

UNDERSTANDING THE DEMAND FOR SCHOOLING

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Understanding social demand for schooling in Hungary (Judit Lannert–György Mártonfi–Iréen Vágó)

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Introduction

Emergence of market elements

When speaking about demand, the values connected to it or to any other market category first we have to refer to the system change that started one and a half decades ago and to some

aspects of its history. Demand was a 'presentable' – i.e. accepted – concept and value in the economy of Hungary in the eighties. Demand was a factor influencing real processes to a much greater extent than it was legitimate in pre-market economy Hungary. This was true, to a limited extent¹, for both health service and education. The political and economic institutions of the transition were established in the years when the values and hopes connected to free market were valued higher, especially among the intellectuals taking an active part in changing the political system. The institutionalisation of market demand and free choice was a legitimate aim shared by – to different extents – by several political forces, government parties and opposition as well. This was also true for the 1989-93 period of educational legislation, a phase that has fundamentally been influencing the course of development ever since. The introduction of such institutions as freedom of establishing schools, free choice of educational content, decentralized school ownership, extending school and professional autonomy, free choice of schools – dates back to this period.

During the past years the relationship to the values of free market has changed and has become more differentiated. Economic difficulties and hardships of the transition period – uncertainty and bad feelings caused by massive unemployment, fall of the GDP, fortunes arising out of nothing and the massive foreign ownership of capital goods eroded the free market values especially in the segment (majority) of the society that was on the losing end of this process. At this time fewer and fewer people worldwide believed in the consistently – or as their adversaries see them: extremely – liberal solutions. Finally, the process of ideological self-identification of the political forces in the country, also going on at that time, not independently from the two processes mentioned above – weakened the trust in liberal solutions stressing market principles. The populism of particular political parties, the marked presence of the values of a past, "noble" Hungary and the nostalgia for state socialism (communism) arising from the hardships of the transition were both distrustful towards liberal solutions and did not hope to gain any political benefit from them either.

Another feature of the political development in Hungary is that elections bring along a political turn. After 1994 the cooperation between the government in power and its opposition, the opportunities for realizing social innovations based on consensus became restricted and were limited to performing the tasks arising from joining the European Union and NATO obligations. The reform of particular sectors and social subsystems was carried out in a contradictory way and in many respects it is still delayed in international comparison retaining its basic features as defined at the early nineties. "Whatever a government starts the next one will stop. It is impossible to move ahead this way." – expressed his disapproval a prominent actor of European bank life, the 'father of euro', who left Hungary half a century ago (*Az euro atyja, 2004*). There are clear indications of this in education as well.

In the sectors not belonging directly to the economy – among others in the subsystems of education – the survival of the solutions based (also) on liberal, market principles is due to several factors. As consensus-based politics has not been functioning for several years, there is no chance for a radical transformation of basic institutions. In every second government cycle (between 1994 and 1998 and since 2002) the liberal party, though gradually losing ground but having a more significant informal and intellectual influence than its political strength would suggest, is in the government and is in charge – among others – of education. The assumption may seem malicious but is perhaps not without any foundation that the

¹ One of the authors of this paper started his studies not at the district general school as prescribed by regulations

survival and renewal of market-conform solutions is enhanced by the fact that they are not disadvantageous for the political class and the lobbying groups that are higher in social hierarchy and important for all political forces. The educational and other needs of these groups – irrespective of their political preferences are generally met by demand-based solutions. Perhaps it is not by chance that among these solutions the issue of tuition fee, the introduction of which would be welcome by several economic and educational experts, is – practically speaking – a political taboo. The groups of the population using higher education are counter-interested as they do not see the – not imminent – advantages of the sector reform but want to avoid additional financing. The main losers of the non-introduction of tuition fees, those who do not get into higher education are weak in articulating their interests and practically remain silent in this issue. The permanent presence of market-based policy instruments in education and other sectors outside the economy is due to the fact that in the countries, mainly the ones belonging to the European Union and serving as references, they are still popular and seem to be working as opposed to some alternatives – regulated dominantly in a bureaucratic way or by political balance/dialogue (with social partners, party-delegated curators of public foundations). However, the need for this step to be taken is extremely great due to the so-called dual paradigm change or dual transition (from state socialism to market economy or from the modern industrial society to an information, knowledge-based society).

In Hungary the transition to the market economy was basically successful, though required huge sacrifices. Many experts attribute it to the quick privatization of public utilities (electricity, gas) and telecommunication and to the establishment of the basic institutions of freedom and market, which was quick and needed relatively few limiting compromises (e.g. in the privatization of land) in some subsystems of public services. Disagreement among experts can mainly be found – along the main ideologies – about how big and what kind of social price has to be paid in the future for quick transition and for its negative and inadequately managed incidental effects (e.g. increasing inequality, segregation). Private capital and market conform solutions appeared in areas of law enforcement and education that were considered traditionally as public tasks: e.g. building prisons or students' hostels. Big private pension funds were established, though politics interfere in their operation. Privatization appeared in public health, which struggles with financing problems worldwide, and based on the experiences of the experimental system of "Guided Medical Attendance" a reform is to be introduced according to which medical attendance organizers –entrepreneurs – will play key roles, and thus the so far dominating healer-patient relationship with the dependency of this latter will radically be changed. These solutions in the area of medical services are supported by the younger, more educated groups with higher incomes (*Janky-Kopasz, 2000*). In public administration, in public places maintenance where private capital is markedly present, outsourcing of certain tasks is common.

Educational legislation established the basic institutions of freedom and choice (some of which will be discussed in the sections to come) in the first years of the democratic transition. Maintenance is heavily decentralized, the institutions are typically maintained by settlements – to a smaller extent by counties or associations of settlements, and in accordance with the regulations the professional responsibility lies with them. *De facto* the professional autonomy of the institutions is very high, while the financial autonomy is generally low. Institutional professional autonomy – through school educational programmes and curricula that obligingly follow the national core curriculum but are also customized to suit local needs –, settlement-based maintenance and free choice of school provide plenty of scope for competition among institutions, programme types and partly settlements. It is especially the

long-lasting negative demographic trend and the financing system connected closely to the number of those enrolled that motivate competition for students. A significant proportion of schools conduct an advertising campaign both for 6-7 year-olds and those entering secondary schools, trying to reach parents and make them enrol their children. They constantly adjust their offers to demand and show a favourable picture of themselves. The competition among schools can be influenced by maintainers who try to limit it and keep it within certain boundaries.

The competition for students is present in public education as well among schools maintained both by local governments and privately – by foundations, churches, etc. Regulation can practically ensure sector neutrality (e.g. when undertaking a public task private schools get the same per student capita grant), which is an expressed objective. In some areas of vocational training and higher education the proportion of private schools is especially high, indicating advantageous competition positions as well. This has a beneficial effect on the appearance of economic and especially community demands in education, on diversification of supply and quick change.

The emergence of market elements is not restricted to competition for students even in public education (*Halász, 2003*). The textbook markets functions as a regulated market but it is still a market where the teaching staffs have the right to choose from a great variety of textbooks. In-service teacher training and educational management training is also open for market companies (*Magyar, 2004*). The schools are granted considerable resources that they can use for purchasing accredited programmes offered by the market. The market of experts providing educational services also functions in a more regulated way. The officially registered experts play an important part in appraising educational programmes, evaluating schools and also in establishing quality assurance systems. Institutions and/or maintainers can finance these tasks from labelled resources or grants won in competitions that are called for resources to cover the costs of these tasks but in both cases they can freely choose from the market supply.

There are some areas where market elements do not or hardly play a part. The most important of them is “teachers’ labour market”. Teachers have been public employees enjoying great job security, their minimum salaries are regulated in exact salary tables. In principle salaries higher than the set minimum could be awarded but it is exceptional and the extent of such differentiation is very small in the schools maintained by the local government, i.e. in the majority of schools. The weakness of the market is a marked supply- and standard-decreasing factor. Finally it may happen that the orienting effect of supply is minor even in areas where it would be desirable. Such is the “market” of vocational training places where the distribution of vocational training places depends typically on the power relations, tug-of-war and individual behaviour of institutions, maintainers and economic actors. Those participating in vocational training are only partly informed about the supply and the free choice of training places is limited in many cases. Trade unions and various interest-groups (Hungarian Association for Vocational Training or chambers) play a considerable part in rolling back market forces and limiting their influence.

Increasing appreciation of school attainment in the nineties

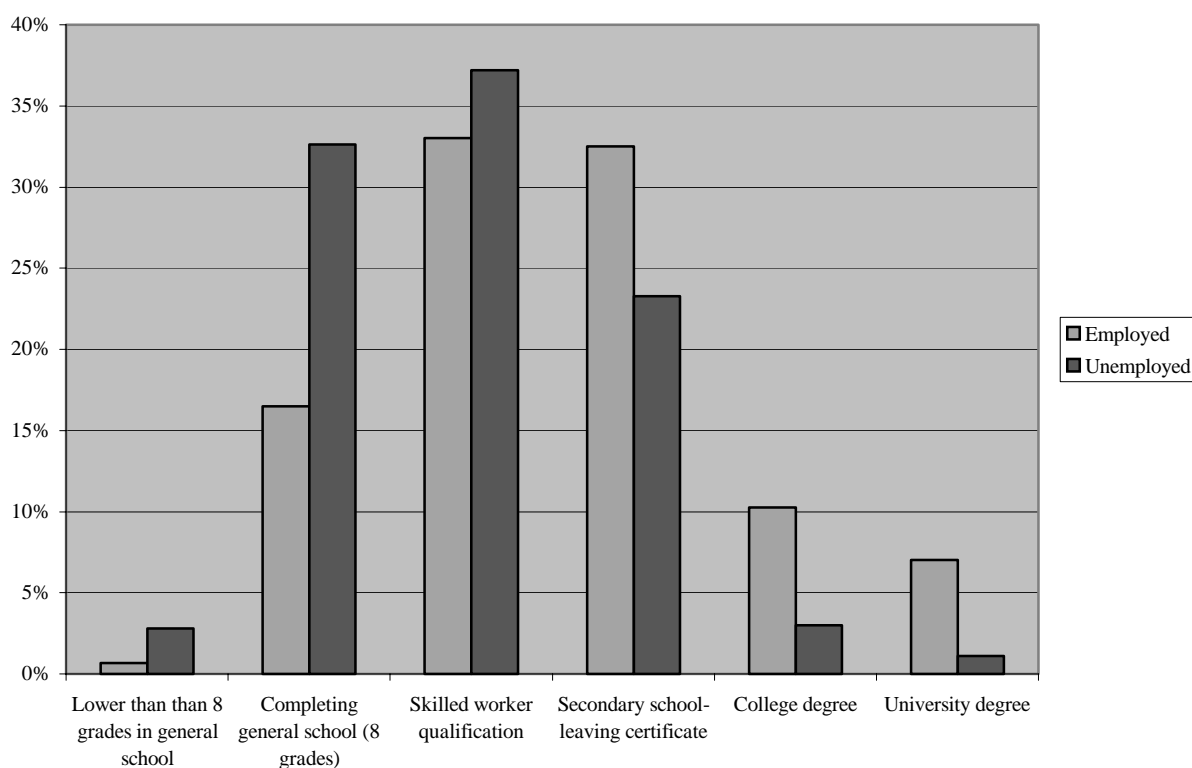
In the nineties the appreciation of school attainment increased. This can be seen in the increasing demand for skilled labour, in the unemployment ratio of groups with different school attainment. Between 1968 and 1998 the earnings advantage of those with secondary school qualification became one and a half times higher than that of those with primary school

qualification, while the earning advantage of those with higher education qualification tripled in the same period. At the same time the earning advantage of higher education graduates is often due to the fact that a larger proportion of them are employed by more productive companies. This points to the fact that a specialization process started and the labour market is split into two segments: one of low productivity employing mostly unskilled workers and one of high productivity employing educated labour force. At the same time it is not necessarily true that the market value of higher education studies increased the most. The so-called turnover rate calculations take into account the time and costs of achieving a certain qualification and these are compared with the expected earnings and the degree of risk of unemployment. Data show that between 1968 and 1998 the market value of a single year of additional studies between the vocational training school and the secondary school increased the most (Köllő, 2000). In the light of this it is understandable why vocational students want to continue their studies to a growing extent.

