addition the former Institute for Pedagogy and Psychology was also closed in 1981.

tion, supporters of free initiative advocated for the expansion of private education and the introduction of common quality standards for both the public and private sectors. The same advocates of a centralist (political) control of the education system wanted to preserve a monopoly rule of the Ministry of Education in curriculum and textbook development and approval. On the other hand, advocates of decentralization and of a free-market system for textbook production and distribution supported the idea of a professional system for curriculum and textbook development, based on capacity building, the existence of sustainable specialized institutions (i.e., the National Council for Curriculum Development and the National Council for Textbook Evaluation), and the involvement of the civil society and local communities in designing the education mission of schools and universities.

After almost five years of intensive debate, the new Education Act was finally adopted in 1995. The Act was immediately criticized as being too rigid and regulatory, and failing to build a framework for initiative and quality innovation. Progressive voices felt that overly detailed education provisions blocked necessary changes in curriculum and evaluation, which required flexibility to deal with continual challenges. Advocates of liberalism in education saw the new law as an instrument of centralist control over the education system instead of a means for stimulating real autonomy, quality, and accountability. In some respects, particularly by reintroducing only eight years of compulsory education as opposed to the ten years mandated by the Communist regime, the new 1995 law was seen to represent a set-back, especially in comparison to previous legal provisions.

At the same time, approval of the law by the Parliament represented a significant step toward the real reconstruction of an education system. By introducing new concepts such as democratic education, autonomy, and accountability, the law provided the necessary legislative stability needed for implementing large-scale education reform projects.

Public Perception and Debate About Reform Goals

As in many other societies under Communist control, public consultation about education matters was virtually nonexistent before 1989. The public debates initiated after 1989 therefore focused on building consensus on the need for large-scale education reform as well as promoting the understanding that education reform must be linked with overall political, economic, and social change in Romanian society. Trade unions, professional associations, parents, representatives of political parties, and students were widely involved in the discussion.

The discussion itself was particularly interesting because of years of propaganda under the Communist regime where public service messages had focused on the excellence of Romanian education. The rhetoric was basically focused upon the performance of a small number of students in international competitions. The “excellence” of the education system was used as a means of exalting national pride in the context of overall poor performance in other areas such as economy, social welfare, and living standards. As the need for reform was not yet acknowledged, public opinion showed a tendency to link reform with changes in infrastructure and logistics, rather than recognizing the need to reshape education in accordance with the new principles and values of an open society.

- Various draft education laws on reconstructing the education system in compliance with the new post-revolution social and economic context were developed and circulated among education stakeholders through brochures and specialized teaching magazines. Written and audio-visual media were also important in preparing the public for the structural changes to come. Some of the debates concerning a new education law were hosted by the media, especially in some of the major newspapers and on state television and radio channels.
- In addition to the education research and development projects of the Institute for Educational Sciences, the newly opened higher education schools helped re-launch professional debates in the field of education on important issues such as quality and access, governance, school and classroom management, international trends on learning and human development, curriculum and assessment, and teacher training. The possibility for scholars to once again travel abroad to visit international projects, attend conferences, and access international publications previously prohibited (none of which had been possible, particularly during the 1980s), linked the education community with international efforts.
- Special events such as conferences and seminars also contributed to the launching of the idea of a large-scale reform in Romania. One of the most important events of this kind was the International Conference of the European Ministers of Education, hosted by the Romanian Ministry of Education in Bucharest in June 1992. This was where the possibility of a large-scale education reform, supported by the World Bank, was first tackled.

From 1997 to 2000 several education policy documents were developed and published with the goal of making education reform outcomes explicit and encouraging a dynamic public debate. The end goal was to attain a shared vision as a prerequisite for the swift and successful implementation of comprehensive education reform at all levels. Strengthening local capacity to manage and implement the education reform was undertaken in parallel to the national and political debates about the reform.

Building Local Capacity

Local capacity-building took place in two phases. The first was creating management expertise to oversee reform implementation, and the second involved building the capacity of school managers and teachers. The latter subject will be discussed in Part 3.

One of the key elements leading to the success of the large-scale education reform in Romania was building local capacity. The process started in the early nineties by exposing researchers from different departments of the Institute for Educational Sciences to international experience.¹¹ These experts received intensive training and were offered opportunities to learn through scholarships and study tours in education and research institutes abroad, curriculum development centers, ministries of education, evaluation, and assessment bodies. Upon their return to Romania, they became involved in disseminating their learning, and designing and implementing innovative projects in their specific domains.

¹¹ The Ministry of Education and the World Bank selected the experts based on suggestions by the Institute for Educational Sciences.

Most of these experts became key figures in the design and implementation of various parts of the country's large-scale education reform. While politics between old and new ministry personnel certainly existed, the experts were nevertheless able to promote a step-by-step vision of the reform and mobilize public support for the changes.

International and National Partnerships in Reforming the Education System

International partnerships have been of crucial importance to the success of the Romanian large-scale education reform. Education projects, in cooperation with international bodies, have not only ensured the necessary financial resources, but have also provided important technical assistance and contributed tremendously to local personnel and institutional capacity-building. The first comprehensive design of primary and secondary education reform was stimulated through exploratory missions of the World Bank to Romania. This led to the Education Reform Project 3724-RO, co-financed with a \$50 million loan by the World Bank and the Romanian government. Other important projects in higher education and school rehabilitation were designed and implemented by the year 2000 in cooperation with the World Bank, and a new project in rural areas is under implementation.

The basis for cooperation between the World Bank and the Romanian government shifted over time from mainly World Bank inputs and requirements to a more proactive attitude of the Romanian government. In the beginning the education reform was dependent on outside ideas. In the late 1990s Romanian education specialists and decision-makers were more capable of identifying and formulating reform directions and priorities in compliance with the country's goal of becoming a stable liberal democracy and a functional market economy. For example, the government has initiated new projects such as the School Rehabilitation and Rural Education Project and has substantively contributed to adjusting project objectives, outcomes, and timelines to new circumstances and priorities.

Other major international partners include the European Union, which supported the comprehensive reform of vocational education in 1997 (Euro 25 million for the PHARE-VET project) for a pilot project in 75 vocational schools. Cultural bodies such as the British Council, Les Services Francaises de Coopération Culturelle, the Goethe Institute, Cervantes Institute, among others, have also provided training and facilities for the study of foreign languages and have committed to promoting training in modern didactics in other subjects and educational management.

In addition, the Ministry of Education has initiated a strategy for linking schools, communities, and businesses based on mutual agreements of cooperation. Several companies have developed school networks to promote education projects (such as education programs for decision-making and risk taking (Kraft Jakobs Suchard) or for civic, economic, and entrepreneurial education (Procter & Gamble). Partnerships with civil society bodies with an interest in education have also been important.

In the early 1990s, because of sometimes mutual mistrust, the presence of NGO-run education programs in schools was rather scarce. This situation has changed over the last decade. Through the new curriculum framework (1998 and 1999), space for school-based curriculum created opportunities for

schools to collaborate with education programs promoted by civil society organizations. In the late 1990s a system of educational agreements between civil society organizations and the Ministry of Education was established. The outcome was that several important education programs became an optional part of the curriculum (junior achievement, debate, civic education, human rights education, peaceful conflict management, and reading and writing for critical thinking). NGOs have also provided support for comprehensive reform measures at the grassroots level. The education programs sponsored by the Romanian Open Society Foundation (SON), Pro-Democracy, or Junior Achievement are just a few examples.

It is interesting to note that over several years, donors and education stakeholders have realized that there is significant convergence between their programs and the ministry's strategy for reforming the Romanian education system. Cooperation between the Ministry of Education and education stakeholders has progressed from donors simply trying to fill gaps and shortcomings in the system to a shift in the late 1990s toward common action based on joint strategies and goals.

Conclusion

Throughout the 1990s the link between the formulation of reform goals in education and the process of Romania's European and Euro-Atlantic integration grew stronger. So did clear references to values and principles of an open society based on democratization and transition to a functional and balanced market economy. In the first years after the revolution, reform technicians (top experts leading various sub-sector-based reforms) largely promoted the vision of a comprehensive reform in accordance with new challenges facing people and the society as a whole. By the end of the 1990s this vision was strongly promoted by the Ministry of Education and important education stakeholders in the Romanian society, including parliamentarians, media representatives, NGOs, parents, and representatives of the business world.

In 1999 the Education Act of 1995 was substantially modified. The management and financing functions of education departments and institutions were granted increased autonomy and achieved better accountability. Quality assurance issues had also been tackled, with a new and better mechanism for equal access and fair distribution in place. As a result of these ongoing processes and lessons learned in reforming the education system, continued debates through the media, and lessons learned from international comparisons and analyses, it was now clearer what had to be changed in the law. These directives for change are making way for good practices in education, such as learner-centeredness, modern evaluation and assessment tools and procedures, modern management and financing schemes based on decentralization, and better links between school and community. In addition, orders and regulations issued by the Ministry of Education are now aimed more concretely at providing more incentives for teachers and education stakeholders to address issues of equity, quality, and accountability creatively and efficiently in their local environment.

Sub-Sector Implementation

Sub-sector reforms were carried out in pursuit of the above-mentioned overall reform goals and processes. This section details the implementation process, institutional framework, and specific measures of the reform in the following sub-sectors: curriculum development, textbook development, teacher training, rural education, assessment and examination, management and financing, occupational standards, vocational education, higher education, and school rehabilitation programs.

Curriculum Development¹²

Given that curricula were seen as a regulatory mechanism for the entire system, curriculum development was considered a priority. In 1994 a step-by-step process began for radically changing the curriculum beginning with primary education. The curriculum was initially designed through two projects.¹³ In 1998 the two areas converged into a single process under the coordination of the National Council for Curriculum Development (NCCDC, formerly National Curriculum Board).

Institutional Framework

The institutional framework for curriculum development was created in 1995 through the establishment of a new autonomous body in Romania, the National Curriculum Board, which was subordinated to the Ministry of Education. In the first phase (1995-1999), the National Curriculum Board focused on three main areas: primary education, lower-secondary education/humanities and social sciences, and lower-secondary education/mathematics and sciences (see Annex 3A). Hundreds of curriculum developers from around the country were trained and divided into working groups. They began work on drafting different subject areas under the leadership of experts from the Institute for Educational Sciences (scientific secretaries). Coordinating commissions were comprised of experts from the Institute for Educational Sciences, Ministry of Education inspectors, and university staff. They played an advisory role to the curriculum developers and evaluated the activity of the various working groups.

Initially the Education Reform Project 3724-RO envisaged changes in primary and secondary general education curricula. From 1995 to 1998 only primary and lower-secondary education underwent these changes. In 1998 in the framework of the Reform Now program, new curricula were developed in upper-secondary education in both general and vocational education. The new curricula were designed with

¹² Curriculum and textbook development, assessment and evaluation, management and financing, teacher training, and occupational standards were part of the Education Reform Project 3724-RO, co-financed by the Romanian government and the World Bank (1995-2001). The Ministry of Education, through a steering committee, coordinated the components and reform dimensions.

¹³ General education curriculum in the framework of the Education Reform Project 3724-RO and vocational curriculum in the framework of the PHARE-VET program.

the goal of facilitating better learning opportunities for students. Ideological orientation was replaced with a pluralistic approach in accordance with the values of diversity and tolerance in a modern pluralistic society.

In 1999 curriculum development entered a new phase. Upper-secondary education (including vocational education) became the main focus and the National Council for Curriculum Development (formerly National Curriculum Board) changed its structure to enable better cooperation and coordination among different working groups (see Annex 3B). A special group of experts conducted a final review of the draft curricula before submitting it to the Ministry of Education for approval. These experts soon replaced the former coordinating commissions and became involved in capacity-building for working groups and school teams, as well as in editing and publishing information and disseminating materials on the new curriculum in primary and secondary education.

Curriculum Framework

From 1995 to 1997 despite the absence of a new curriculum framework, new subject curricula for primary and lower-secondary education were developed. The lack of a new curriculum framework led to differences in approach, and in several cases (especially language teaching, science and social studies, history, and civic education) syllabi and textbook authors preferred a more traditional approach. In order to overcome difficulties generated by the lack of a new curriculum framework, the National Curriculum Board tried to include new pedagogical and didactic orientations into general curriculum guidelines. New orientations sometimes contradicted old-fashioned timetable structures, teaching methods, and assessment and evaluation tools. For instance, although curriculum guidelines were focusing on interactive learning and child-centered approaches, several new syllabi continued to promote rote learning of prefabricated discourses. Instead of promoting learner-centered approaches, several syllabi and textbooks continued to promote a so-called academic perspective. In the case of some of the new syllabi (especially languages, civic education, history, and sciences) working groups had to cope with these serious clashes of paradigms.

Under the coordination of the National Curriculum Board, important discussions among defenders of old and new paradigms took place. The new draft syllabi were published in pedagogical newsletters and magazines, and submitted for discussion to teachers, professional organizations, and expert panels. Despite several revisions, supporters of the old models actively lobbied to preserve traditional, teacher-centered approaches. In the end the Ministry of Education required a new pedagogical model.

A new curriculum framework, comprehensively reshaping teaching and learning in primary and secondary general and vocational education, was first issued in 1998 (for compulsory education) and completed in 1999 (for upper-secondary education). There was a gradual and highly dynamic process of introducing new teaching and learning resources in schools to support the new curriculum while simultaneously shaping new assessment and evaluation tools and teacher-training strategies (see Annex 3C).

Capacity Building

One major challenge was the promotion of curriculum development based on new institutional standards and capacity building. Conservative voices in both academic circles and the broader public strongly opposed the changes in the curriculum. A new vision of school mission (i.e., teaching and learning based on students' needs instead of on academic requirements) was difficult to promote due to these conservative voices.

In the early 1990s top experts from Romania (mainly from the Institute for Educational Sciences and the University of Bucharest's Faculty for Psychology and Education) were trained to provide the necessary local expertise for curriculum development. They subsequently became involved in capacity-building.

Under the leadership of the newly established National Curriculum Board and the Ministry of Education, the capacity-building process included a transparent selection and training of professionals as potential curriculum developers. These trainers were then invited to prove their skills in drafting new curricula in accordance with general guidelines issued by the National Curriculum Board (later called National Council for Curriculum Development). Announcements for trainers were published in major newspapers, and clear terms of references were circulated. The process also included a component of developing policy documents and disseminating them to education stakeholders, such as teachers and headmasters, local school inspectors, parents, and in some cases also students. Another important dimension in curriculum development activities was that of encouraging public debates on changes in education, the first of their kind after several decades of top-down decision-making and management.

Reform Measures: Curriculum Reform

1. In only six years (from 1995 to 2001; see Annex 4), a new curriculum framework and new subject curricula were developed and gradually implemented from grades 1 to 12;
2. The following changes were made to the content of the curriculum:
 - Goals were formulated to promote living together globally and facing competition successfully by cultivating cooperation and solidarity.
 - Cross-curricular approaches and integrated learning significantly reduced the overload of subject and content matter.
 - A better balance between conceptual and practical learning was achieved through the introduction of higher level skills learning such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and creative problem-solving as well as social and emotional skills.
 - Learner-centered approaches were promoted to facilitate individual learning strategies and personal development.
 - Constructivist approaches enabled students to create their own learning situations and opportunities.

- Better links were forged between academic learning and life skills, and extracurricular activities provided more opportunities for counseling and orientation.
- Recent developments in specific cultural areas were taken into account, and new syllabi reflected the new didactic paradigms. Outdated information and traditional approaches were removed from syllabi and textbooks in order to create room for recent developments in science and culture, and social and economic life.

Textbook Development

Reforming textbook development in accordance with new quality standards of content, technical design, editing, and printing was a huge endeavor which took the overall education reform to scale. Considered as the most common and important education tools,¹⁴ textbooks were possibly the most visible outcome of the education reform process. Therefore in the opinion of many education specialists, new pedagogical paradigms and education messages in accordance with new pluralistic and democratic values of the Romanian society were to be swiftly integrated into textbooks and other teaching aids. New alternative (different) textbooks were seen as the expression of pedagogical pluralism. These were usually accompanied by other teaching aids, such as teachers' guides, students' notebooks or other pedagogical kits for individual and group work. These new didactic and pedagogical tools were seen as crucial steps for shifting from a teacher- and subject-centered approach to a learner-centered perspective.

Institutional Framework

As in the case of curriculum development, a new body for coordinating textbook development, the National Council for Textbook Approval, was created outside of the ministry. The establishment of an external body for textbook evaluation and approval was necessary because of several reasons. Before 1989 a single textbook was used for all subject. The reform was moving toward the creation of different textbooks for every subject and the idea of optional texts. The establishment of an independent body (thereby promoting transparency and professionalism, and avoiding corruption) for evaluating texts was also seen as an important step toward the creation of a fair process of textbook approval. Creation of a free textbook market in Romania would greatly facilitate this goal. The British Council provided technical assistance to train local experts (primarily teachers and university professors) on textbook evaluation. Private publishing houses also received substantial support through training and financial resources to strengthen their capacity to successfully engage in a newly organized competitive market for textbook production.

Reform Measures: Textbooks

1. In 1994 a free-market system for teaching aides was set up in two stages:
 - (a) 1995-1998: A limited choice with a maximum of three alternative textbooks for each subject in compulsory education was created. Private publishing houses were invited to compete. Textbooks

¹⁴ Textbooks were relatively inexpensive (less than US\$1 for primary education and up to US\$2 for upper-secondary education) and more accessible in comparison to other learning resources.

were selected on basis of content and price. The term “alternative” was used, though “diverse” would have been probably more appropriate. The new alternative textbooks were based in each subject on the same syllabus, but the pedagogical approach, content, layout, and editing could vary. In accordance with the provisions of the Education Act, textbooks were free of charge for students in compulsory education.

(b) 1999: A free market for textbooks in upper-secondary education was established.

2. New alternative textbooks were introduced in all grades (see Annex 5), including classes for minority populations at the end of the 2002/2003 school year. Translation of textbooks for minority students will take an additional year. A new generation of primary education textbooks are now being launched since the initial ones have already been in use for over five years.

Teacher Training

Despite the fact that all national and international studies on the post-Communist Romanian education system recommended that pre- and in-service teacher training should be a priority, no significant progress was made until 1998. Despite a rhetorical acknowledgement of the need for professional teaching, no substantial changes were brought to the traditional model of pre-service training, conceived mainly as an academic preparation in one or two related subjects to which departments for teacher training provided additional education courses and practical training. Pre-service training remained the exclusive prerogative of universities in which teacher training departments were created in accordance with provisions of the Education Act of 1995 and the Teachers’ Act of 1997.

Local capacity-building entered a new phase in 1998/1999 when a national program for in-service teacher training was developed and implemented in cooperation with several education development centers (i.e., Casa Corpului Didactic). In addition, the Education Reform Project also initiated training programs in curriculum and textbook development, and management and financing. By 2001 more than 40,000 teachers had been trained in curriculum development, and more than 8,000 teachers were trained in education management.

Training programs were conducted by Romanian and international experts, and comprised of short-term in-service sessions from one to five weeks. They addressed the theoretical and practical dimensions of implementing the new curriculum, the national system for assessment and evaluation, and new school and class management approaches. Some of the training was delivered during summer schools or over holiday periods. Based on the length, content, and certification procedures of the training, participants were awarded certificates and diplomas. Some were granted authorization to conduct training in further programs at the national or local level.

As the implementation of the national curriculum was progressing from primary to secondary education, several training programs geared toward developing the school-based curriculum were implemented from 1999 to 2001. Special funds were allocated for training teachers, headmasters, and school inspectors nationwide via several components of the Education Reform Project. The impact of these capacity-building programs was especially significant in the medium term. In 1998 and 1999

teachers were relatively unfamiliar with changes in the education system. After two or three years of training, studies¹⁵ found a critical mass of teachers embracing and promoting new teaching and learning strategies and/or new management strategies.

The trainees were constantly encouraged to engage in continuous dissemination and capacity-building in their own local environment, especially through school-based training of local staff. School networks were one of the most effective ways to stimulate teamwork and school-based training.¹⁶ Schools could apply for grants and benefit from the technical assistance of the ministry and the Education Centre 2000+. In several cases magnet schools have been engaged in the dissemination of good practices in education. At the ministerial level a database of education experts and trainers was established, and schools were encouraged to invite these specialists for school-based capacity-building.

Institutional Framework

In-service training also remained a prerogative of universities, the only training providers entitled by law to conduct certification programs required for career advancement (didactic degrees). University programs were usually developed in cooperation with the Teachers' Centers. These centers were created some decades ago as support bodies for in-service teacher-training programs and professional development of teachers and school principals. They conducted in-service courses for teachers who, according to the law, had to attend new training every five years (if they were not registered for didactic degrees). NGOs, professional organizations, and academic and research institutes were allowed to organize training sessions but were not authorized to issue a formal certification for completed training.

In 1999 and 2000, a process of institutional development similar to the one for management and financing began to take shape. A National Centre for Teacher Training was established to provide accreditation of training programs offered by different training providers on the basis of national quality standards. Through the cascade model only a limited number of teachers had been trained (about 30,000 out of approximately 300,000), and in several cases training outcomes were not satisfactory. The new model, based on a market competition of training providers and accreditation programs, seemed to have more potential for facilitating greater teacher participation in new training programs over a short period of time.

In 2001 the two newly created bodies for teacher training and management and financing merged into a single entity: the National Agency for Professional Development in Education. A draft set of Quality Standards for Accreditation of Training Programs were proposed and became functional in 2001/2002.

Reform Measures: Teacher Training

1. In 1998 the teacher-training component of the Education Reform Project finally began implementing a cascade training model. Initial opposition of universities in particular, teacher training departments and repeated postponements of cascade model implementation were finally overcome through

¹⁵ Curriculum Impact Study. www.cedu.ro.

¹⁶ Joint program of the Ministry of Education and the Education Centre 2000+, "Education reform at the grassroots" (1999-2001).

the support of international technical assistance¹⁷ and through inclusive strategies involving university specialists as partners and strategic allies.

2. The first teachers trained were national trainers, followed by regional trainers. Professional standards for teaching and standards based on assessment criteria were also developed. At the same time Teachers' Centers and other teacher-training centers in rural areas were equipped and transformed into certified teacher-training resource centers.

3. Although a systematic approach to teacher training began much later than other reform components, several positive outcomes can be identified. The new curriculum provisions and guidelines in assessment and evaluation have provided the background and point of reference for teacher training and management courses. Teacher-training programs could therefore incorporate recent developments in other areas of education reform. Major contradictions between the content of training programs and developments in other areas such as curriculum, assessment, and management could be avoided. At the same time progress in management and financing has been used to support promotion of best practices not just theoretically, but also in accordance with new realities in the Romanian context. For instance, school autonomy issues were the reference point for training teachers in developing and implementing the new school-based part of the curriculum.

Rural Education

The student to teacher ratio is compatible with the average figures in the European Union (see Annex 8), but important disparities persist between urban and rural areas. Some urban settings are confronted with overcrowded classrooms. Rural schools, on the other hand, have the opposite problem. In some areas one teacher teaches only six to seven students or less. To address this issue, a restructuring of the school networking in rural areas was initiated in the early 1990s and is still ongoing. In 1999 the Ministry of Education launched the Rural Education Program. In 2001 and 2002, other exploratory and preparatory activities paved the way for making the program comprehensive as soon as possible. These preparations have led to the development and approval in 2003 of a new GOR-WB project on Rural Education. It is hoped that the coming years of gradual and successful implementation of the Rural Education Program will significantly reduce the disparities in education quality in urban and rural areas, and that education will once again become a concern for local rural communities.

Institutional Framework

Several education programs for Roma students and other disadvantaged populations have been implemented with the support of the World Bank, SON, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and others through programs such as Second Chance, special education for young mothers, community education, and school infrastructure rebuilding.