The advantage of being educated is shown by the fact as well that among the active population the proportion of those with secondary and higher education qualifications is higher than in the whole population. More than 42 percent of employed men had at least secondary school qualification in 2000, while nearly 60 percent of employed women had at least secondary school qualification. In 2001, based on census data the proportion of men above the age of 15 the proportion of those with secondary school qualification was 35.5%, while that of women above the age of 15 was 39.5%. That is the proportion of those with at least secondary school qualification was considerably higher than their proportion within the whole population (Népszámlálás 2001. 2., 2002; Népszámlálás Részletes..., 2002).

The composition of unemployed by school attainment slightly changed in the past years. The proportion of those with little education is still over 30%. The proportion of those possessing only primary school qualification decreased to some extent, the primary reason for this may be that it was the unqualified who gave up hopeless job-seeking in the first place. Unemployment strikes those with higher education qualification the least. Their proportion among those employed is about 17 percent, while among those unemployed is only 4 percent. The distribution of the employed and the unemployed shows that employers employ first of all more qualified employees (see *Figure 1.*)

Figure 1.
Educational attainment of the employed and unemployed population, 2001 (%)

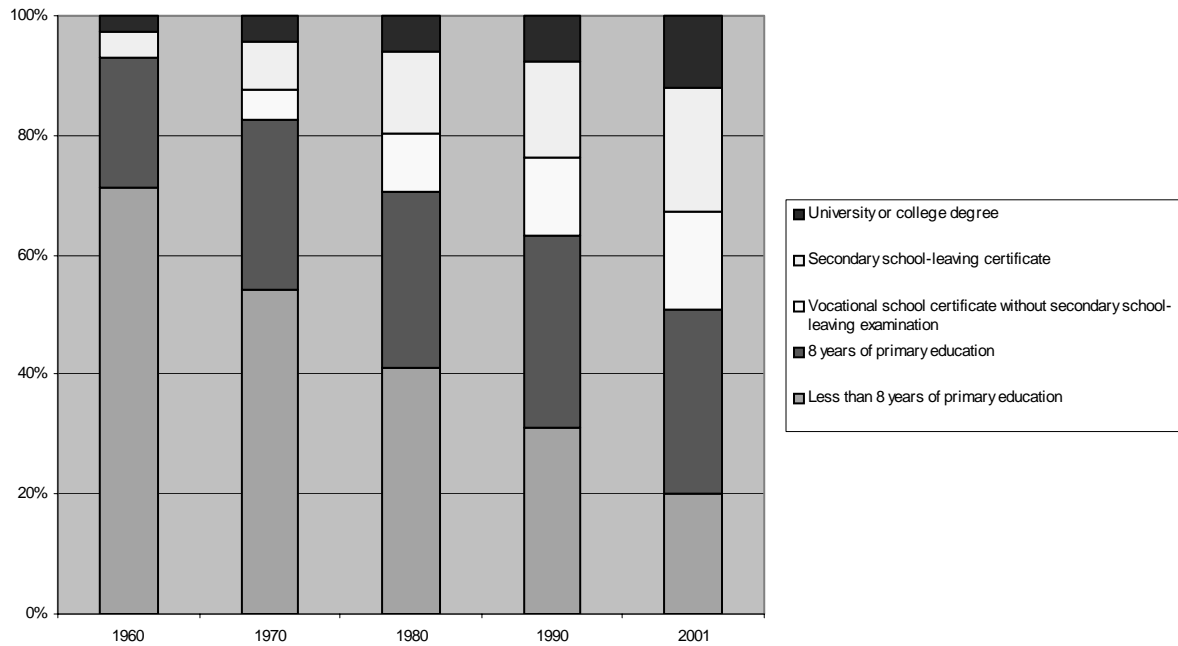


Source: KSH, Magyar Statisztikai Évkönyv (Statistical Yearbook of Hungary), 2001

School attainment of the Hungarian population is generally surveyed in census time. The level of school attainment slightly improved but a considerable part of the population still completed only 8 grades of general school (see *Figure 2.*) Along with this the proportion of those above 18 years of age who completed grade 12 of secondary school grew considerably, while in 1990 this ratio did not reach 30%, in 2001 it was around 39.5% (*Népszámlálás(Population census) 2001 2.*).

Figure 2.

Educational attainment of the Hungarian population, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2001(%)

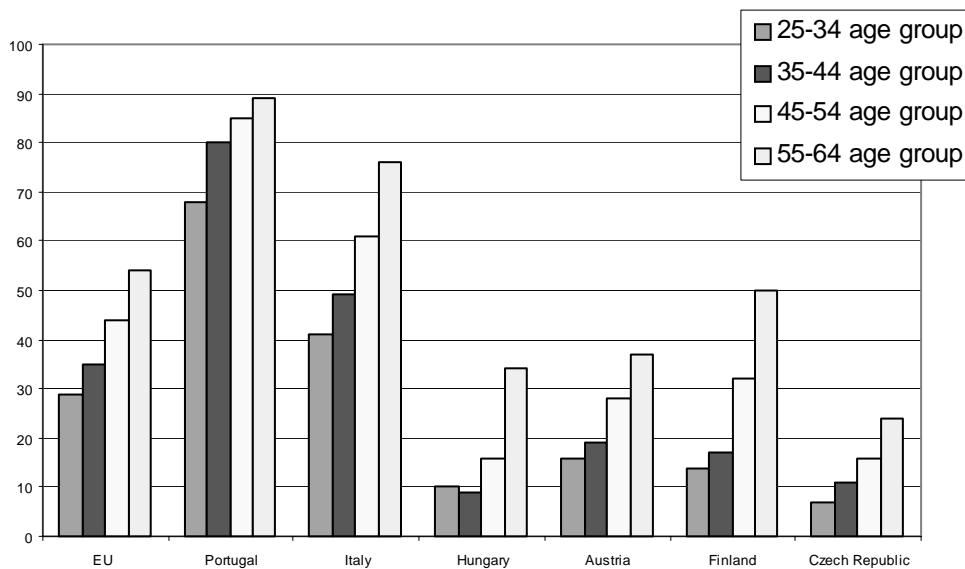


Source: Population census 2001 6., KSH

In international comparison it can be observed that the number of those continuing their studies after secondary school increases from decade to decade, while the number of those leaving the educational system without a secondary school-leaving certificate decreases. The level of school attainment of the population increases both in the old and new member states of the European Union (see *Figure 3*).

Figure 3.

Percentage of people who do not have an upper secondary qualification, by age group in some European countries, 2000



Source: Key data..., 2002

School attainment became more appreciated; at the same time there is little information available on the efficiency or effectiveness of educational services. In the decentralized educational sector neither a central inspection nor the market factor functions in a way that quality could be guaranteed. Thus the access to information on educational services is very much stratum-dependent. At the same time in today's public education there are very serious efficiency and effectiveness problems in Hungary. The number of teachers is very high compared to the number of students, while students' performance is lower than the international average (*PISA 2000*). The workload of teachers can also be regarded as low. The exit from the run-down, community-financed educational area (*Hirschman, 1970*) is only possible for the more affluent strata as a minimum of mobility and spending power is required for that (alternative, private schools, segregated districts). Control that would ensure quality and market elements are partly present in the public education of Hungary but at the level of the whole system level quality is not guaranteed.

Needs for and views on education in the society

The appreciation of school attainment, the increase of the demand for schooling is indicated by the process of large-scale expansion that took place in the secondary and tertiary education of Hungary in the nineties.

Vertical and horizontal changes in the school structure of Hungary in the nineties²

The existing educational supply fundamentally influences where one should continue their studies. While prior to the transition the routes of learning in general and those of further

² This section builds on the chapters „The Educational System and the Progression of Students” of the publications *Education in Hungary 2000* and *Education in Hungary 2003* co-authored by Judit Lannert, Anna Imre and György Mártonfi.

education were more transparent, as there was a uniform eight-year general school, followed by three types of secondary educational institutions, by the nineties this transparency of structure got blurred and the former clear boundaries, educational levels and training types became indistinct both vertically and horizontally. Today students can enter secondary school education at various points and within the secondary institution there are several programmes to choose from. Schools differed in the past as well but not so strikingly. The marks obtained at various institutions had specific local values and many people were aware of that. Secondary schools usually knew what a particular general school certificate was worth. Differentiation was hidden, for instance between the classes of general schools with or without an advanced programme in a certain subject. The extremely diverse structure of the school system shaped in the nineties made the stratification of it apparent but it cannot be said that there is much more information available for parents on the quality of education. Both the surveys on students' performances and the school rankings presenting rates of those continuing their studies show that behind structural differences there may not be quality differences. There are good general secondary schools and vocational secondary schools and there are bad ones as well. The type of training still does not indicate what kind of work is carried out at the institution. With the expansion of secondary school education and the decrease in the number of students today it is not any easier than before to decide where the child should continue their studies. Moreover, the fight of schools for children with good abilities and the fight of parents and students to get into a good school are accompanied by more and more stress and tension.