Reform Measures: Rural Education

The Rural Education Program had the goals of improving infrastructure and school facilities, and building capacity for sustainable education development at local levels. The intervention was sup-

¹⁷ From the Education Development Centre (EDC).

ported by a comprehensive financial and technical project of the Romanian government and the World Bank.¹⁸

Assessment and Examinations

Assessment and evaluation-related procedures took more time to establish than curriculum and textbook development. From 1990 to 1997 there was little coordination between progress made in curriculum development and old-fashioned assessment and evaluation strategies. The situation changed considerably after 1998 with new assessment and evaluation principles and strategies reshaping teaching and learning in Romanian schools along with new curricula provisions. Before 1998 substantial capacity-building took place with technical support from the Netherlands National Institute for Educational Measurement (CITO), supported by the Education Reform Project. Small groups of Romanian teachers (approximately 30-50 per session) were trained by Romanian and foreign experts. Although they initiated the development of draft policy papers and new guidelines for assessment and evaluation, their efforts had little impact on the education system because a lack of political will for changing the assessment and evaluation system.

The main objectives of reforming and creating a new culture of assessment and evaluation in Romania were to:

- support better learning in schools and personal development of students;
- facilitate transition from content-based assessment to learning objectives-based assessment;
- promote methods, procedures, and instruments for monitoring and stimulating students' progress in school;
- provide reliable tools for evaluation, counseling, and certification of competencies at the end of a certain educational stage;
- improve quality of school-leaving examinations;
- strengthen communication and cooperation among schools, parents, and other education stakeholders to enhance learning outcomes in schools and provide better guidance and counseling for students; and
- balance internal and external evaluation and improve reliability of assessment and evaluation results.

Institutional Framework

The National Assessment and Examination Agency (NAES) was established as an autonomous institution in 1997. The Loan Agreement between the Romanian government and the World Bank and the legal status of the NAES made it one of the most sustainable education reform outcomes compared to other similar entities created for the implementation of the Education Reform Project. The NAES had two primary issues to tackle from the onset. The first was creation of appropriate assessment and

¹⁸ In 2001 based on pilot projects in 8 of the 42 counties in the country, the Centre Education 2000+ published an Impact Study on rural education development, focusing on challenges faced by schools in implementing the new curriculum and other reform measures. It also focused on the need to strengthen ties between schools and communities and to help schools re-establish themselves as focal points of community life.

evaluation tools for daily use in schools. These tools help teachers encourage students' individual development and correlate with education objectives promoted by the new curriculum. The second issue was reforming school-leaving examinations in a system where more emphasis was placed on selection and accession against reliable outcomes at the end of a certain learning cycle or education stage. It was therefore necessary to considerably reform final examinations in accordance with external (i.e., nationally agreed-upon) evaluation procedures. For example, in lieu of school-based examinations, which were seen to be arbitrary and potentially corrupt, external examination bodies were to examine students and assess them based on valid and reliable national tests and standards.

The newly established NAES not only had to change the examination system, but also the daily classroom assessment and evaluation techniques. Diagnostic approaches based on processes of selection and accession in education also had to undergo a much-needed change. Traditionally more attention was given to access or entrance examinations than to testing learning outcomes and student achievements at the end of a learning cycle. Similarly more emphasis was placed on diagnostic and summative evaluation than to formative and progress assessment.

Reform Measures: Assessment and Examinations

1. An important dimension of NAES's activities was the reintroduction of national sample-based assessment focusing on basic education skills (reading and writing in the mother tongue and possibly in a foreign language, numeracy, and natural sciences). There was a national assessment test four to six years ago. In 2001 Romania joined the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), with NAES as a counterpart and coordinator of the Romanian survey.¹⁹
2. Over the past several years NAES experts have actively participated in nationwide training seminars and workshops organized with teachers. Publications have also been issued on general policy-related issues and specific assessment and evaluation techniques in a particular curriculum area. New complex and user-friendly guidelines for examinations have also been designed in cooperation with publishing houses specializing in teaching aids.
3. Although no plans have been made to systematically analyze the impact of reform measures in assessment and evaluation, there are nevertheless outcomes that show that the changes in assessment and evaluation have been positive (see discussion in Part 4). For example, final examination results are considered to be more reliable. Careful assessment and observation of students' progress is now part of daily practice in some schools, especially in primary and lower-secondary education.

Management and Financing

The implementation of a new decentralized system of education management and financing has proven to be one of the major challenges of the education reform. A significant challenge was articulating why decentralization was a good approach for the Romanian education system and how it could function efficiently in the Romanian context. As shown through many countries' experiences, decentralization

¹⁹ Romania has participated in Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) under the coordination of the Institute of Educational Sciences.

is not necessarily a miracle solution for all problems. In fact, if resources are scarce and school and education authorities are not well prepared, decentralization could very well lead to severe disruptions in the system. In Romania's case, the following were seen as main reasons for decentralizing the education system:

- By shifting decision-making and budgetary functions from central to local levels, schools and local authorities would be able to capitalize on their autonomy and make decisions that were best for the local context.
- Autonomy and decentralization were seen as powerful incentives for motivating education stakeholders to support educational initiatives at local levels.
- Decentralized structures were also supposed to become more accountable and maximize the efficient use of human, financial, and material resources and costs.

Institutional Framework

Before 1989 as in other social areas, democratic centralism was the guiding principle in the education system. Decision-making was mainly a top-down process, and almost no cooperation existed between schools and the community. The Ministry of Education exerted its authority through school inspectorates set up in each of the 41 counties, controlling schools and teaching staff in coordination with local authorities and local bodies of the Communist Party. Inspectors and head teachers were appointed on the basis of their professional record as well as on the formal approval of party representatives. Education management, however, was not considered a special area of competence. It was a function occupied by the head teacher. Decades of centralized decision-making resulted in a lack of initiative, interest, and participation on the part of parents and the public, and poor accountability.

Although after 1989 public debates centered on the need for decentralizing the Romanian public administration (including education), neither the 1991 Constitution nor the new legislation on the functioning of different bodies of public authority succeeded in creating the necessary preconditions for decentralized education management and financing. In the early 1990s decentralization was perceived more as a threat than an advantage, primarily because this was associated with claims for autonomy by ethnic groups (especially Hungarians). After 1993 when Romania became a member state of the Council of Europe, more attention was paid to promoting local and regional initiatives and facilitating decision-making at local levels. Although supported by new legislative provisions in the late 1990s and 2001, the devolution of power from central to intermediate and local administration levels is still ongoing.

In 1995 under the coordination of a National Management and Financial Board (a body similar to ones created for curriculum development and assessment and evaluation), different working groups began to promote and facilitate an optimization of the education system based on new decentralized management and financing principles and mechanisms.²⁰ Working groups usually consisted of senior specialized staff of the Institute for Educational Sciences and reform-oriented headmasters and inspectors. Objectives included:

²⁰ The working group established under the management and financing component of the reform management project worked in cooperation with a team of British experts from the Centre for British Teachers, who provided international technical assistance supported by the British Know How Fund.

- strengthening the managerial capacity of Ministry of Education, school inspectorates, and schools;
- implementing new decentralized management and financing mechanisms;
- providing extensive training in modern education management and financing, and disseminating best practices;
- promoting new quality assurance tools through a new inspection model and training in school development;
- setting up an Education Management Information System (EMIS) and a Data Interchange Agreement (DIA); and
- improving education financing through new mobilization, allocation, and fund management approaches.

In 1999 and 2000 a National Agency for Education Management was established in order to accredit training programs in education management and financing; strengthen current education management programs in pre-service training; and develop professional standards for administration. A series of seminars and workshops were held nationwide, and intensive publishing also supported the dissemination of new ideas and best practices. The establishment of local and regional networks of centers for professional development, innovation, and resources was a major accomplishment. These centers acted as decentralized capacity-building bodies for education management and financing.

Reform Measures: Management and Financing

1. So far a gradual introduction of decentralization has been promoted, with several areas of decision-making and financing not yet completely decentralized. For instance, an important part of the curriculum is still decided at the central level, and national exams were introduced based on standards and instruments developed by the NAES. Teacher salaries are still determined and paid by the central government while salaries for other support staff (librarians, secretaries, etc.) gradually have been relegated to local/county levels.
2. The training of trainers in each of the 42 Romanian counties was a major achievement of the National Management and Financial Board. As a result Romania has a critical mass of reform-oriented headmasters and local school inspectors. These professionals began to network across the country, and professional associations are beginning to promote their ideas in a systematic and sustainable manner.

Occupational Standards

In 1996 the Council of Occupational Standards and Assessment (COSA) was established as a representative forum for employers, unions, and government. As in many countries where such entities have been introduced, COSA was not a regulatory body. Rather, its purpose is to provide training providers and trainees with quality benchmarks for increased labor-force mobility and productivity. The goal is to develop and promote a system of assessment and certification based on occupational standards. The basic profile of a certain occupation and its corresponding competencies were to be defined. As such occupational standards were seen to facilitate a better correlation between practices and labor-market

demand and vocational education and training. Training programs in different vocational branches and streams have to be designed in compliance with profiles of different occupations and competencies required in a certain field of activity.

Through its Research and Technical Services Unit, COSA operates jointly with local consultants, as well as with occupational groups in the public and private sectors. Over the last years COSA has published many occupational standards (most of them for industrial activities and services), including occupational standards for the teaching profession. In most cases drafting occupational standards became also an opportunity for professional reflection of various interest groups on the content and mission of different fields of activity in a dynamic, quickly changing society.

Vocational Education

Although a priority of the former Communist regime, in the 1980s vocational education was affected by the same unproductive decisions and resource shortages as general education.²¹ Vocational education was provided through three different streams: (a) technical high schools of four or five years with baccalaureate certification or professional qualification (technician); (b) vocational schools of three or four years with certification; and (c) apprenticeship schools of one or two years with lower qualification certification. In most cases, especially in large cities, different vocational streams were concentrated in Grupuri Scolare and equipped with laboratories and workshops in accordance with training needs for specific professions. Most of these groups had been created in the absence of an informed decision-making process based on reliable forecasts regarding demands and developments in the labor market.

After 1990 it became clear that a radical reform of vocational education and training had to be undertaken. Schools offering too focused a specialization in professions that were no longer in demand in the labor market continued to produce new categories of unemployed people. According to statistics, young people graduating technical high schools and vocational schools (approximately 23 percent) are experiencing major difficulties in finding employment.

Institutional Framework

From 1997 to 2000 a pilot program was implemented for reforming vocational education in 75 units (approximately 25 percent of vocational schools).²² Major objectives of the program were to:

- redesign vocational education streams to facilitate a broad and flexible training based on modern occupational classifications and standards;
- provide a better balance between general and vocational education and meaningful learning opportunities through comprehensive changes in the curriculum and teaching and learning approaches;

²¹ Before 1990 much of the motivation for students to attend vocational education schools stemmed from the fact that graduates were guaranteed employment in associated industrial complexes. The impact of de-linking education and employment could very well present serious challenges to reform efforts, and needs to be better documented.

²² Made possible by a grant from the European Union.

- link theory and practice and give students the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills in concrete working situations relevant to the present labor market through appropriate equipment and other facilities;
- provide enhanced counseling and orientation for students from a life-long learning perspective and promote entrepreneurial education;
- promote effective social partnerships with employers, trade unions, NGOs, and governmental bodies in defining vocational education, training priorities and strategies;
- provide teacher training in accordance to modern quality standards;
- improve school infrastructure and logistics; and
- use ICT extensively in vocational education.

Reform Measures: Vocational Education

1. The number of specializations in technical high schools significantly decreased from 132 in 1995 to 27 in 2001. Specializations in vocational schools decreased from 130 in 1995 to 15 occupational fields in 2001. In some cases education streams that did not provide the qualifications needed in the European market were altogether closed (e.g., pedagogical upper-secondary schools and sanitary upper-secondary schools).
2. In 1999 evaluations conducted by Romanian, European Commission, and European Training Foundation (ETF) experts showed pilot projects in vocational education to be successful.
3. The Ministry of Education decided to gradually expand the reform program to all vocational schools in the country over a three to five year period.
4. In the late 1990s restructuring of schools took place. In some cases two or three similar technical high schools (of mostly agricultural orientation) were concentrated in the same area at little distance from one another; in other cases students in crowded compulsory schools had to learn in three shifts while in neighboring high schools learning took place in one shift. In rural and remote areas school inspectorates were encouraged to provide school buses to better distribute the student population among schools and to ensure quality education, including through distance learning.