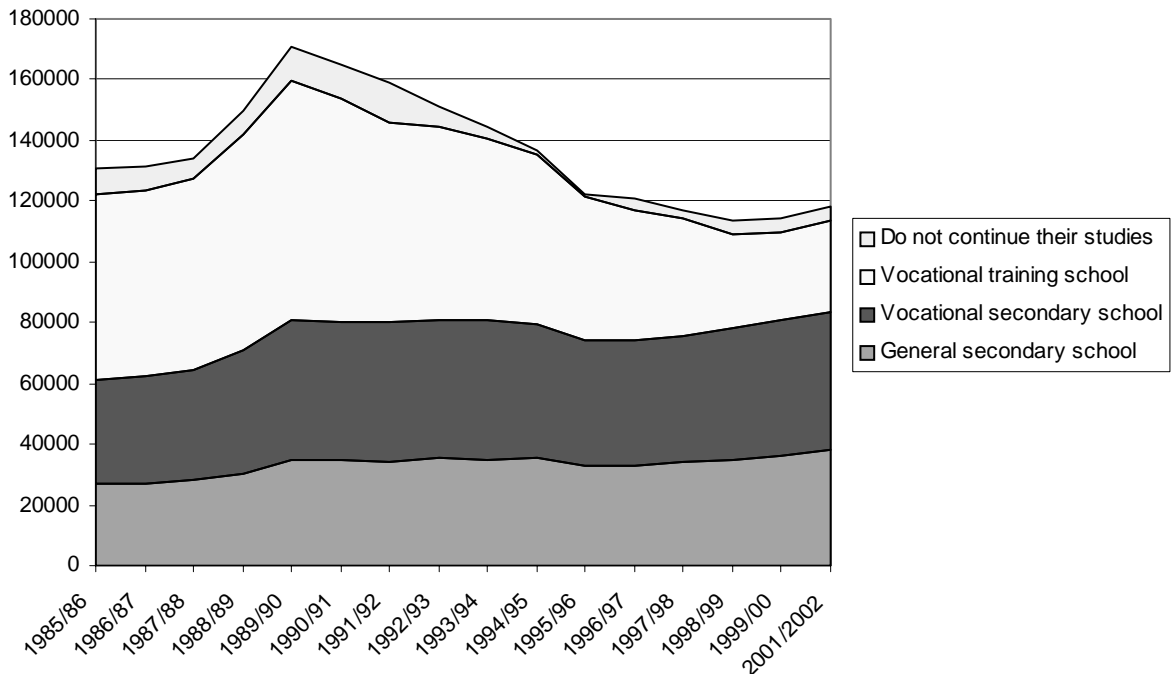
Expansion of secondary education

The structure of public education and the possible routes of progression within the system have changed considerably in the past years. The changes in the horizontal structure of public education were forced primarily by *the expansion of secondary education*. The unexpectedly rapid increase in the number of secondary school students started in the second half of the eighties. The number of those continuing their studies in secondary schools increased by nearly 20 thousand between 1985 and 1990, from 60 thousand to 80 thousand. Despite this increase in absolute numbers, it reflected a relative stagnation as there was an ever increasing population behind. In this period the proportion of those continuing their studies in general secondary schools was around 20%, while the proportion of those continuing their studies in vocational secondary schools was about 27%, and these percentages were stable. Starting from the nineties the number of those enrolled in secondary schools has hardly changed but as the student population has decreased at a rapid rate the enrolment proportions have sharply risen for both general secondary schools and vocational secondary schools, from 20% to 31% and from 27% to 38%, respectively.

The expansion was not controlled by conscious education policy; the main engine of this was a growing social demand and the interestedness of schools in keeping the number of students at a constant level. Due to the structural changes and the general crisis and restructuring of the vocational training sector the number of those enrolled in vocational training fell considerably. Along with this the interest in secondary schools leading to a school-leaving exam grew and so did the number of those entering this type of secondary schools, thus the expansion of secondary education started in a spontaneous way. As a result of restructuring by the end of the nineties 70% of those applying for secondary education attend secondary schools (see *Figure 4*).

Figure 4.

Number of those continuing or not continuing their studies at secondary level after completing general school, 1985/86–1999/00 and 2001/2002



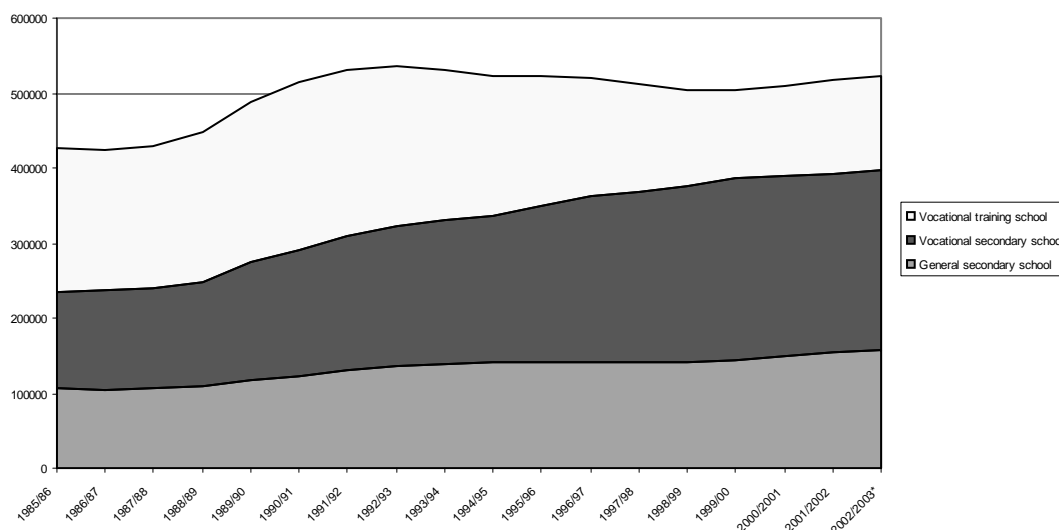
Source: Educational statistics of MoE; OM, Statisztikai tájékoztató Középfokú oktatás(Secondary education), 1999/2000; 2001/02. Calculations based on educational statistics database by Tibor Könyvesi and Erika Garami
 Note: By vocational training school both vocational training and other vocational training schools are meant.

Slightly more than one third of those continuing their studies in secondary schools attend a general secondary school, while nearly two thirds attend secondary schools with some kind of vocational programme. Examining the dynamics of secondary education *by programmes* it becomes clear that the increase is not in *general secondary schools* but in *vocational secondary schools*.

As concerns numbers of students it can be said that while at the beginning of the nineties only one fourth of secondary school students attended general secondary schools, one third went to vocational secondary schools and more 40% to vocational training schools, in the school year of 2001/2002 30% of secondary school students attended general secondary schools (calculated without those in the lower grades of 6-or 8-grade general secondary schools), 46% studied in vocational secondary schools and 24% in vocational training schools (see *Figure 5*). If those studying in the lower grades of 6-or 8-grade general secondary schools are also classified as secondary school students, the proportion of students in general secondary schools and in vocational secondary schools will change to 34% and 44%, respectively.

Figure 5.

Total number of students at secondary level by programmes, 1985/86–2002/03



Source: Educational statistics of MoE; Oktatási adatok (Educational Data) 2002/2003, KSH
 Note: By vocational training school all kinds of vocational training schools are meant.

The dynamic increase in the total number of vocational secondary school students is unambiguously due to the introduction of grades 13 and 14. On the other hand, if we added to the total of general secondary school students those in the lower grades, i.e. students of general school age, the advantage of vocational secondary schools would disappear. It can be said then that during the nineties the expansion of secondary education was relative as the number of enrolled students became unchanged and only the proportion increased as compared to decreasing population figures. On the other hand secondary schools could stabilize the number of students by vertical expansion when general secondary schools expanded downwards and vocational secondary schools – upwards. Taking all this into consideration we get the astonishing result that in the nineties the division of labour between general secondary schools and vocational secondary schools remained almost unchanged – as far as the total numbers are concerned.

An important feature of horizontal structural change is that very often it became possible not by creating new institutions, new places or by closing institution but by the inner restructuring of the existing institutions; as a result the number of *secondary institutions of a mixed profile (with both a general secondary and a vocational profile)* increased considerably. Due to horizontal structural changes a huge part of institutions provide several educational programmes for their students in grades 9-12 but the organization of grades 13(-14) brings about not only vertical but also horizontal change within the training structure of the institutions. These changes and the increase in the number of institutions with a mixed profile make the boundaries of general and vocational training more blurred. In addition to their special offer (dual-language classes, 6-or 8-grade schools, classes with advanced programmes in particular subjects) general secondary schools launch optional training of vocational character preparing those who do not continue their studies in higher education for entering the job market, organizing courses for those who have already obtained the general school-leaving certificate; vocational secondary schools open classes with a programme of general secondary schools and vocational training schools launch classes with a programme of vocational secondary schools. The spectacular increase in the number of secondary schools with a mixed profile is also partly due to this. Behind the expansion of secondary school

places very often there is only a renaming of vocational school training for vocational secondary school training.

The really spectacular expansion of secondary schools in Hungary can be seen in the increase in the number and proportion of those obtaining secondary school-leaving certificate. Although the number of those enrolled in secondary schools stagnated, nevertheless the number of those passing a secondary school-leaving exam rose unbroken. It is not only the number of those with a secondary school-leaving certificate that increased but also their proportion as compared to the age group of 18-year-olds. While in 1990 this proportion was 36.9%, in 1998 it was 52.7%. This proves that the school-leaving certificate becomes more and more common, the lack of it has a stigmatizing effect, and therefore everybody tries to obtain it.

Increase in the number of students in higher education

Higher education in the former socialist countries was always a narrow cross-section of education. Even at the beginning of the nineties Hungary lagged considerably behind the more developed countries of Europe concerning the participation of 18 to 22-year-olds in higher education. Since the second half of the nineties – partly due to the increasing social demand generated by the increase in the number of those with a secondary school-leaving certificate and partly because of the financial interestedness of the institutions of higher education – there has been an explosion-like expansion in higher education as well. As compared to 1999 the number of those admitted to higher education and studying there had tripled by 2002. At the same time the number of those with a secondary school-leaving certificate increased by roughly one-third “only” (see *Table 1*). In the given period the proportion of those with a secondary school-leaving certificate increased by one and a half times as compared to the 18-year-old population. The expansion of higher education was of a much bigger extent than that of secondary education.

Table 1.

Overall data on those with a secondary school-leaving certificate and those applying for admission to universities, 1990–2002 (thousand persons)

Title	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000*	2001	2002**
General secondary school (without correspondence and evening courses)	24.1	24.6	26.7	31.1	31.0	31.2	32.1	32.7	33.7	32.0	32.2	32.5	33.5
General secondary school (all)	27.2	27.5	29.3	34.2	34.4	34.6	41.4	36.4	37.7	36.3	37.1	38.0	40.0
Vocational secondary school (without correspondence and evening courses)	28.9	29.6	33.0	37.6	37.6	39.1	41.3	42.9	43.9	41.9	40.0	37.9	36.0
Vocational secondary school (all)	40.6	41.0	42.2	46.3	45.8	49.9	51.5	53.8	53.3	50.4	52.1	50.9	50.0

Total (without correspondence and evening courses)	53.0	54.2	59.6	68.6	68.6	70.3	73.4	75.6	77.7	74.0	72.2	70.4	69.5
With secondary school-leaving certificate in % of 18-year-olds	36.9	35.9	32.8	36.2	37.9	40.4	44.5	48.7	52.7	53.6	52.4	54.5	..
Applied for admission to higher education (without correspondence and evening courses)	46.8	48.9	59.1	71.5	79.4	86.5	79.4	81.9	81.1	85.5	82.9	84.4	89.0
Admitted to higher education (without correspondence and evening courses)	16.8	20.3	24.0	28.0	29.8	35.1	38.4	40.9	43.6	44.5	45.5	49.9	52.5
Admitted in % of applicants	36.0	41.6	40.6	39.2	37.5	40.5	50.0	50.0	53.8	52.1	54.9	59.1	59.1
Admitted in % of those with a secondary school-leaving certificate (without correspondence and evening courses)	31.7	37.5	40.3	40.8	43.4	50.0	52.3	54.1	56.2	60.2	63.0	70.8	75.5
Higher education students in % of 18-22-year-olds (without correspondence and evening courses)	8.5	..	..	..	..	11.9	12.9	14.1	15.3	17.5	19.0	24.7	..

Source: KSH, Magyar statisztikai évkönyv. (Statistical Yearbook of Hungary) 1990–2001; OM Statisztikai tájékoztató, Oktatási Évkönyv (Statistical information. Educational Yearbook) 2001/2002; Oktatási adatok (Data on education) 2002/2003, KSH

* Public education data referring to 2000 are estimated by MoE based on a 98-percent survey and trends.

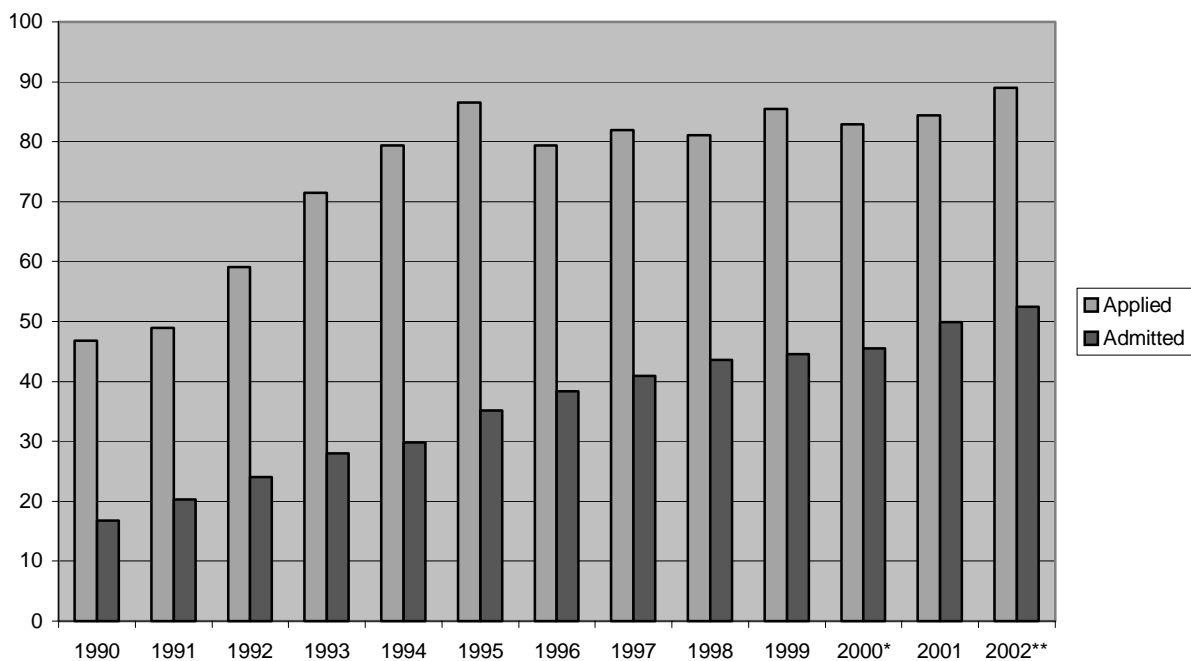
** Preliminary data.

.. Data not available

The number of those applying for admission to higher education (regular courses) rose quickly until 1995, since the mid-nineties it has stagnated and is around 80 thousand applicants today. At the same time the number of those admitted has been steadily growing, while in 1990 36% of the applicants were admitted; in 2002 this ratio was 60% (see *Figure 6*).

Figure 6.

Number of those applying for admission to higher education (regular courses) and of those admitted, 1990–2002(thousand persons)



Source: KSH, Magyar statisztikai évkönyv. (Hungarian Statistical Yearbook) 1990–2001; OM Statisztikai tájékoztató, Oktatási Évkönyv (Statistical Information. Educational Yearbook) 2001/2002; Oktatási adatok (Educational Data) 2002/2003, KSH

* Public education data referring to 2000 are estimated by MoE based on a 98-percent survey and trends.

** Preliminary data.

At the same time the above increase in the number of students in higher education in the first half of the nineties was accompanied by a 15-percent-increase in the number of higher education institutions, from 77 to 89. In the past five years the number of institutions has not changed and thus the capacity of this sphere has only slightly increased.

With the increase in the number of first-year students the proportion of those in the 18-22 age group who attend a higher education institution increased as well. While at the beginning of the decade this ratio was less than 10%, in 2000 it was near 20%. If we take only those with a secondary school-leaving certificate, this ratio is even more favourable: in 1990 less than one third of those with a secondary school-leaving certificate got into university or college, by the end of the decade this ratio was over 50 percent, i.e. more than half of those with a general or vocational secondary school-leaving certificate may continue their studies at a university or college (regular courses). At the same time it does not mean that there are no differences in chances of those admitted; with the expansion higher education became more diversified as well and the quality of available training became very uneven. This means that with the wider supply very diverse learning routes developed concerning the content and the length of courses.

Until 1999 short-term vocational training lasted three years while training in vocational secondary school was a four-year one. The accredited non-university higher vocational training just started, which was a new element in the supply of tertiary education. After 1999, however, vocational training lasts four years and training in vocational secondary school is practically a six-year one: after the first 4 years secondary school-leaving exams can be taken and following that vocational qualification can be obtained in two years. Due to this, the

strategies for further education have changed considerably, as the greatest advantage of the vocational secondary school was that in a relatively short period school-leaving certificate and vocational certificate could be obtained at the same time. The changes will make vocational training more expensive as it takes longer, and as a consequence it may become less popular.

Education in the press and public opinion

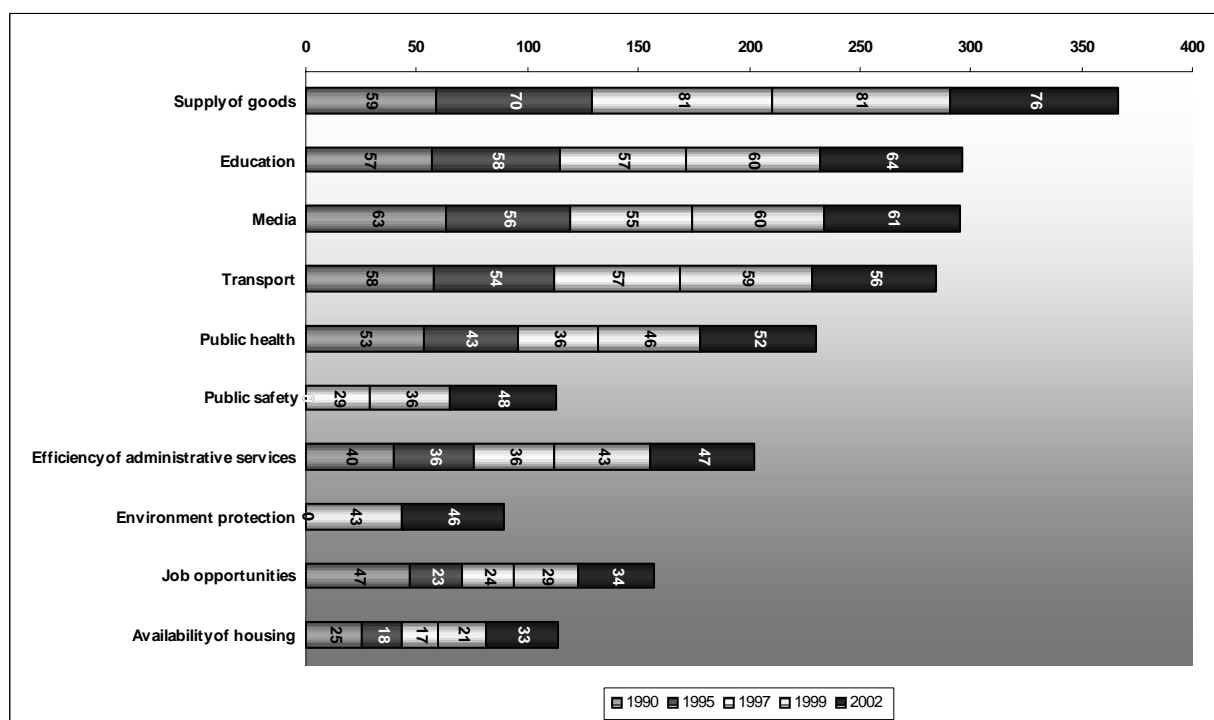
Public education is not among the most favoured topics in printed press (*Jelentés...*, 1998; *Jelentés ... 2000*), and in this respect there was no change at the turn of the millennium either (*László, 2002*). Examining the various levels of education it can be observed that in 2000-2001 – as for many years earlier – it was higher education again that was covered most in the press. A remarkable debate on the structure and efficiency of higher education could be followed on the pages of the weekly ‘Élet és Irodalom’ in 2002. Public education topics are much rare, especially vocational training is neglected in the press. However, in 2002 reacting to the reports of chambers on lack of skilled workers, several articles were published on vocational training.

Examining how often particular institutions were mentioned it can be seen that as before foundational, private and church schools were the most popular. In 2000-2001 curricula and school educational programmes were top topics in the press. From among the actors of education it was the students that received most attention, especially in connection with student welfare issues like grants and credits for students. Teachers were mentioned in connection with their pay, their work is much less presented. Unfortunately little attention is given to parents and their position in education. Among the less favourite topics equal chances and disadvantaged situations can be listed. The publication of the results of the PISA survey in 2002 ignited a very interesting and important discussion on the quality and effectiveness of public education. The public debate in 2003 on the amendment to the Act on Public Education of 1993 brought issues into the press like the role of teachers, student workload and the “ban” on failing pupils in the first four years of schooling. The efficiency problems that were raised following the pay rise for public employees appear repeatedly in the media in the context of closing down schools and the fear of it.

As compared to other public services the public is satisfied with education, and this tendency has not changed since the nineties (see *Figure 7*).

Figure 7.

Satisfaction rate of the Hungarian adult population with certain public services between 1990 and 2002 (on a scale of 100)



Source: Marián, 1999a; Szonda Ipsos Média-, Vélemény és Piackutató Intézet Gyorsjelentés, (Szonda Ipsos Media, Opinion and Market Research Institute Draft Report) 2002

Question asked: „I’m going to list a few things. Please tell me how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with them in Hungary today.