Higher Education

In early 1990s new legal provisions stressed the autonomy of universities as an important principle in reforming higher education in Romania. The Education Acts of 1995 and 1999 increased financial autonomy of universities organized as systems in the service of the community. "Universities as service providers" is a relatively new concept in higher education reform. This concept stresses the need for higher education units to become active in fundraising and attracting extra-budgetary funds through various categories of service provided to the community, including businesses.

Higher education reform also took into consideration international developments such as the Bologna process²³ and the need to adjust higher education qualifications to progressive developments and

²³ The Bologna process is based on the 1999 Bologna Declaration which aims to create a European space in higher education. In order to increase students' and teachers' mobility and improve the quality of education, higher education bodies are to be reformed in compliance with the principles stated in the Declaration.

competition in the context of globalization. In the late 1990s several programs for quality assurance in higher education were added, as well as programs for stimulating research and academic excellence (including competitions for grants supported through a World Bank project). In 1999 and 2000 the student to teacher ratio in some universities was extremely low (4 to 1) and thus less cost effective. Curriculum changes and restructuring of the university system in the late 1990s has brought the current ratio closer to the EU average.

Reform Measures: Higher Education

1. Based on existing new legislation for opening economic enterprises, several new private higher education bodies were created as education service providers. To meet the increasing higher education demands of society, in a short time the number of private universities equaled that of state public universities. In 1994 a special law for accrediting higher education institutions was passed to provide quality assurance. After a long and complex evaluation process undertaken by the National Commission for Evaluation and Accreditation in Higher Education, eight universities were accredited in 2002. (In previous years only faculties and schools had been credited, not universities as a whole.)

2. A number of needs were taken into account for reforming higher education:

- increasing the number of students in higher education (in comparison to other Central and Eastern European countries in which approximately 19-20 percent of the school population attend higher education institutions (ages 19 to 24), until 1997 in Romania this proportion was less than 10 percent);
- reorganizing university programs according to modern qualifications and appropriate duration of study (a better balance between long-term studies and short-term studies);
- extending double and multiple specialization;
- improving the curriculum as well as teaching methods to support individual study;
- introducing distance and life-long learning programs;
- organizing better postgraduate studies at master's, advanced, doctoral, and postdoctoral levels;
- stimulating academic excellence through grants and other incentives for students with outstanding performance;
- improving academic management and financing on the basis of university autonomy; and
- improving the infrastructure and education facilities in accordance with today's international quality standards.

School Rehabilitation Program

In 1997 a new program for school rehabilitation in Bucharest and other counties was launched with the support of the World Bank (with a US\$50 million loan). In particular approximately 1250 old school buildings affected by earthquakes were targeted. In 1999 after several unsuccessful attempts,²⁴ a coordinating body was finally established based on improved legal provisions. Concrete rehabilitation work began at full speed. The coordinating body included specialists in construction and school rehabilitation, school principals and managers, economists, and community representatives.

²⁴ Unsatisfactory legal and economic status of the coordinating bodies made it difficult to retain a director for more than several months.

Reform Assessment

This section analyzes the effectiveness and sustainability of reform measures. The real impact of a large-scale education reform can only be determined in the long run. However short- and medium-term outcomes can be assessed against reform goals set in 1990, achievement of objectives in different areas of intervention, and student impact. Student impact can be assessed through access, retention, and student achievement rates. This section assesses the success and challenges of developing and implementing an education reform agenda in terms of:

- making education a national priority;
- bringing education and learning back to the classroom and community;
- increasing access to education, particularly for disadvantaged and minority students;
- instilling a new curriculum culture;
- providing textbooks, teaching aids, and pedagogies, including through private education that will convey the new curriculum culture;
- improving management capacity;
- strengthening assessment and evaluation of students and the system; and
- allocating resources for maximum impact on student outcomes.

One of the more prominent and positive results has been the active participation of education stakeholders in debates about reform design and implementation. Whereas before 1989 the participation of the general public, including practicing educators, was virtually absent from education debate, in just a few years education reform has become a topic of national interest. Ownership of the reform process by education stakeholders is less regarded as an abstract principle. A dynamic consultation process involving different education stakeholders has taken shape and in some cases, influenced policymakers to revise reform measures.

The December 1997 Reform Now manifesto stipulated that numerous delays, resource shortages, and gaps in changing education in line with new challenges had prevented comprehensive education reform and urged that the time had come for the reform to be implemented at full speed. However the rapid reform pace was criticized by stakeholders who were direct beneficiaries of reform measures (such as teachers, school inspectors, and parents) because they felt the fast pace neglected people's need to adjust to change.

Education: a national priority and topic of national interest. The implementation of large-scale education reform has led to a renewal of public interest in education. During the last decade (and especially from 1997 to 2000), education reform became an issue of national interest, and education stakeholders became more involved in supporting the idea of education as a national priority in a concrete and sustainable way. In 2000 the idea of an "educational pact" among the different

political parties emerged and was put into practice to develop a comprehensive strategy for accelerating the process of European integration. (In 2000 Romania closed the first chapter in the negotiation process.) Several unsuccessful attempts have been made to develop a shared vision on education reform goals and priorities, and several strategic documents have been published. In 2002 the discussion around a new education pact was re-opened and is ongoing.

Bringing education back to the classroom and community. In the late 1990s the Ministry of Education launched a campaign to bring education and learning back to the classroom. A first important step was defining the school mission in conjunction with changes in social and economic life. Education units and institutions in both pre-tertiary and tertiary education were requested to make their mission and strategies for achieving quality education transparent to the community. Every year since 1998 schools and universities publish presentation materials and take part in special events in order to advertise their mission and results, as well as to attract more support from education stakeholders. In 1999 the idea of contracts between schools and communities was launched. The purpose was to provide incentives for both schools and education stakeholders in the community in order to identify better ways for cooperation and mutual support. Schools are presented as proactive institutions in the service of public and community good, rather than as passive receivers of community support.

Increased access to education and improvement in retention rates. Although there has been a constant decrease in population growth and subsequently of school population in the 1980s and 1990s (see Annex 6), during the last decade significant progress has been made in terms of increasing access and retention rates at all levels. Most importantly enrollments increased in pre-school and higher levels (upper-secondary and tertiary education; see Annexes 7 and 8), bringing Romania closer to EU figures and standards.

Greater efforts to include disadvantaged populations. Enrollment and learning achievement discrepancies remain significant between urban and rural areas. For instance, drop-out rates are higher in rural areas and among Roma children and students in apprenticeship schools. There are no significant differences between drop-out rates for boys and girls. Schools in small one-industry cities with decaying factories affected by unemployment as well as schools in overcrowded industrial neighborhoods of large cities are also disadvantaged. Furthermore a high percentage of the Roma population living in poverty situations is unable to access a high-quality education, either due to a lack of appropriate infrastructure or because of the poor quality of teaching staff. The effect on student learning and development is invariably negative. Equity issues have been addressed through special equal-opportunity programs promoting meaningful partnerships with civil society. Second chance programs addressing both the completion of basic education and vocational training have been designed in addition to education development programs in rural areas, and a GOR/WB rural education project has been approved in 2003 to improve the rural-urban balance.²⁵

²⁵ In rural schools drop-out rates are higher than in urban schools (especially in early grades), and student achievement is also significantly lower in comparison to student achievements in urban areas. Rural students' access rates to higher education (less than 3 percent) are also significantly lower than in urban areas. Poor infrastructure and logistics, and a high proportion of uncertified teachers invariably have a negative impact on education quality, as does a lack of interest on the part of local authorities supporting education in transforming schools into centers of community life.

Minority education. In the last decade special attention was paid to providing equal opportunities for all, including studies in the mother tongue from pre-school to university for large minority populations and on request by the smaller minority populations. The new curriculum framework implemented in 1998 stipulates that minority language mother tongues will be taught for the same minimum number of hours a week as the Romanian mother tongue. In the case of smaller minorities, the mother tongue can be studied for three to four hours a week on request.²⁶ In addition to minority languages (Hungarian, German, Serbian, and Slovak), special attention was paid to minority education for Roma children who, for the first time, could study in Romani. Study of the full curriculum in a foreign language and intensive studies of foreign languages, in combination with cultural awareness courses, have also been made possible in both secondary and tertiary education.

Several other affirmative-action measures have been taken in support of Romani education. In the early 1990s special classes in Romani language were offered in pedagogical high schools in order to train teachers for pre-schools and schools with high percentages of Roma students. In the late 1990s in response to programs initiated by the Ministry of Education, universities began to annually allocate a special number of places for Roma students. In the 1998/1999 academic year 101 out of 634 students registered in state universities under the category of "other ethnicity" (in addition to Hungarian, German, Serbian, and Russian) were Roma. In private universities 25 out of 385 "other ethnicity" students were Roma.

Over the last decade, primarily due to a population decrease the overall number of students studying minority languages has also decreased. This has not, however, had any negative effect on accession and retention rates. In general the percentage of the school population studying minority languages compared to the total school population is slightly higher in pre-school and primary education (5 to 6 percent) than in upper-secondary and tertiary education (4 to 4.5 percent). This is mostly due to the well-developed community networks of primary and lower-secondary schools. At the end of the 1990s several new vocational schools began offering instruction in minority languages. This led to a significant increase of students taking minority languages in vocational and post-secondary schools (from 1.1 percent in 1990 to 3 percent in 2000).

A new curriculum culture. Although the gradual implementation of a new curriculum will produce results over time, it is nonetheless possible to assess impact via a change in mentalities and better learning outcomes in schools.²⁷ Many people still held misconceptions about the high quality of Romanian education. In reality Romanian students in grades 7 and 8 scored below average (31st in sciences and 34th in mathematics, when compared to the 41 countries in the TIMSS study).²⁸ Over 80 percent of the students encountered difficulties in retaining learning, creative problem-solving, and applying theoretical teaching to everyday situations. A 1997 International Association for the Evaluation of

²⁶ In order to promote intercultural understanding through provisions in the new 1998/1999 curriculum framework, Romanian students can choose one of the minority languages as an elective course.

²⁷ A recent impact study on curriculum reform (coordinated by Lazar Vlasceanu, issued in 2001, and published in 2002) initiated by the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research and the Centre for Education 2000+ stresses the tremendous change in paradigms promoted through the new curriculum and its advantage in helping students reach their full potential through meaningful learning experiences.

²⁸ Third International Mathematics and Sciences Study, 1995/1996.

Educational Achievement (IEA) study on civic education also showed that despite predominantly conceptual approaches in the curriculum, students have a poor understanding of concepts and relevant data on democracy and human rights. Other studies²⁹ point to overload in the curriculum, as well as to the false assumption that condensed and commonly high requirements in the curriculum are the answer to good teaching and learning. Achievements of the Romanian curriculum reform so far include:

- The new curriculum has facilitated a culture of informed choice and contributed to the change of mentality in accordance with the values and principles of a democratic and open society.
- The curriculum has promoted better linkages between school and communities. For example, 70 percent of the curriculum focuses on compulsory education and the remaining 30 percent (higher in upper-secondary school) on school-based or optional subjects. As a result, schools have been able to elaborate mission statements.
- The reduction of the minimum number of hours a week for compulsory subjects has given rise to differentiated learning in smaller groups, especially in terms of elective subjects. This has made interactive learning possible and facilitated learner-centeredness, thus supporting a better balance between curriculum density and flexibility.
- The new curriculum has been structured into seven areas³⁰ to support personal development. For example, in the old curriculum, greater emphasis was placed on teaching and learning of mathematics and sciences. However the new curriculum balances the need for compulsory subjects with cultural education.
- Learning objectives and changes in didactic approaches have promoted a cross-curriculum approach to teaching and learning and downsized on content. So, for instance, environmental education is promoted through natural science courses or ecology, as well as through other subjects such as history, civic education, and languages.
- The new curriculum is considered to be more student-friendly in the sense that it aims to increase students' interest and curiosity and encourages their sustained efforts through meaningful learning experiences. In order to support young people's responsible and competent participation in social life and public affairs, the new curriculum promotes education for democratic citizenship and human rights. At the same time, the new curriculum helps students develop entrepreneurial skills as well as consumer and environmental awareness from a sustainable development perspective.
- The new key stages of the curriculum³¹ are designed to stimulate student development in accordance with age characteristics. From 1995 to 2002 more than 440 new subject curricula were developed for all grades and education streams. The curriculum framework, subject curricula, and guidelines for teaching and learning provided for each of the seven curriculum areas were widely disseminated in schools (at least 10 copies were provided for each school).