Concerning public satisfaction with education it is important to remark that the rate of satisfaction is not the same for all educational levels. Data of an opinion poll of 2002 about education prove that those questioned are most satisfied with pre-school education, which is followed by higher education, secondary school education and general school education in this order (see Table 2).

Table 2.

Change of opinions about the standard of particular institutions between 1996 and 2002, (on a scale of 100)

	1996	1999	2002
Pre-school education	..	..	73
General school education	54	62	66
Secondary school education	57	66	67
Higher education	60	72	71

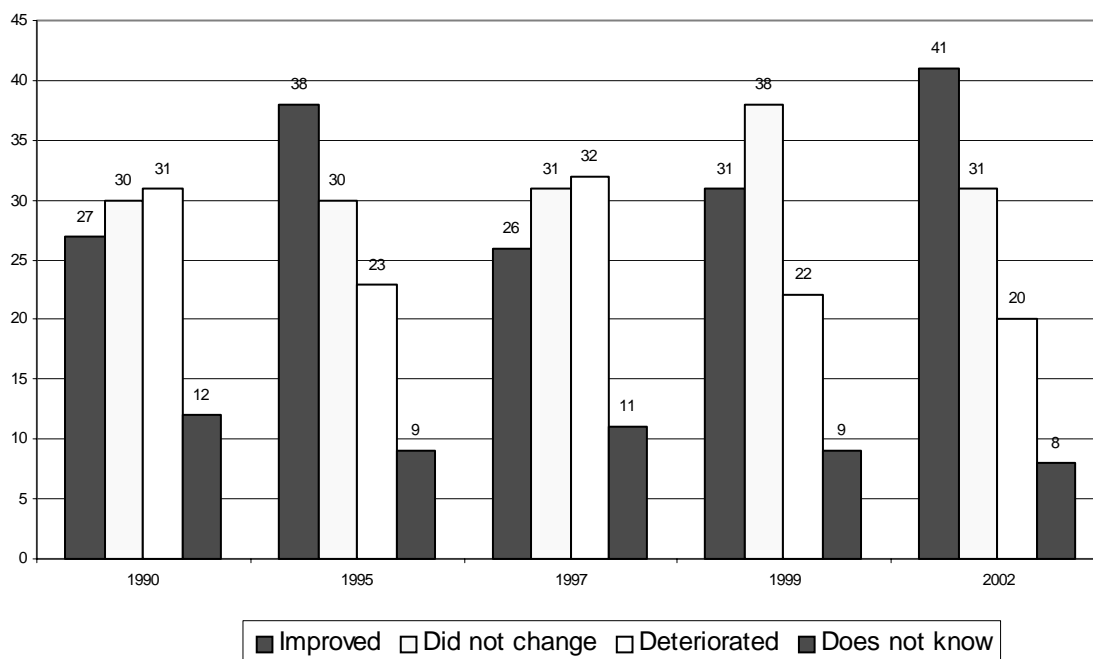
Source: Marián, 1999; Szonda Ipsos Média-, Vélemény- és Piackutató Intézet Gyorsjelentés, (Szonda Ipsos Media, Opinion and Market Research Institute Draft Report) 2002

Question asked: „Now I’m going to ask you to mark the standard of the following institutions.”

The relatively high rate of satisfaction does not mean that in previous surveys those asked gave the same mark for the standard of education (*Jelentés ...*, 2000). In 1990 the majority said the standard was deteriorating while in 1995 the majority found it was improving and in 1999 the majority said they did not see any change. Based on data from 2002 this cycle seems to turn: the majority experienced improvement (*see Figure 8*).

Figure 8.

Change of opinions on the standard of education between 1990 and 2002 (on a scale of 100)



Source: Marián, 1999; Szonda Ipsos Média-, Vélemény és Piackutató Intézet Gyorsjelentés, (Szonda Ipsos Media, Opinion and Market Research Institute Draft Report) 2002

Satisfaction with education is not irrespective of how educated the respondent is or where s/he lives. Generally, the more educated and city-dwellers are less satisfied with education due to their higher expectations.

If asked about the preferences concerning the allocation of public money education is placed high again. On settlement level only public health comes before education (see Table 3).

Table 3.

Public opinion concerning financing various public services, 1997, 1999 and 2002 (the amount that should be allocated to given services in percentage of all available sources)

Title	1997	1999	2002	Source: Marián, 1999; Szonda Ipsos Média-, Vélemény és Piackutató Intézet Gyorsjelentés (Szonda Ipsos Media, Opinion and Market Research Institute Draft Report), 2002
Public health	24.7	22.1	24.0	Question asked: „Suppose you have to decide what the settlement (district) should spend the resources available on. If you had HUF 1,000 to allocate, what would you spend it on?
Education	14.6	13.8	13.0	
Housing (building, renovation, buying)	8.2	12.0	12.3	
Public security	13.3	12.6	10.4	
Social care	12.9	10.6	11.5	
Public utilities, road construction, transport	8.9	10.1	9.9	
Culture, sport	5.9	6.6	6.9	
Environment beautification, protection	5.7	6.3	6.7	
Support for local enterprises	3.9	3.7	2.9	
Support for local civil organizations	1.9	3.0	2.4	
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	The needs and expectations of the Hungarian society concerning education

changed fundamentally in the past period of more than 10 years (*see Table 4*). The number of those saying that education is important for getting on in life rose, though even in 2002 only 49% of the population agreed with this statement. The opinion that schools overload children is nearly general, and so is the opinion that it is the task of the school to provide meals for children and day-care service for children. A great majority of respondents say that public education should be free for all but while the mid-nineties 80% thought so, in 2002 only 68%. The expectation that parents could send their children to the school they find the best is still very strong.

Table 4.

Attitudes towards education, 1990, 1995, 1999 and 2002 (those agreeing with the given statement in %)

Statement	1990	1995	1999	2002
1. Only educated people can get on in life nowadays.	36,1	36,4	43,9	49,0
2. Gifted people can get on in life even if they are not educated.	62,0	61,4	53,8	48,3
– Does not know	1,8	2,2	2,3	2,7
1. Schools today overload children, set too high requirements.	69,3	75,8	77,9	82,7
2. Schools today do not set hard enough requirements.	24,2	12,3	16,0	11,4
– Does not know	6,5	11,9	6,0	5,9
1. Parents have the right to send their children to the school they find the best.	67,3	89,2	82,8	84,4
2. Everybody should send their children to the district school where they belong, otherwise only the privileged could get into better schools.	29,1	9,1	14,8	12,8
– Does not know	3,5	1,7	2,4	2,8
1. The task of the school first of all is to give good vocational qualification, and widening general knowledge of children is not enough.	47,7	49,2	54,7	54,6
2. The task of the school first of all is to provide the most possible information and knowledge; it is not the task of the school to prepare for some kind of profession.	46,4	41,4	39,6	37,3
– Does not know	5,9	9,2	5,8	8,1
1. Separate schools should be opened for the gifted because they can develop only in this way.	49,5	54,5	45,6	42,2
2. Separate schools should not be opened for schools because it infringes the principle of social justice.	43,1	35,1	47,3	50,4
– Does not know	7,3	10,4	7,0	7,4
1. Schooling should be free for all.	63,9	73,2	78,0	68,3
2. The families that can afford should contribute to the costs of schooling.	33,9	24,9	20,9	29,8
– Does not know	2,1	1,9	1,1	1,9
1. Most of the problems of education could be solved locally, within schools.	49	49,5	47,9	46,0
2. The problems of education could only be solved centrally by government measures.	38,7	35,4	43,4	45,4

– Does not know	12,3	15,1	8,8	8,6
1. Schools should provide education as well as provide meals for children and day-care service.	67,6	82,2	83,8	83,0
2. Schools should only be engaged in teaching, providing other services is not the task of the school.	29,0	14,5	13,9	14,2
– Does not know	3,4	3,2	2,3	2,8

Source: Oktatásügyi közvélemény-kutatások, (Educational opinion polls) OKI – Szocio-Reflex Kft., 1990, 1995; OKI – Marketing Centrum, 1999, OKI Szonda Ipsos 2002

Question asked: „Now I’m going to read you statements that contradict each other. Please tell me which one you agree with. I may be difficult to choose but please try to decide which statement you could agree more.”

Surveys of TÁRKI (Social Research Informatics Center), however, warn us that people underestimate the costs of public services and cannot make a difference between taxes and contributions. This tax-consciousness is shown by the fact that the majority of voters of active age could only mention the tax revenues of the central budget. It became clear that citizens do not make difference between taxes and contributions and those mentioning different kinds of contributions did not know anything about the rate of the contributions in question. Only half of those asked knew that pensions were paid from social contributions and only one fourth was aware that “free” health care and subsidies for medicine prices are covered from these contributions. The fiscal illusions of voters of active age are shown by the fact a huge majority of them considerably underestimated the costs of higher education, subsidies for medicine prices and pensions. The picture is only complete, however, if we mention that such fiscal illusions were of a much smaller extent when higher education and social benefit costs per taxpayer had to be estimated. In these last two areas costs were more often overestimated.

From the survey it also became clear – and this is an outcome that can be used in economic policy as well – that the citizens’ commitment to the economic and social contribution of the state is so strong because those concerned are not aware that this contribution has a price that can be expressed in tax money. In cases when citizens are aware of the real costs and the mechanisms of redistribution, we find much more careful and much more moderate attitudes. That is: if the costs of particular institutional solutions can be made clear for the citizens they will make decisions not along ideological premises but rational calculations. This experience is of fundamental significance from the aspect of changing the organizational and financing structure of the welfare system. This means that defining clear, personalized alternatives supported by a sort of individual cost-benefit analysis is one of the preconditions of successful reforms.

Parents’ attitudes and expectations

Although educational research in Hungary has always paid special attention to surveys on institutions and maintainers, and there are considerable fewer surveys carried out among parents and students, in the following we can base our analysis on two important empirical surveys carried out between 2001 and 2003. One of them was carried out for the Office of the Commissioner for Educational Rights on parents’ rights (*Az oktatási jogok...*). The questionnaire-based survey was not representative but it aimed for diversity concerning educational levels and types of settlement and also included interviews. The responses of 2,325 parents were processed. The other survey was carried out for the Ministry of Education on students’ workload and included several questions concerning expectations and satisfaction (*Tanulói terhelésvizsgálat. OKI-Medián, 2002*) This survey was a national one and was carried out in all programme types of public education, in several grades, on a

representative sample. This latter database comprises of the responses of a total of 2,702 parents³. Apart from these two major surveys we will refer to other – partly national, partly local – surveys that we find particularly relevant for this theme.

Expectations towards school and their fulfilment

In the survey on students' workload the expectations of parents were examined by asking them to rank ten specific educational aims first and then say whether the given aims were achieved at their children's schools. The responses given by the parents showed a variance that was beyond all expectations, indicating the diversity of parents' expectations by school type, social position and mentality. The expectations that got the least support in total ("providing peaceful and caring learning environment", "developing students' life skills", "educating students to become honest adults with high moral standards") – were ranked first or among the first by very large parent groups – 20-25% in all (*see Table 5*). Parents' society is much more uniform concerning the level of fulfilment of the expectations in their children's schools; standard deviation is much smaller here.

Parents' expectations are clearly outlined by the responses. Limited to the ten given statements – the main expectations are: "developing the students' competencies and skills", "preparing the student for the next level of schooling" and "teaching the students to learn, developing their problem solving skills". Of these the parents are most satisfied with their children's preparation for the next level of schooling, while they are clearly dissatisfied with developing their children's problem solving skills, which dissatisfaction seems to be justifiable by the results of the PISA survey. The traditional virtue of Hungarian schools – and at the same time the obstacle to development: transferring information was ranked the highest concerning satisfaction but among priorities it was ranked on the middle of the scale. Parents are also satisfied with education for honesty and high morals, which was ranked last but one on the list of importance.

The variance in parents' responses concerning the ranked aims shows the distribution of parents' society. Standard deviation is especially high by the type of programme (school) the child attends and by parents' school attainment. Preparation for the next level of schooling is ranked first among parents' expectations and they are relatively much satisfied with it (*see Table 5*). Parents of general school and vocational training school students find the development of competencies and skills as the most important, but the satisfaction level is only average. Concerning problem solving parents' opinions are unanimous irrespective of the type of school their children attend. It is noteworthy that the parents of vocational training school students – and only they – require the school to develop life skills. These students are generally disadvantaged ones, with failures in learning and with weaker than average intellectual capacities. This expectation of their parents however is hardly fulfilled: the efforts of vocational training in Hungary focus on keeping the students in the educational system and transferring vocational information and knowledge. To become educated is the expectation of parents with general secondary school students, while parents with vocational secondary school students expect the school to give as much information as possible. The demand of this latter group is fully met, while that of the former one only more or less.

Table 5.

³ The database was generously made available for us by the researches and thus we could make special statistical calculations for this analysis.

Parents' expectations of schools and satisfaction with the fulfilment of these expectations by school type, 2002

	Most important	Expectation (ranking)				Satisfaction (ranking)			
	In % of mention	General school, grade 4	General secondary school, grade 10	Vocational secondary school, grade 10	Vocational training school, grade 10	General school, grade 4	General secondary school, grade 10	Vocational secondary school, grade 10	Vocational training school, grade 10
Developing the students' competencies and skills	14.0	1	2	2	1	6	3	4	3
Teaching the students to learn, developing their problems solving skills	13.1	2	3	4	4	9	6	8	8
Preparing the students for the next level of schooling	21.4	4	1	1	7	5	1	2	5
Giving as much information as possible	12.1	5	5	3	2	1	2	1	1
Preparing the students for community life and co-operation	4.2	6	9	8	6	3	8	6	2
Providing peaceful and caring learning environment	8.1	7	10	9	10	4	7	5	4
Helping students to become highly educated	5.5	9	4	5	8	8	4	7	6
Making students like learning	9.4	3	6	10	9	7	10	10	10
Developing students' life skills	4.7	10	8	6	3	10	9	9	9
Educating students to become honest adults with high morals	7.6	8	7	7	5	2	5	3	7

Source: Tanulói terhelésvizsgálat. (Survey on students' load) 2002

Parents' expectations by the school attainment of the mother differ greatly in the level of satisfaction with their children's school in a given respect. The higher the school attainment of the mother is, the more emphasis is given to the development of problem solving skills but the achievement of this goal is considered to be of very low level. The information transferring school reflects the needs of the less educated parents, maybe due to habit or traditions. For them the school is a place where the child "learns something". Parents with higher education qualification rank it very low. They, however, prefer helping their children to become highly educated and providing peaceful learning environment and schools generally meet this demand. Less educated parents expect more of the institutions in the area of educating their children to become honest adults with high morals, and this demand is usually met by the schools, too. Those being lower in the cultural hierarchy would expect the school to help develop life skills, but they think that the school performs poorly in this respect. This view is shared by the more educated parents as well.

Among the parents of general school pupils those living in villages find information transfer and developing competencies more important, while helping pupils to become highly educated is less important for them than for those living in cities. At the same time their opinions radically differ at each item concerning how schools perform (*see Table 6*). It is also interesting that those living in the capital see the performance of schools completely differently when compared to those living in other cities or towns. The responses from Budapest indicate rather negative opinions; those living in country towns are highly satisfied, while the opinion given on the performance of village schools is between the two extremes – in all issues!⁴ The negative picture given by those living in the capital may be justified by the more critical attitude, higher expectations, more competitive labour market of those living in the cultural centre and being the most educated. The more negative opinions of those living in villages may be justified by the differences in the standard of schools, which is known for the public as well. The range of this difference may not be reflected by the less critical opinions of those living here.

Table 6.

Percentage of parents saying their expectations are fulfilled by settlement type, 2002

	Budapest	Városok	Falvak
Developing the students' competencies and skills	37.3	52.2	44.5
Teaching the students to learn, developing their problem solving skills	20.3	44.7	35.4
Preparing the student for the next level of schooling	35.3	62.4	41.4
Giving as much information as possible	37.4	65.8	49.8
Preparing the students for community life and co-operation	44.5	56.8	45.5
Providing peaceful and caring learning environment	39.6	53.3	47.1
Helping students to become highly educated	23.4	49.5	39.4

⁴ It was examined whether a third variant is responsible for such differences but no such variant was found. The distribution of grades is even, school attainment follows the settlement slope, etc.

Making students like learning	29.7	39.8	38.1
Developing students' life skills	22.4	39.5	29.3
Educating students to become honest adults with high moral standards	40.9	63.6	47.1
Total (average)	33.1	52.8	41.8

Source: Tanulói terhelésvizsgálat. (Survey on students' load) 2002

Satisfaction with the school

In the same survey another question measured parents' satisfaction with the school. Parents were asked to say how much they agreed with each of the 16 statements related to particular dimensions of school – on a scale of four. This makes further fine-tuning of the opinions possible. Parents were nearly unanimous in feeling – the less educated ones and mothers in general to a bigger extent – that today's children are expected to work much more than the students of their generation were (*see Table 7*). This may be connected to the statement also supported by many that students have to learn too many data instead of learning how different things, events are connected. This opinion is shared more than the average by parents living in towns. The efficiency of school was also strongly criticized. Two thirds of the parents said that children had to learn a lot at home as well because time management was very poor at the school. Students – especially those in vocational training schools and with weaker cultural background – cannot learn a part of the material without assistance. In order to achieve good results it is especially the students in vocational training and children of less educated parents that would need the help of a private teacher. More than two fifth of parents – to a various extent and strongly connected to school attainment – cannot give the necessary help in learning to their children. Especially parents living in the capital and the more educated ones are of the opinion that the school does not teach students to learn. Moreover – strongly connected to this – it is incapable to make students like learning; this opinion was shared more often by the older generation. Three thirds of parents – but less than half of fathers! – see that children are stressed at school. The degree of stress is irrespective of cultural background, school type or settlement type.

Table 7.

Percentage of parents agreeing with particular statements by school attainment of parents, 2002

	General school	General secondary school	Vocational secondary school	Vocational training school	Total
Today children are expected to work more than we were.	87.1	85.6	92.2	90.5	88.0
Today children have to learn too many data instead of learning connections.*	85.1	86.8	84.0	84.2	85.4
The school my child attends has a good atmosphere.	82.5	88.4	83.9	78.9	84.6
My child likes going to school.	82.0	84.9	91.3	69.7	81.7
Today children have to learn many superfluous things.	65.2	75.4	75.8	73.5	71.9
Overall I am satisfied with teaching*	71.6	68.0	65.4	68.2	68.7

The time spent at school is not managed well and children have to learn a lot at home as well	57.1	63.3	70.5	61.8	62.7
Children cannot learn a part of the material without assistance	67.6	55.9	63.0	67.1	62.5
Today children are under much stress at school *	59.2	62.4	64.2	56.5	61.2
The requirements are not in harmony with the standard of teaching	55.5	57.2	64.2	64.5	58.8
The school does not teach children to learn	54.3	57.2	64.0	67.2	58.6
Today the school prepares the children better for further studies than it prepared us in our times*	58.4	57.2	60.0	58.4	58.3
Often children do not learn at school what they should*	51.6	55.1	57.2	54.6	54.3
To achieve good results private teachers, assistance is or would be needed	48.0	46.4	57.7	56.8	50.4
The school cannot make students like learning	43.9	47.2	51.7	63.6	48.5
We cannot give our children the necessary help in learning	40.8	39.6	51.3	61.8	44.6

* Not significant deviation

Source: Tanulói terhelésvizsgálat, (Survey on students' load) 2002

However, three fifths of parents say that schools prepare students for further studies better than their schools did when they went to school. This opinion is shared mostly by less educated, older parents and those living in smaller settlements, while less than 50% of parents living in the capital and those with higher education qualification agree with this statement more or less. Five sixths of parents say that their children go to a school that has good atmosphere. Concerning village schools and vocational training schools this opinion is less positive than concerning town schools and general secondary schools. Due to this, four fifth of parents think their children like going to school. It is especially true for vocational secondary schools, and the least true for vocational training schools. Overall, two thirds of parents said they were more or less satisfied with teaching: the more educated ones, the older ones and those living in the capital are less satisfied.

Parents' ideas on their children's future

Parents' ideas on their children's future may fundamentally influence children's demand for learning and further studies. In 2001 the Hungarian Central Statistical Office conducted a survey in several thousand households with children (*Család változóban, (The Changing Family)2002*). Based on the data it can be said that most families in Hungary consider their children's schooling important, they know that without professional qualification they do not have good chances for a successful life. Nearly half of the families could not formulate their aims concerning schooling but as children progress in their studies these aims get more and more concrete. Of those who have ideas about their children's future, nearly one fifth would like their children to obtain a university degree, and only an insignificant proportion of families prefer their children to become breadwinners as soon as possible (*see Table 8*).

Table 8.

Distribution of households with children by ideas on their children's future and by school attainment of the household members, 2001

Complex school attainment of household members	Would like their children to start work as soon as possible	Would like to ensure that their children have of a good profession	Children should obtain at least a secondary school-leaving certificate	Would like their children to obtain a university degree	Have no idea	Have other ideas	Total
Uneducated household	6.4	23.3	11.9	3.5	54.5	0.4	100.0
Household without secondary school qualification	2.0	16.2	17.6	9.6	54.1	0.5	100.0
Household with secondary school qualification	1.3	9.7	18.0	22.0	48.6	0.5	100.0
Household with a member with higher education qualification	0.7	5.9	9.6	35.6	47.3	0.8	100.0
Household of intellectuals	0.0	2.9	6.6	50.8	38.9	0.7	100.0
Total	2.1	12.8	15.1	19.3	50.2	0.5	100.0

Source: Család változóban, (The Changing Family) 2002

In the households classified as multiply disadvantaged or disadvantaged and comprising 18% of all households with children the aim that the children should obtain a college or university degree is practically non-existent. In the capital in every 10th household children are sent to a school their parents consider as one of better reputation. 8% of the households choose a school with advanced programme in particular subjects outside their own districts or a church school. In the household, however where the head of the household has only general school qualification, 90% of children attend the district school, while this ratio is 73% in the case of parents with university or college qualification.