²⁹ Such as the 1997 study of the Department of Cognitive Psychology of the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca on students' overload through curriculum provisions and excessive homework (Revue for Applied Psychology).

³⁰ These include: languages and communication, mathematics and sciences, social studies, the arts, sports, technology, counseling, and orientation (in accordance to Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence theories).

³¹ Basic acquisitions (preparatory year in pre-school education, and grades 1 and 2); development key stage (grades 3 to 6); observation and orientation key stage (grades 7 to 9); reinforcement stage (grades 10 and 11); and specialization stage (grade 12 and, if applicable, 13).

By the late 1990s one of the most vivid and dynamic public debates centered around changes in the curriculum, especially in the case of ideologically sensitive areas such as teaching of the mother tongue and history. This renewal of the pedagogical discourse through curriculum and textbooks does not by itself represent a sustainable solution for adjusting the education system to the values and principles of an open society. It must be accompanied by the support of new teaching methods, school environment, and school ethos, as well as by positive social and economic developments outside school. In order to be fully accepted, the new curriculum has to prove that it is truly able to provide better learning results than the former Communist models. Although a vigorous dissemination process and capacity-building efforts have taken place over the last years, more efforts will have to be made to reach a critical mass of curriculum professionals and the public at large.

Alternative/optional textbooks and other teaching aids. Until 1995 only unique (official) textbooks were allowed in schools and production of textbooks and other teaching aids was centralized. In more recent years a free and competitive market-system for development and distribution of teaching aids (including textbooks) has emerged. In the case of textbooks, the number of titles approved for use in schools has increased more than twofold between 1995 and 2001 (see Table 3).

Table 3 Number of Textbook Titles Approved for Use in Schools		
Level	Baseline (1995)	Actual (2001)
Primary education	73	163
Lower secondary (gymnasium)	116	234
Upper secondary (general education)	141	420
Total	330	817 new titles

According to new regulations, teachers can choose a textbook which best fits the needs of their students. Teachers can hold a consultation process with students, parents, and other education stakeholders (education NGOs, publishers, and community representatives). In order to fully meet local needs, selection procedures for textbooks and other teaching aids must be improved further. More emphasis has to be given to cultivating demand based on more market-oriented activities, such as education fairs, promotion campaigns of publishing houses and other teaching-aid providers, use of the Internet for accessing information and informing decision-making, etc.

Private education. Private education flourished after 1990 in response to an increased demand for education, especially in pre-school and higher education. After several years of legislative confusion, a reliable system for accreditation of private education institutions was gradually put in place. In 1994 on the basis of a special law for accreditation of higher education institutions, the National Evaluation and Accreditation Commission for Higher Education became operational. The Commission evaluates and

accredits not only private higher education institutions, but also state universities established after 1989.³² The private higher education system is one of the largest in Central and Eastern Europe, with the 63 private higher education institutions currently outnumbering the 57 state-led higher education institutions.

In 2002 evaluation results showed that not all private institutions were imparting high-quality education. As a result some private higher education institutions did not receive accreditation and were closed. That same year eight private universities received full accreditation and obtained for the first time after 1990 the right to organize graduation examinations.³³ From 1992 to 2002 the number of students registered in private higher education bodies almost doubled (from 85,000 in 1992/1993 to 150,674 in 2000/2001). This contributed to a significant overall increase in the total number of students registered in higher education. In 1998/1999 for the first time the total number of students registered in both state and private higher education bodies exceeded 400,000, which brought Romania closer to average figures in Central and Eastern-European countries (19 to 20 percent of the total school population). Over the last decade, private institutions have worked hard to legitimize themselves and to be seen as reliable and dynamic educational institutions.

In 1998 the Pre-tertiary Commission for Evaluation and Accreditation was established. Its task was to develop national evaluation standards and initiate a process of accrediting private pre-schools and primary and secondary schools. As with higher education bodies, the 1999 Accreditation Law on pre-tertiary education stipulated two accreditation steps. The first was the provisional authorizing of institutions based on quality criteria, and the second involved providing actual accreditation based on national quality standards. At present there are over 600 private schools, most of them at the pre-school level. More than half are already authorized, which by law entitles them to file for accreditation following a one-year wait. As of July 2003 there were a total of 479 schools, including 132 pre-schools, 35 primary, 11 lower-secondary, 25 vocational, 14 apprentice, 39 high, and 223 post-secondary schools.

Due to the absence of norms regarding tuition, private institution fees range from several hundred U.S. dollars a year to several hundred dollars a month. In general even in the case of moderate fees, only students with economic means can access private education. Fees are sometimes higher in kindergartens and high schools (particularly those that provide language and ICT training) than in universities. In 1998 in order to provide a adequate and flexible response to an increased demand for higher level education in Romania, the Ministry of Education decided to allow state universities to register students paying a study fee (*locuri cu taxa*) in addition to the regular number of students who were accepted free-of-charge.³⁴

³² In the process of drafting the new Education Act of 1999, a proposal was made to replace in the law the term "state" (as in "state university") with "public," (as opposed to private). This proposal was not accepted based on the argument that the term actually used in the Romanian Constitution is "state property" and not "public property."

³³ In accordance with the law, private universities that have been authorized but are not yet accredited cannot administer graduation examinations. Rather, their students must register for graduation examinations at state universities.

³⁴ In order to respond to an increased demand for upper-secondary education (high school, especially academic/general ones), a similar albeit less successful attempt was made in 1999 and 2000 to create more study-fee places.

Alternative pedagogies. As evidence of the change in attitudes toward education during the reform period, several private alternative pedagogy or alternative schools have sprouted in Romania. These child-centered approaches started as experimental projects (Waldorf school or Step-by-Step program) in pre-school and primary education. By the end of the 1990s several alternative kindergartens and schools utilizing the Montessori and Jena Plan emerged all over the country. Consequently new and flexible solutions have had to be created to integrate the philosophy of alternative education models, and curriculum and assessment and evaluation requirements in the traditional education system. A Commission for Alternative Education Programs was established in the early 1990s, with the Commission's goals and objectives becoming clearer in 1998 and 1999. Alternative schooling models were also extended to upper-secondary education during this time. There is still no reliable data regarding these schools.

Management capacity. In 1997 the European Commission expressed serious concern with regard to the capacity of the Ministry of Education to implement a comprehensive education reform (see OECD Report 2000). This has changed over the last few years as positive developments in the management of reform implementation have taken place. The structure and functions of education bodies (from the Ministry of Education to schools boards) have been changed in order to assure more prerequisites for quality management. For instance, several functions have been externalized, and specialized professional education bodies have been created.³⁵

Despite initial fears that these new education management bodies will not be able to coordinate and collaborate effectively and to fulfill their mission without increasing bureaucracy and confusing people in the system, these various units have proven to be a good solution. The Ministry of Education, school inspectorates, and other education management bodies are able to focus on specific tasks instead of dealing with a plethora of issues.³⁶ Finally, these newly created bodies have proven that they can develop into autonomous sustainable centers. Most of them have succeeded in attracting funding by providing specific services.

Education management is now more geared toward problem-solving and negotiating, rather than controlling and punishing as in the times before 1989. The role of professional management in fostering a good learning atmosphere has been consistently stressed, and more emphasis has been placed on capacity building. Under the coordination of the National Board for Management and Finances, out of approximately 29,000 school headmasters, 8,000 have been intensively trained in modern professional management and represent today the core of reform-oriented school managers. They, in turn, became involved in training their colleagues at the local level. In 1999 a new inspection model was implemented, reshaping relationships between schools and school inspectorates from the point of view of mutual support for improving quality, equity, and efficiency in the education system. School

³⁵ In addition to those previously mentioned, others include: the National Centre for Diploma Recognition and Equivalent Rating, the National Agency for School Tourism and Camping, Agency for Student Social Support, the National Bureau for Grants Abroad, and the Federation of School and University Sports.

³⁶ The authors feel that corruption has been significantly reduced as a result of the division of tasks among different units.

inspectorates have become more involved in topics of quality assurance at the local level, and more efforts have been made for meaningful partnerships between schools, school inspectorates, and local communities for attracting more support for quality education. Still more progress must be made.

Decentralized management. An important positive change over the last decade has been the increased involvement of local authorities and education stakeholders in school decision-making. Although such efforts were better characterized as deregulation (as opposed to decentralization) in the early 1990s, financial decentralization during the late 1990s changed this trend. In 2000, for example, 3,600 representative schools (schools with consistently good results over the years) were given the authority to recruit their own teaching staff. They were also entitled to decide how to spend funds generated by the school without approval from education management bodies, as had been required in the past. In addition, proposals were made for schools to run money through commercial banks, rather than the treasury offices. This is still under debate in the case of universities.³⁷ In the late 1990s significantly more schools than in the early 1990s became so-called budgetary centers. They had their own bank account and were accountable for spending public monies.

Before 1998 the Ministry of Education single-handedly decided the structure of the school year. In the case of primary and secondary education, the school year was divided into two semesters; pre-tertiary education was organized in three terms; and higher education involved two semesters. Starting with the 1998/1999 school year the Ministry of Education implemented a more flexible structure, leaving more room for local decision-making. Schools were given the ability to determine their own calendar of holidays and school-year structure according to local needs and conditions while observing the general duration of the school year (175 working days) and the national examinations calendar. Higher education institutions were entitled to make their own decisions with regard to the structure of the academic year and examinations calendar. One of the major challenges in the years to come will be the extension of working days in pre-tertiary education. It is currently one of the lowest in Europe (most countries use 185 to 190 or more working days a year).

In the years to come, an issue of special concern seems to be the school-based aspect of the curriculum. In 2001 based on claims that schools are not well-prepared to make proper decisions with respect to curriculum and to manage its implementation satisfactorily, the Ministry of Education and Research decided to reduce school-based curriculum from approximately 30 to 5 percent (10 percent in high schools). In the following months education specialists and stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and students, as well as media representatives and opinion leaders in the civil society and opposition parties advocated that this should be just a transitory measure, and more room for school-based curriculum decisions should be allocated in the future based on extensive capacity-building.³⁸

³⁷ Legislators expressed fears that without local capacity and preparation, the increased financial autonomy of schools and universities and the decision-making power of principals, deans, and rectors/presidents of universities would lead to mismanagement, increased financial risks and, possibly, fraud.

³⁸ In 2003 the Ministry of Education published draft curriculum provisions and new timetables for upper-secondary education, leaving more space for the school-based curriculum. Draft timetables are available at www.edu.ro.

A more transparent and reliable system for assessment and evaluation. As discussed in Parts 2 and 3, before 1989 assessment and evaluation outcomes were highly unreliable. Only the top scores were reported, and the high percentage of students earning low scores was not discussed. Despite the fact that after 1990 there was no longer an official request for schools to only report exceptional results, because of sheer inertia the practice continued (see Table 2). Scores appeared unbelievably high. However in 1998 the results of the first external evaluation of students passing the school-leaving examination at the end of high school showed that significantly fewer students succeeded compared to previous years. At first sight results from 1998 onward seem to indicate a decrease in the quality of learning outcomes in comparison to previous years. In reality, however, only the results from 1998 onward can be considered reliable.

1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
93.72	95.25	95.79	93.66	67.11	n/a	84.8	84.22

A similar and more realistic reporting of students passing the school-leaving examination (capacitate examination) at the end of eighth grade took place in 1999. Once again an external evaluation showed that a lower number of students succeeded than shown in previous results.

1999	2000	2001	2002
75.12	77.55	71.17	84.22

Introduction of qualitative achievement indicators. In 1998/1999 a new system for measuring student achievement was introduced in primary education. The system was introduced shortly thereafter in secondary schools. Instead of grading scales of one to ten, five qualitative indicators (unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good, very good, and excellent) were introduced. The goal of this policy was to shift focus from quantitative to qualitative results. It was hoped that this new system of assessment and evaluation would motivate students, teachers, and parents to monitor progress toward improved learning.

In 1998 the Ministry of Education requested universities to replace the old entrance exams with modern procedures of selection, based on results of the baccalaureate examination. In most cases universities responded favorably to the request. In order for the new selection procedures to be sustainable, examination results must be reliable. Admission criteria for high schools and vocational schools were also changed to reflect the results of not only the capacitate exams, but also student achievement over the four years of lower-secondary school.

The existence of numerous pre-tertiary evaluation and accreditation commissions created coordination and efficiency problems. At first in the late 1990s, cooperation between different commissions was rather erratic. Owing to several legislative improvements (especially the 1999 Accreditation Law and additional amendments), relationships between different commissions are today clearer with significantly reduced bureaucracy.

Capacity-building for the new assessment and evaluation system. Capacity-building has focused on the introduction and use of alternative assessment and evaluation tools and procedures, such as students' portfolios, project activities or assessment of students' performance in a team setting. However the transition from a content-based evaluation model focusing mainly on rote memorization and reproducing to a model based on assessing higher level intellectual skills and attitudes has been a major challenge for Romanian teachers and evaluators.

The structure of baccalaureate exams (six subjects and seven exams, several of which are oral) continues to be quite complicated. Every year specialists in assessment and evaluation have to prepare a large amount of evaluative items. (In 2001 students could choose from a range 80 different subjects depending on the different high school streams.) This, along with ensuring exam security, capacity-building, and disseminating information amounted to an enormous overload for NAES employees. It is hoped that a simplification in structure and procedures of school-leaving examinations, along with a change of mentality (i.e., significantly less or no corruption, significantly less or no misrepresentation of results) will allow NAES to focus on making progressive changes in assessment and evaluation of daily school practices.

As a result of these changes, procedures have become more transparent and schools more accountable to parents and the local community. A major challenge in the future will be to coordinate the work of curriculum developers and assessment and evaluation specialists to ensure that curriculum standards for assessment and evaluation are reviewed and better disseminated.

Allocation of resources. Efforts have been made for increasing overall funding for education. The Education Acts of 1995 and 1999 stipulate a minimum of four percent of the GDP for public education, but several proposals for minimum six percent have been also discussed in Parliament. However these initiatives have only met partial success, as shown in Annex 1. Inefficient allocation of economic resources (a large percentage of public funds are still allocated for inefficient state-owned enterprises and economic management initiatives) have amounted to an insignificant increase of per capita education-related expenditures.

In the late 1990s a new formula for allocating funding more efficiently, equitably, and in response to local needs was piloted in several counties. The original allocation formula was based on salaries for teaching and non-teaching staff. The new approach accounts for non-salary expenditures, such as teaching aids, infrastructure, logistics, specific education targets, programs, and priorities.

In terms of per-capita expenditures, a positive development can be seen in increasing allocation for special-needs schools, orphanages, and tertiary education while in previous years (especially during the early 1990s), more attention was given mostly to salaries in general education, especially compulsory education and high schools. This development can be credited to campaigns in the 1990s for changing attitudes toward special-needs schools and orphanages, which were severely neglected under the Communist regime in the 1980s. De-institutionalization programs lead to the dismantling of huge institutions and promotion of foster family-type solutions. While the percentage of the increase is significant for all categories of schools listed below, the real increases in school financing remains to be seen. In the future analysis should explore the correlation between increased funding and real school improvements.

Level	1995/1996	1997/1998
Pre-school education	467.2	731 (approx. US\$30)
Compulsory education	528.1	1,160
High schools	969.5	1,662
Vocational schools	401	881
Special needs schools	5,227.8	12,687
Orphanages	5,029	8,055
Post-secondary	212.9	1,175
Tertiary	2119.4	4,656

The efficiency of the Romanian education system will best be measured over time and by consistent improvements in learning in the context of other quality assurance indicators observed by EU countries. In 2001 Romania joined the OECD PISA survey, which will provide the first reliable indicators regarding the mastering of key competencies in basic education. It is hoped that, along with Romania's integration into the European Union, a new culture of quality assurance will emerge and that there will be more emphasis on the need for a stronger link between education and social and economic life.

Lessons Learned

The large-scale education reform in Romania provides an excellent example of the challenges of reforming education in line with the values and principles of an open society in a nation where the traditions to support such values had not existed previously. Although reform efforts were often faced with scarce resources and poor economic conditions, the reform has nevertheless led to several important changes (see Part 4). The sustainability of the changes already accomplished and their deepening as Romania becomes more open depends upon sustaining the vision that has made change possible. However lessons may already be drawn from the experience of the last decade. These lessons include the following:

Learning by doing. Comparing the quality of the analyses and discussion on education in 1990 with today's, the richness of the current dialogue is impressive. Reform goals and orientations were not clearly mapped out at the start. Goals and objectives were muddled and often conflicting among stakeholders. Still, the leadership moved ahead with change, tackling it where it was possible. The reform evolved by doing as stakeholders' experience and awareness of new needs, opportunities, challenges, and solutions grew.

The importance of a shared vision of education reform goals. There are two issues related to developing a shared vision: (i) agreement of the need for change; and (ii) clear and commonly agreed-upon reform goals and priorities. After the fall of Communism in the early 1990s, only a few people linked education reform with the values of an open society. During an iterative learning process, a general agreement on the need for reform took hold. The second issue was lack of a clear and common vision of education goals. The key lesson learned is that a shared view on education reform goals should be fostered as early as possible in the form of an education pact or White Paper. In Romania's case, the White Paper led to a part of the society agreeing with it. A more substantial communication and awareness building in the early stages of education reform would probably have had a positive effect on reform dynamics.

Continuity and sustainability of reform efforts in a transition country. Five ministers of education and several secretaries of state have served over the last decade. Continuity in governance has not been possible. Still, Romania has been able to identify and train top, local-level education experts with the support of international bodies. By the mid-1990s the reform vision was being carried out by these Romanian experts, acting as technocrats in the framework of a consistent reform program irrespective of political changes occurring at the level of top decision-makers. Growing from the debates and experience in the first half of the nineties, numerous policy papers were issued from 1997 to 2000. These documents helped to clarify reform goals, orientations, and priorities, and articulated the various components and dimensions of the reform for the technocrats.

An iterative implementation process. Decentralization and new economic and social practices such as local and institutional autonomy were slow to take hold. It was easiest to start with changes in curriculum and assessment/evaluation, two components in which significant new developments have taken place. As changes in curriculum and assessment evolved, it became clearer that school and institutional autonomy of curriculum and assessment bodies would be an important asset for the sustainability of reform measures. In addition, the reform of education management and financing could only keep pace with broader processes in legislation and the economy.

Timing of reform measures. A better coordination between legislation, management, financing procedures, and curriculum guidelines could have contributed to a more efficient implementation of the new national curriculum. At the time curriculum reforms were implemented in 1998, the Ministry of Education created ad-hoc legislation for granting schools autonomy in relation to curriculum decisions. These were later incorporated into the new 1999 Education Act, with new changes. Coordination of curriculum development and assessment/evaluation processes with pre- and in-service teacher-training practices and management procedures remains to be established. While the implementation of reform components on different timelines has benefits, if the process is not coordinated, it can produce substantial implementation delays.

Need for informed research and decision-making. Research and informed decision-making was virtually absent before 1989, and much of the education reform effort has been based on political exigency. Romania has gradually begun to change this by using comparative research from international student assessment research projects. Results from these studies have been discussed in public forums where debates have influenced the content and pace of reform. Continued efforts at building Romania's research capacity should further improve decision-making.

Timely identification of challenges and constructive solutions. One of the main recommendations in the OECD report on Romania (2000) refers to the need to carefully identify potential obstacles and elaborate proactive strategies to overcome them. Unfortunately controversial reform issues have not been addressed in a timely manner. There have been few meaningful partnerships among stakeholders. Thus sometimes reform champions have found themselves alone in the storm, able only to provoke reactionary responses and strategies.

Combining top-down and bottom-up approaches with grassroots efforts. Top-down approaches to reforming the education system were unavoidable at first given Romania's political and historical background. Over the years, however, as capacity-building efforts reached more schools, teachers, and communities, private initiatives and devolution of authority in education have begun to strengthen Romania's bottom-up capacity.

Allowing more time to prepare for and carry out reform. As illustrated by Romania, at least a decade was needed for designing, developing, and implementing the decisions that constitute large-scale education reform and the process continues, even after fifteen years. It is significant, for example, that the major policy papers felt that impact in the field only became apparent after 1997, almost ten years after reform initiation. Had the context allowed it, the pace of change could have been

better balanced. In some periods there were probably too many moments of calm compared to other periods in which reform turmoil was manifested.

Partnerships are essential. International and civil-society partnerships have been of crucial importance for the success of Romania's education reform. NGOs with international connections have provided support for comprehensive reform measures at the grassroots, and education projects in cooperation with international bodies have ensured necessary financial resources and provided important technical assistance, local personnel, and institutional capacity-building.

Conclusion

Keeping these lessons in mind, decision-makers and education stakeholders will have to further explore and implement under uncertainty what is to be done. There is a difference in perception among our research respondents regarding what has happened in Romania over the last decade. Those who have been closer to the decision-making and implementation processes are more able to approach reform comprehensively and critically. On the other hand, those that have not had the opportunity to directly contribute to the reform processes are passive beneficiaries or not-so-passive critics. These non-participants require further explanation and orientation for understanding and accepting the changes in education that have been accomplished and those that are still to come in support of Romania's integration into the rest of Europe.

Annex 1 Allocation and Sources of Public Spending in Education										
	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
% of GDP	3.2	3.1	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.6*	3.4	3.5	3.8	4.2
of which:										
Central Budget*	96.1	96.7	82.6	82.2	79.7	81.6	79.3	80.4	27.5	33.65
Local Budget	-	-	13.4	14.7	11.5	9.2	10.4	9.3	61	57.6
Other**	3.9	3.3	4	3.3	8.8	9.2	10.25	10.3	11.5	8.8

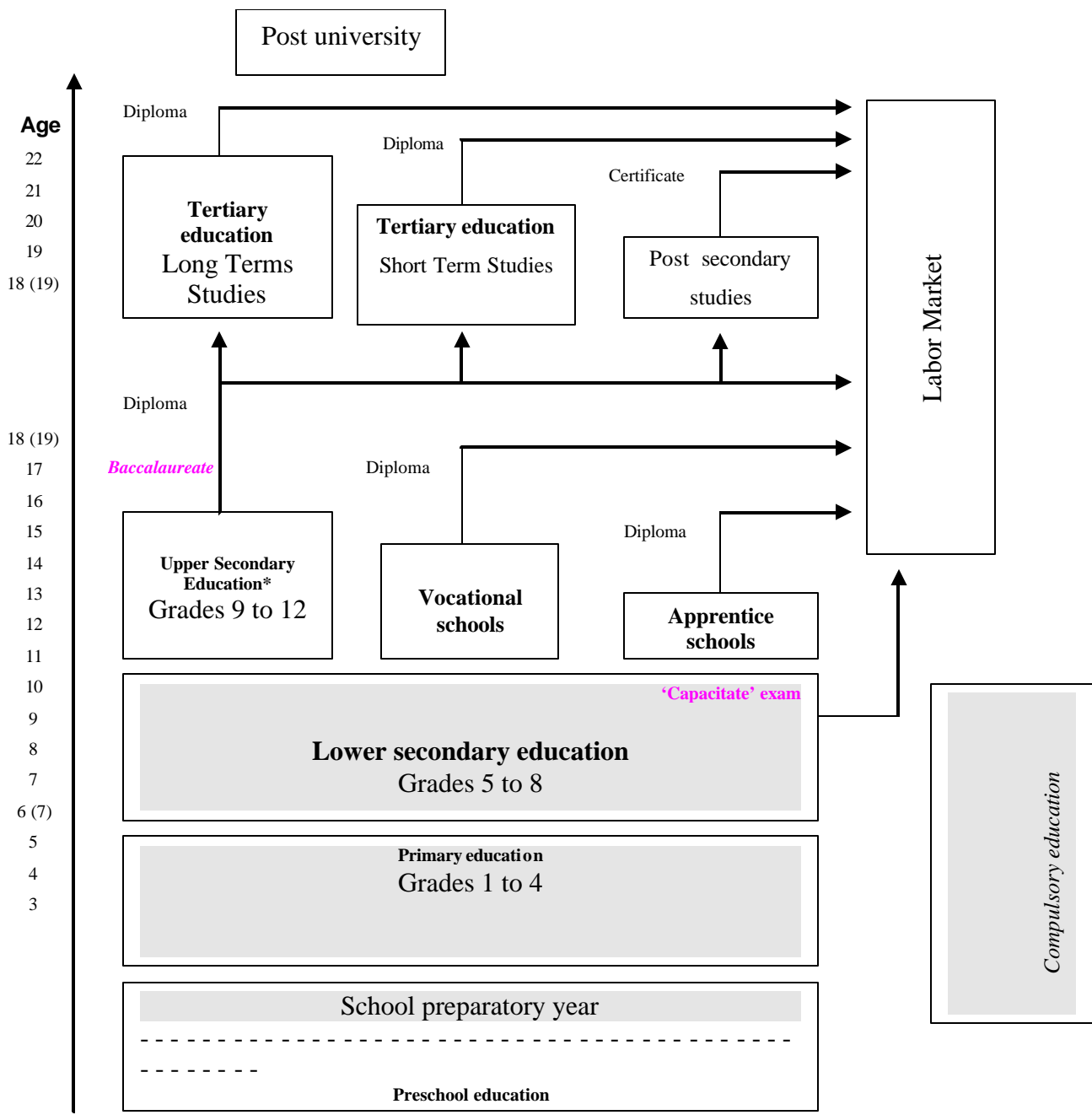
Source: Ministry of Finance (1998; 2002).