Another survey conducted in 1999 (*Pályaválasztási aspirációk (Career aspirations). 1997 és 1999*) shed light on the fact that the choice of school is the result of a rational investment-return calculation where the main objective is that the professional (social) status of the child

should not be lower than that of the parents. In order to achieve this objective the majority of parents are willing to pay nearly any price and take all risks – unsuccessful school career, i.e. the risk of investment without return. As opposed to this in the case of another objective (upward mobility) the risk factors and the external compelling conditions are strongly taken into account when the rate of school investments and returns is calculated. For parents of higher status any other option but achieving the highest school attainment belonging to the highest status is unacceptable, so in the case of any other option they calculate that avoiding this situation is worth any price. For the parents of lower status there exist several acceptable options, i.e. ones that could constitute a “real” basis for calculation. The family background affects school attainment to an unchanged extent because the process of choosing a school is the result of a rational calculation where in the algorithm of investment-return calculation relative risk aversion is taken into account so much that this danger outweighs nearly any other rationally calculated factor (*Sági, 2004*).

Participation in school decision-making

Parent – school relationship

Parent – school relationship is rather differentiated in many aspects. According to a national survey conducted at the beginning of August 2000 about one third (36%) of the parents responding to the question concerning their influence on the education of their children said that they had great or very great influence on the pre-school or school education. The majority, however, said that they could hardly if at all influence the institutional socialization of their children, because schools do not involve them (*Gallup, 2000*). Rare meetings limit the exchange of information and opinions. Concerning articulating needs, the quality of contact-keeping and judging the effectiveness of the school it is presumable that the opinions and behaviour of more or less educated parents differ. The more educated ones articulate their needs better, they have a stronger critical attitude towards education, their expectations are more reflected in the investments in their children’s schooling and in their demand for alternative pedagogical methods. From the side of the institution it raises the issues of responsibility, transparency and accountability and also the question how the institution can popularize and manage itself. The character of the parent – school relationship may also be differentiated by settlement and region. Involving parents into school life and various free-time activities more than before is a European tendency. This strengthens the co-operation not only between parents and schools but also between various generations. In Hungary this phenomenon can mainly be found at the initial stage of schooling and in alternative schools (*Golnhofer, 2001*).

At several places parents – taking seriously the foundation that the school has endowed – support it by 1% of their income taxes or by contribution-in-kind (transport, paper, stationery, building material). A *negative* example for self-organization is, however, when the better-off parents of a settlement try to ensure quality schooling for their children by thrusting weaker stakeholder groups into an ever more disadvantaged position (see *Box*).

The case of Jászladány

At Jászladány, a settlement with considerable Roma minority pre-dominantly non-Roma parents initiated the establishment of a private school, which according to plans would have used a part of the settlement’s school building maintained by the local government. At this

school the enrolled children's parents should pay a minimal monthly fee. Thus it is exactly the poorest social groups (most probably Romas) would be excluded from the education of a possible higher standard (*Ligeti-Márton. 2002*). Behind the conflict around the quality of the school there is the contradiction between educational competition and social equity, which is interpreted by the press as a conflict between Roma and non-Roma parents. The increased presence of the media made the Ministry of Education act as well. The establishment of the private school was not authorized and a programme package of chance creation was offered. Unfortunately the two groups of parents did not come to consensus; moreover another example for negative self-organization was that into the local Roma minority self-government non-Roma people were elected – as it is not against the law. The Jászladány phenomenon shows that where the difference between the expectations of the local middle class and the more disadvantaged families becomes gap-like, the parents who can advocate their interests better may push the schools and the teachers who are inert due to lack of instruments in a direction where those dropping behind cannot follow them. As a consequence, the distance between the elite and the periphery increases. Thus a complex problem emerges: on one side there are the over-motivated parents striving for self-assertion and on the other there are the under-motivated ones with weak advocating power. Similar tensions will have to be expected unless teachers get into a position that they are ready and able to develop professionally well-grounded school programmes and adjust them to the needs of their students and in doing so establish a relationship with parents based on mutual trust and responsibility and co-operate with them.

Initiatives for learning parents' opinions

Since the second half of the nineties support for the quality assurance systems of schools has been an ongoing important educational policy priority. Along with many other initiatives the *Comenius programme* was introduced building on central funding and a tender system. In the framework of this programme 539 institutions laid down the foundations of a partnership-based quality assurance system (*Györgyi-Török, 2002*). In these institutions parents (and in many cases students as well) are asked about their views on the institutions with the aim that their needs, critical remarks be taken into account when operating the school. It is problematic that the outcomes of the survey receive only restricted publicity. Parents themselves may learn about some of the outcomes at the closing ceremony of the school year in the form of a carefully selected quotation, they cannot learn the mean of the responses given to certain questions, and they themselves do not initiate this, either. The teachers' staffs learn about the parents' opinions on themselves and on the school at a teachers' meeting. For some time this may be found on the notice-board but it does not arouse much interest. We do not know of any discussions of it among teachers or with parents. The analysis itself in a written form is available for the teachers' staffs only in an informal way. The questionnaire that is usually formulated with the help of an external expert provides several opportunities for feedback but school managements do not wish to use them. They find it more secure if only a small circle learns about the outcomes that are mostly favourable but in some aspects involve serious criticism (language learning, variety of programmes, personal care, etc.).

Similar analyses are made in hundreds of schools every year. Little is known about their internal publicity and the given local policy reacting to the critical elements. These analyses do not have any wider publicity, which is understandable as they were not made with this aim – whereas the lessons than can be drawn from them would justify it.

To learn about parents' opinions is an obvious aim of Hungarian parents' associations as well. We visited the most influential organization, which is the most popular one in the press as well (National Association of Parents' in Hungary) to collect the parents' opinions that can be documented. Learning about parents' views is only sporadic at the organization, due to lack of source and expertise or more concrete intentions in this respect. The main source of learning about parents' views is studying cases of parents' complaints. This could be sufficient for learning about typical problems but is not sufficient for a comprehensive and authentic picture.

Assertion of parents' rights

The rights and obligations of parents are frequently inseparable, and are often preconditions of one another. Parents' custody rights can be suspended or eventually denied if they do not fulfil their obligations, e.g. when after several warnings and penalties they do not ensure the participation of their children in the pre-school education for the preparation of the education in school, fulfilling the compulsory education or training obligation⁵ or do not promote or help the children to find their places in the community. The *appropriate assertion of parents' rights* is the precondition of the fulfilment of parents' obligations. Parents can ensure the participation of their children in the pre-school education or the fulfilment of compulsory education⁶ if they get access to necessary information⁷ and can assert their right to freely choose school⁸.

Although amendments to regulations continuously expand the scope of rights of the school board⁹, which has practically no tradition in Hungary, these boards play their rightful role at very few institutions. Unfortunately the old practice is still alive and is getting even stronger that most teachers disapprove of the fact that an "external actor" (and parents are still considered as such) has the opportunity for having a say in school life. Parents on the other hand, are dissuaded from expressing their opinions by fear of retaliation.

As opposed to school boards the *parent-teacher associations* dating back to several decades have some kind of real function at most schools. Pre-schools and schools "use" these associations for organizing programmes and school trips, and most teachers regard the parents in these associations as assistants. On the other hand it also happened that the parent-teacher association was only formed when the educational programme was developed in order that somebody could officially deliver the opinion of parents.

The survey carried out for the Office of the Commissioner for Educational Rights in 2001-2002 examined the assertion of parents' rights and within this concentrated on three main areas. The three areas were: parents' right to information, which is a precondition of fulfilling parents' obligations, parents' self-organization, and parents' advocacy. The main finding of the study is not surprising: parents' rights of families of lower social status are multiply infringed.

⁵ (Act on Public Education, Section 14 (2) a).

⁶ (Act on Public Education, Section 14 (2) a).

⁷ (Act on Public Education, Section 14 (1) a-b, e, g-h).

⁸ (Act on Public Education, Section 13 (1) a).

⁹ See e.g. 11/1994. (VI.(8.) Ministry of Culture and Public Education decree on the operation of educational institutions)

Parents have the right to get access to school documents that could orient them when choosing a school – educational programme, rules of organization and operation and school rules. A considerable part of parents have not even heard of the existence of the first two (*see Table 9.*), they know only school rules as either they themselves or someone in their environment or their children got into conflict. The more educated parents are more likely to know about the existence of these documents – as it becomes clear from analyzing another set of questions – and they usually judge cases requiring legal interpretation better than the less educated ones (*see Table 9.*).

Table 9.

To your knowledge does the school have

	school rules?	rules of organization and operation?	educational programme?
No	1,5	3,7	4,2
yes	90,6	61,4	62,1
I don't know	4,0	28,0	27,6
No data available	39	69	61
Total	100	100	100

Source: Kurt Lewin Alapítvány kutatása, (Survey of Kurt Lewin Foundation) OJBH, 2002

Keeping personal contact with parents, which is or could be the best way of information flow between parents and teachers, is in most cases dominated by formal parents' meetings concentrating on topical matters, and typically organized three times a year, where teachers give information the same way, i.e. "frontally" as they do with students. This setting is little suitable for one-to-one discussions on individual students. The so-called "reception hours", which are also organized a few times a year are more suitable for that. This opportunity, however, is used by a smaller proportion of parents – maybe half of them with considerable standard deviation. "Unfortunately it is especially those who should come that don't come" this is how a teacher in the interview indicates the limits of this institution in the case of passive teacher behaviour. According to the survey the reason why poorer parents do not turn up at such meetings is that the school collects regular material contribution for its "extracurricular" programmes, which the parents with smaller sources try to avoid or at least to postpone, or try to save themselves the humiliating "we cannot afford it" by not turning up. In doing so, however, their decision-making will be limited and they will be able to follow their children's progress less carefully. At smaller settlements the sporadic operation and the costs of mass transport also contribute to the absence of poorer strata at the programmes offered by the school.

Keeping contact with Roma parents is a special problem analyzed by sociologists (*Liskó, 2001*). A part of Roma parents are even more uninterested than their non-Roma counterparts, or simply more distrustful towards the institution of school. The frequency of contacts with the school is smaller than that of non-Roma parents, three quarters of the Roma parents in the survey said that in the year before they attended at least one parent – teacher meeting. In the schools attended by the middle-class this ratio was well above 90%. Teachers personally visit the families that do not come to school meetings but with one fifth of Roma parents there is no contact established at all. Dropping out, non-fulfilment of compulsory education and deviances leading to serious consequences are more frequent in these families. The communication barrier to uneducated parents with a special minority communication culture is unbreakable for a considerable part of teachers.