State budget: 71 percent personnel; 23 percent materials; 2 percent scholarships; 4 percent other.

* The central budget includes external credits, special funds, and re-qualification funds.

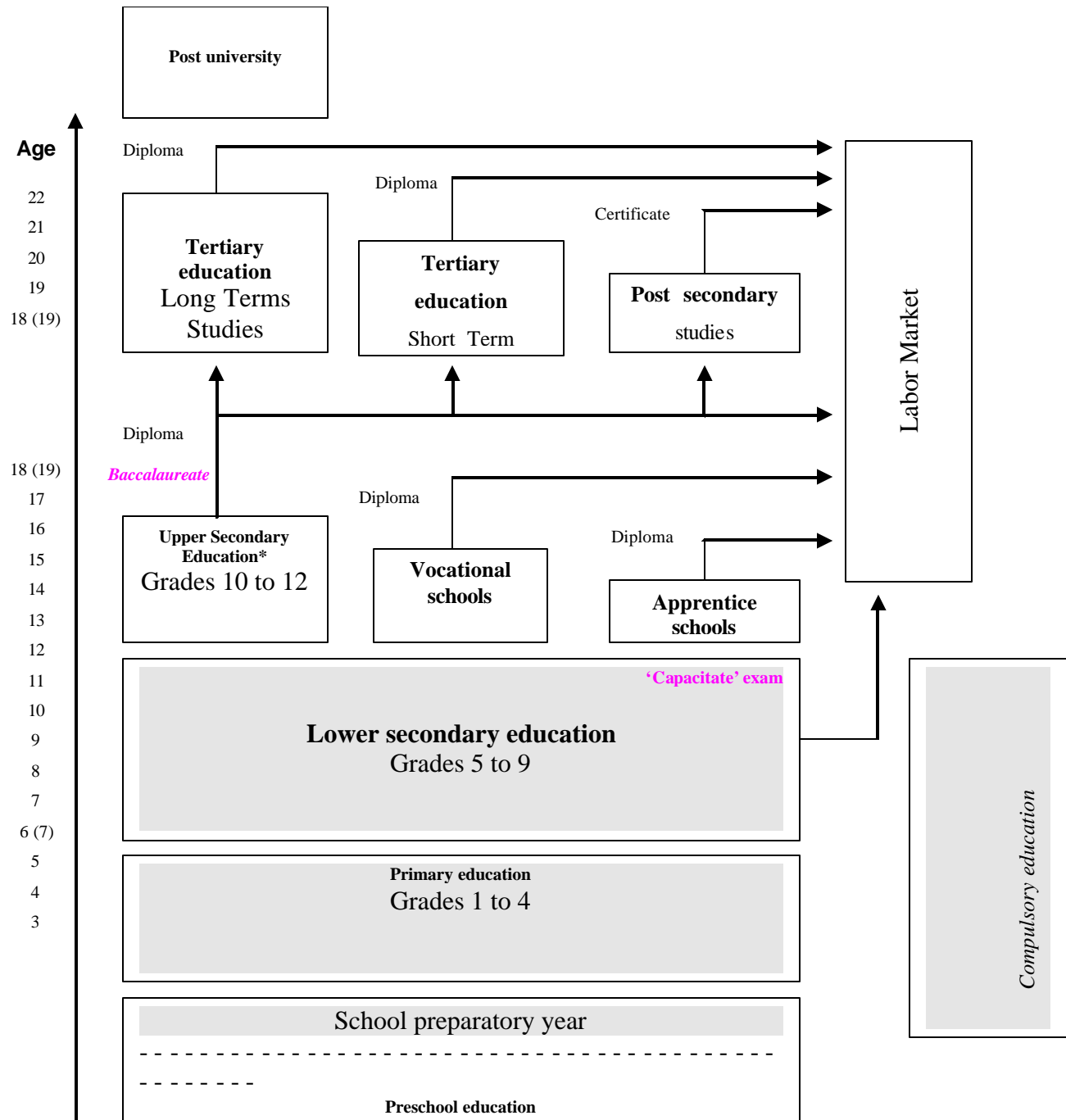
**Own incomes

Annex 2a
The Romanian Education System (4+4+4 education structure, 1995 Education Act)



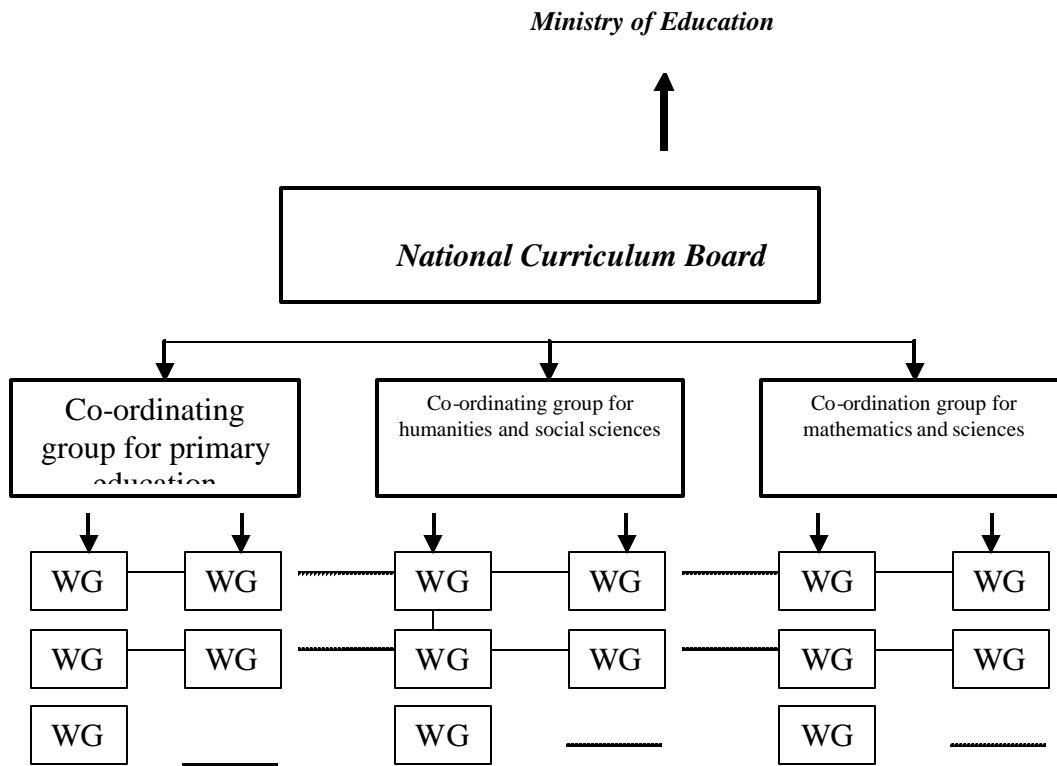
It includes academically, technical, and skills based high schools.

Annex 2b
The Romanian Education System (4+5+4 education structure, 1999 Education Act)



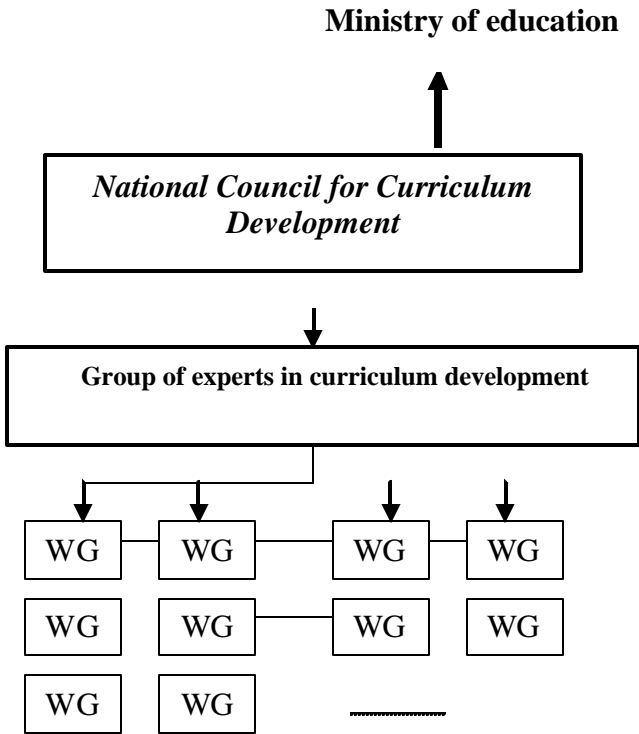
It includes academically, technical, and skills based high schools.

Annex 3a
Structure of the National Curriculum Board (1995-1998)



WG – Working Groups for different subject

Annex 3b
Structure of the National Council for Curriculum Development (1998-2001)



WG – Working Groups for different subject areas

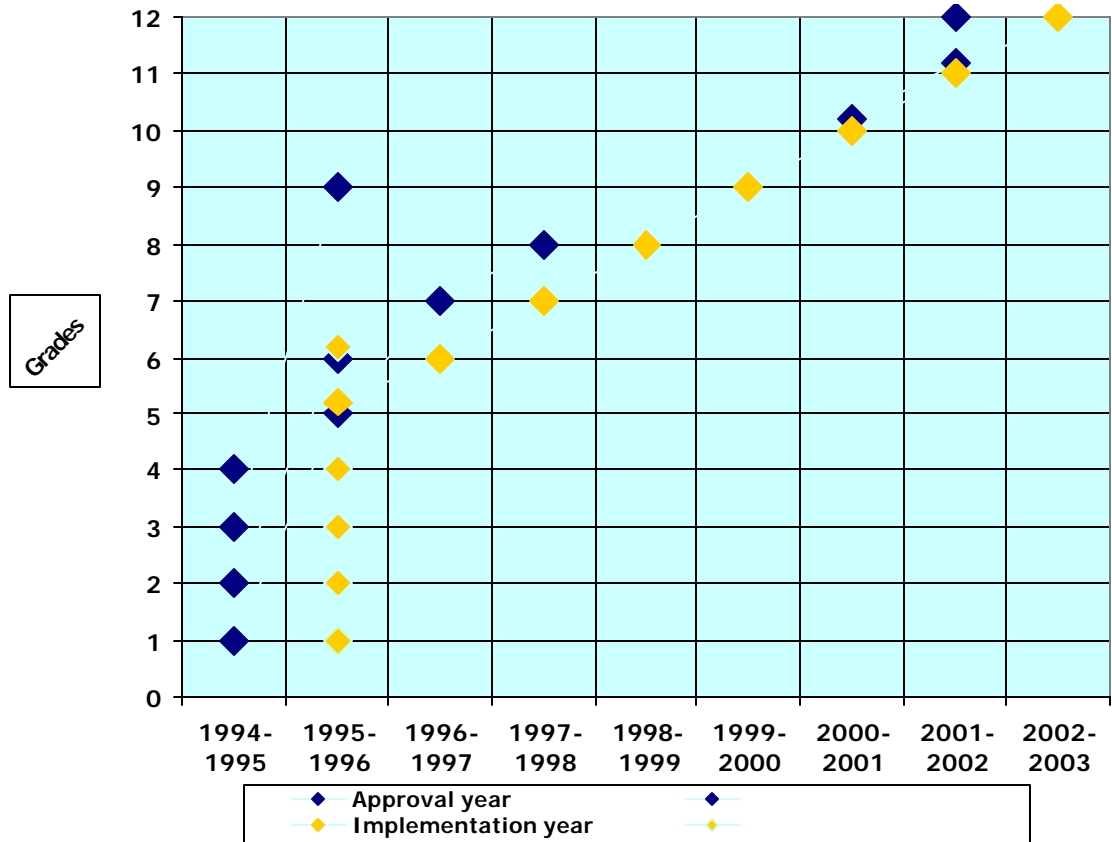
Annex 3c
Implementation of Curriculum Reform

Period	New Subject Curricula	New Curriculum Framework	Alternative textbooks	Assessment and Evaluation	Teacher Training
1990-1994	Cosmetic changes of existing subject curricula, introduction of new subjects, and omission of ideological references	--	New textbooks produced only for philosophy with a new didactic perspective. History and social science textbooks were revised.	--	New strategies for in-service training offered only in some of the training programs developed through international projects
1995/1996	New subject curricula, Grade 1	--	New alternative textbooks (ABC book and mathematics)	1996-First draft of the general assessment and evaluation guide	--
1996/1997	New subject curricula, Grade 2	--	New alternative textbooks, Grade 2	--	--
1997/1998	New subject curricula, Grades 3 and 5	--	New alternative textbooks, Grades 3 and 5	Establishment of NAES Introduction of external evaluation at the end of Grade 12 (school-leaving exam/baccalaureate)	--
1998/1999	New subject curricula, Grades 4 and 6 Revision of existing curricula in accordance with the New Curriculum Framework for primary and lower-secondary education	New Curriculum Framework for compulsory education, Grades 1-5	New alternative textbooks, Grades 4 and 6	New assessment and evaluation guidelines for primary education (based on band descriptors) and lower-secondary education Introduction of external evaluation at end of compulsory education, Grade 8 (school-leaving examination/capacitate)	Commencement of national teacher-training program (cascade program)

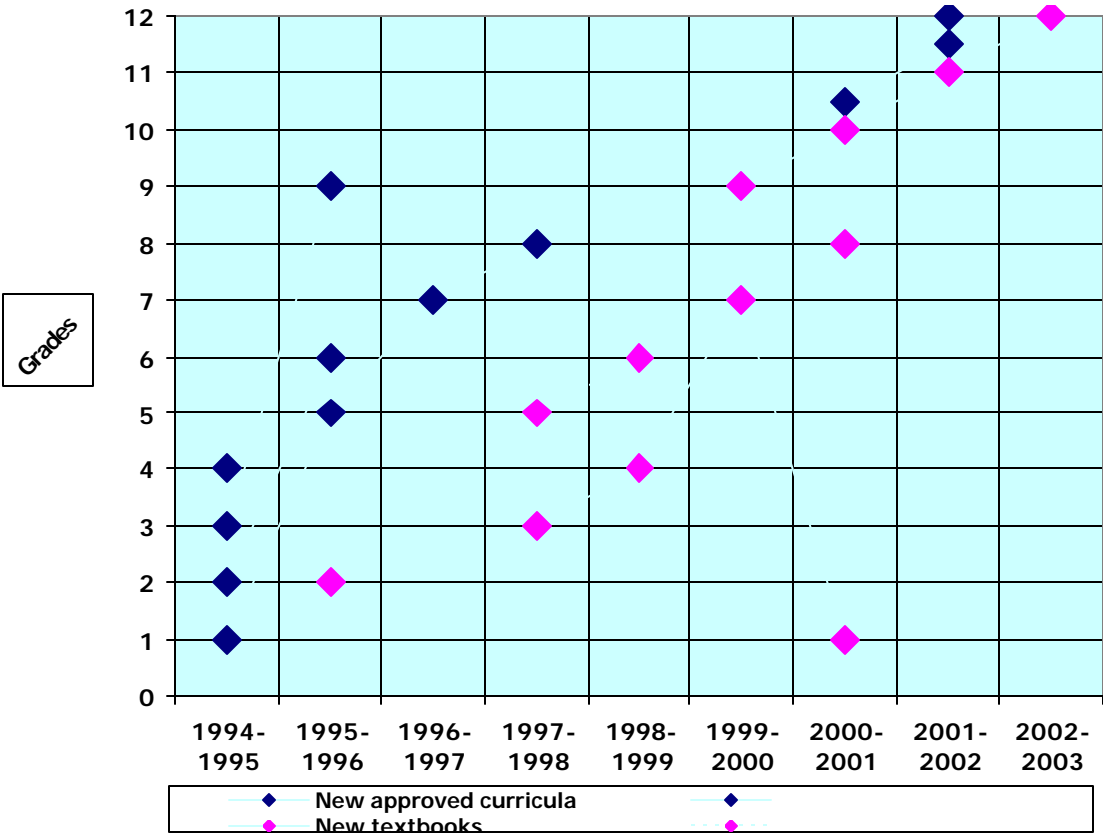
Annex 3c
Implementation of Curriculum Reform (continued)

Period	New Subject Curricula	New Curriculum Framework	Alternative textbooks	Assessment and Evaluation	Teacher Training
1999/2000	<p>New subject curricula for history in upper-secondary education</p> <p>New subject curricula for history in upper-secondary education (all grades)</p> <p>New subject curricula for vocational education developed in framework of PHARE/VET program</p>	New Curriculum Framework (Grades 6-9)	<p>New alternative textbooks, Grades 7 and 9</p> <p>Opening free textbook market for upper-secondary education</p> <p>New alternative textbooks for history in all upper-secondary grades</p>	NAES takes over organization of external evaluation for school-leaving examinations	<p>Continuation of the national cascade program</p> <p>Special training for curriculum development, textbook selection and use, management and financing, and assessment and evaluation</p>
2000/2001	<p>Revised subject curricula, Grade 1 (second generation)</p> <p>New subject curricula, Grades 8 and 10</p>	New Curriculum Framework, Grade 10	New alternative textbooks, Grade 1 and 10	Revision of guidelines for internal and external assessment and evaluation	Extended joint teacher training programs (involving curriculum implementation, management and financing, and assessment and evaluation) organized as school-based training and/or joint training for school teams
2001/2002	Revised subject curricula, Grade 2 (second generation) and new subject curricula (Grade 11)	New Curriculum Framework, Grade 11)	New alternative textbooks, Grades 2 and 11	First external evaluation at end of compulsory education (capacitate exam), organized on basis of new Curriculum Framework and new subject curricula in Grades 5-8 (lower-secondary education)	Extension of joint teacher training programs (involving curriculum implementation, management and financing, and assessment and evaluation), organized as school-based training and/or as joint training for school teams
2002/2003	Revised subject curricula, Grade 3 (second generation) and new subject curricula, Grade 12	New Curriculum Framework, Grade 12	New textbooks, Grades 3 and 12		

**Annex 4
Implementation of the New Curricula**



**Annex 5
Implementation of the Textbooks and the New Curricula**



Annex 6											
Dynamics of Birth (per one-thousands of inhabitants)											
1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
16	13.6	11.9	11.4	11	10.9	10.4	10.6	10.5	10.8	10.7	10.7

Source: National Commission for Statistics (2001).

Annex 7											
Enrollments in Education (millions of students)											
LEVEL	1989/90	1990/91	1991/92	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00
Pre-school*	0,836	0,752	0,742	0,752	0,712	0,716	0,698	0,659	0,623	0,625	0,616
3-6 years	82.9%	71.8%	51.9%	52.6%	50.5%	55.2%	58.3%	60.4%	58.3%		
Primary	1,379	1,253	1,211	1,201	1,238	1,336	1,376	1,388	1,356	1,285	1,189
6-10			93%		99.4%	96%					
Lower-secondary	1,513	1,465	1,416	1,358	1,283	1,181	1,150	1,41	1,187	1,272	1,309
10-14				86.1%		84.6%		94.3%			
Compulsory education**	-	91,2	90,5	90,7	91,4	91,9	93,3	95	95	97	96,8
6-14											

Source: *National Commission for Statistics (2001).

**National Report on Human Development in Romania, PNUD (2001).

Annex 8
The Romania Education System 1990-2000
Establishments, Students, Teachers, and Student to Teacher Ratios

LEVEL	1989/90	1990/91	1991/92	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00
Pre-school											
3-6 years											
Establishments	12,108	12,529	12,600	12,603	12,715	12,665	12,772	12,951	12,368	12,760	12,831
Students (millions)	0,836	0,752	0,742	0,752	0,712	0,716	0,698	0,659	0,623	0,625	0,616
Teachers	31,134	37,007	36,326	36,447	37,303	37,603	38,915	39,166	36,648	36,555	35,619
S/T Ratio	27.8/1	20.3/1	20.4/1	20.6/1	19.1/1	18.8/1	17.9/1	16.8/1	17.1/1	17.1/1	17.3/1
Primary											
6-10											
Establishments	6,166	6,070	6,137	6,145	6,160	6,162	6,180	6,188	6,099	6,086	-
Students (millions)	1,379	1,223	1,223	1,214	1,251	1,351	1,392	1,405	1,373	1,285	1,189
Teachers	54,342	60,376	60,054	60,272	61,728	65,511	69,536	71,829	71,078	68,644	64,057
S/T Ratio	25.4/1	20.2/1	20.4/1	20.1/1	20.3/1	20.6/1	20.1/1	19.6/1	19.3/1	18.7/1	18.65/1
Lower Secondary											
10-14											
Establishments	7,191	7,305	7,710	7,634	7,639	7,637	7,367	7,623	7,583	7,122	-
Students (millions)	1,513	1,465	1,416	1,358	1,283	1,181	1,150	1,114	1,187	1,272	1,309
Teachers	84,642	103,489	99,145	103,893	103,052	103,191	102,611	103,597	102,439	104,359	102,275
S/T Ratio	17.9/1	14.2/1	14.3/1	13.1/1	12.4/1	11.4/1	11.2/1	11.1/1	11.6/1	12.2/1	12.8/1
Upper Secondary											
14-18											
Establishments	981	1,198	1,209	1,238	1,277	1,276	1,284	1,295	1,309	1,315	1,340
Students (millions)	1,346	1,0	0,778	0,714	0,722	0,758	0,787	0,793	0,766	0,718	0,694
Teachers	34,044	51,731	55,013	58,161	59,488	60,514	62,409	64,485	63,669	66,101	67,239
S/T Ratio	39.5/1	19.2/1	14.1/1	12.3/1	12.17/1	12.5/1	12.6/1	12.3/1	12.2/1	10.86/1	10.32/1
Post Secondary											
18-20											
Establishments	-	310	384	589	636	596	624	693	659	628	90
Students (millions)	-	29,225	54,907	57,037	50,707	45,321	54,642	73,521	86,300	96,134	94,700
Teachers	-	980	1,300	1,627	1,698	1,728	2,192	3,074	3,225	3,104	1,404
S/T Ratio	-	30.0/1	42.2/1	35/1	29.9/1	26.2/1	24.9/1	23.9/1	26.8/1	31/1	67.4/1
Tertiary											
18-22											
Establishments**	44	48	56	62	63	63	95	102	106	111	121
Students (millions)**	-	192,810	215,226	235,669	250,087	255,162	336,141	354,488	360,590	407,720	452,621
Teachers**	-	13,927	17,315	18,123	19,130	20,452	22,611	23,477	24,427	26,103	26,977
S/T Ratio	-	13.8/1	12.4/1	12/1	13.1/1	12.5/1	14.9/1	15.1/1	14.8/1	15.6/1	16.8/1

Source: National Commission for Statistics (2001).

*Includes foreman education.

**Starting with 1995/1996 academic year, private universities are included.

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