It may happen that the non-fulfilment of compulsory education comes from being uninformed as it is indicated by the study prepared for the Office of the Commissioner for Educational Rights. Many parents still think that after completing 8 grades of general school education is not compulsory because it was not in their times. Failure in the attempts at solving the problems may also be due to the fact that “the lawyer and the officials, not in one instance in our survey, think only in terms of legal regulations ... some kind of communication-based problem-solving way is beyond their ken, they only see regulation-based solutions, which are usually sanctions.” Parents’ rights and choices are seriously affected by deficiencies accompanying poverty, which go beyond material limitations. “The poor see the institutions (the school in particular) not as ones serving them but as an offshoot of power that they can only enter as someone being subjected.”

Parents’ rights to choose are often infringed when their children are classified as ones with mild mental disabilities. In many cases this has social causes and the expert panel proposes remedial education in more than one case referring to the children’s socialization disadvantages saying that due to them they would be deemed failures in the regular classes of the general school. Although according to the law the youth completing any type of general school can continue their studies in any type of secondary education, the parents are not informed of this opportunity and in many cases they are literally dissuaded from it. For the *de facto* not disabled children with conformity problems, learning difficulties and behavioural disorders an alternative of special and therefore segregated classes would be learning in small-sized regular classes in the first few years of schooling, while for those with mild mental disabilities the alternative could be learning together with non-disabled children in integrated classes. There are sparse examples for this. It is more frequent, however, that the educational consulting services do not present these opportunities in their official reports either, though they would professionally be justified, because there are no small-sized ad/or integrated classes in the given settlement. Therefore the parent’s right to information and thus freedom of choice are also infringed. Although the process requires the active participation of parents, they most often sign the decisions made by those “above”, not knowing of their rights and opportunities. This especially hits those within the group of the poor belonging to the Roma ethnic minority, which fact is known for the public as well and is confirmed by the proceedings of the ombudsman.

The most important finding of the survey commenting on parents’ choosing schools is that “a part of parents really *make a choice*, while for another considerable part external social constraints determine the general school that their children will attend. This latter group of parents are usually unaware of the fact that they could choose”. The background of this phenomenon was discussed above. At the same time another finding of the researchers was that civic culture changed for the better in the decade following the transition, the parents belonging to the strata with more citizen-like mentality “see the school as contractors and have expectations”. Their orientation is often based on informal channels but the increasing marketing activities of schools are also helpful. There are opportunities for getting into contact, for visiting classes of their children’s future teachers, for getting familiar with the environment, the school atmosphere during the so-called open days. Many wish to choose a school “that would fit my child and not one that my child would fit”. In choosing the first school it is very often not the school but the class teacher that is selected. It is the teacher they try to get basic information about (educational principles, style, etc.). Due to the lasting unfavourable demographic processes there are extra capacities that brought the schools into a race condition together with the institution of free choice of schools and as a consequence schools try to attract students by informing parents, by learning about parents’ demands and

adjusting to them and thus ensure the further existence of the institution. Operation based *also* on “management” and market-like behaviour borrowed from the economy characterizes the bigger proportion of schools and it is seen as desirable by the professional public.

The settlements that have only one general school are in special situation. Here the freedom of choice of parents is obviously smaller, and the decisions require more consciousness and material sacrifice and may be accompanied by greater risks. It is becoming typical that village children are sent – may be not at the age of 6 or 7 but when they are aged 10 – to the schools of higher standard or regarded as such in nearby towns. We know towns in the schools of which the proportion of young pupils coming from the nearby villages is more than 10%. The institutions and their maintainers are interested in this as they receive the per pupil capita grant for pupils coming from other districts as well and the motivated, well-performing pupils may contribute to the increase of the effectiveness of the school. Those who stay in the village out of constraints or other considerations are obviously on the losing side, as they have to attend an institution of reduced financing and social composition.

In the case when in the village with one general school there lives a considerable Roma minority, the migration of young pupils is accelerated. However, as this entails considerable expenses for the parents, most often the maintainer of the school is under strong pressure to enhance segregation. Such a case in the conditions of weak democratic traditions could lead to a serious conflict even if the process is legal (*see Box*), which makes further co-existence in the same settlement difficult and labels integrated education as an improbable scenario in perspective as well.

Students' choice and values

Demand for and supply of secondary education places

Students were admitted to secondary education in similar proportions in 2000 and 2001. Nearly 66% were admitted to the secondary schools of their first choice, 13-14% to institutions of second choice, 6% to institutions of third choice. In both years 10-11% of those who applied were not admitted to secondary education in the first round. A part of them attended 6-or 8-grade general secondary schools, they obviously stayed in their general schools, while the majority of them (70% - 9 to 10 thousand children) were admitted by less frequented secondary institutions following an extra admission procedure in summer. Based on the admission database of secondary education, in 2000 90% of those completing general school were admitted to the type of education of their first choice, in 2001 this proportion was 91%. In 2001 89% of those applying for 4-year general secondary school education were admitted to general secondary schools, 10% to vocational secondary schools and 1% to vocational training schools. 88% of those applying for vocational secondary schools got into vocational secondary schools, 3% to general secondary schools, 9% to vocational training schools. Of those whose first choice was a vocational training school 98% got into vocational training schools and 2% to vocational secondary school.

The database of KIFIR (Public Education Information Office) provides the opportunity for analyzing application and admission rates by the settlement type of the general school as well. As in several other surveys the settlement slope is present here as well, the smaller the settlement where the general school is the higher the probability of pupils applying for admission to vocational secondary schools or vocational training schools. Admission rates show the same tendency (*see Table 10*). It can also be observed that more pupils would like to

go to the 6-or 8-grade general secondary schools than are admitted, while there are more students in vocational training schools than those who wanted to go there, and this is also true for village students, who applied in bigger proportions for this school type.

Table 10.

Distribution of first choice applications and admission rates by type of secondary education and by the settlement type of the general school, 2001

First choice application	Budapest	City of county rank	Other town	Village of more than 5,000 inhabitants	Village 1,000-5,000 inhabitants	Village of fewer than 1,000 inhabitants	Total
4-grade general secondary school	31.78	32.14	28.65	19.51	20.35	18.11	26.73
6-grade general secondary school	12.96	8.06	4.88	5.87	2.68	2.36	6.20
8-grade general secondary school	8.23	5.44	3.98	4.24	1.90	1.99	4.36
Secondary vocational school	37.97	38.36	39.84	44.26	42.14	41.41	40.18
Vocational training school	9.06	16.00	22.66	26.11	32.95	36.13	22.52
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
4-grade general secondary school							113108
6-grade general secondary school	32.21	30.69	28.15	20.08	20.13	18.12	26.20
8-grade general secondary school	10.80	5.62	4.15	4.80	2.03	1.91	4.84
Secondary vocational school	5.91	4.32	2.88	2.72	1.43	1.62	3.17
Vocational training school	39.43	39.99	39.75	43.64	40.74	38.76	40.21
4-grade general secondary school	11.65	19.38	25.06	28.77	35.67	39.59	25.58
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

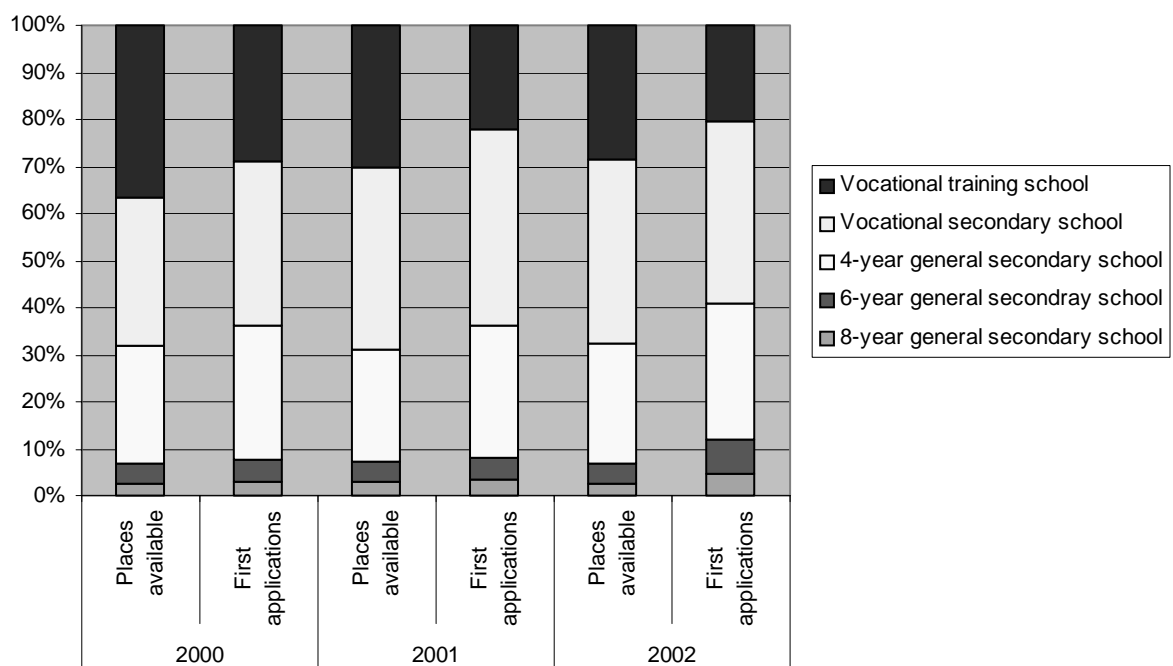
Source: KIFIR adatbázis (KIFIR database), 2001

According to the data the supply of secondary institutions exceeds demand in all school types but not to the same extent. In 2000 80% of 4-grade general secondary school places could be filled, this ratio was around 85% in 2002. In the case of the places at the 6-or 8-grade general secondary schools the ratio of filled places was 90%, which may indicate a narrow cross-section. In the case of vocational training places, however, the ratio of filled places did not change in the three years examined, less than 80% of vocational secondary school places and 65% of vocational training school places could be filled by at these schools. By all accounts, these data prove that lack of places cannot be a barrier to secondary school expansion as they far exceed, at least in quantity, the demand.

The analysis of the demand for and supply of various educational programmes by advanced programmes and trades shows that in some areas there are narrow cross-sections. For the 6-or 8-grade general secondary school places there is much more demand than can be met (*see Figure 9*). The expansion of this sector is not encouraged by county development plans and this sector itself is also interested in keeping the elite character due to the narrow cross-section. While in 2000 and 2001 the supply of 4-grade general secondary school places seemed to be sufficient, in 2002 there were some counties where this became a narrow cross-section as well, especially in the case of classes with intensive foreign language teaching. Vocational secondary schools seemed to be the main engine of secondary school expansion, but the fact that at county level the places of vocational training schools decreased to the same extent as the vocational secondary school places increased indicates that there was only a restructuring within vocational training, which does not necessarily mean quality improvement. The supply of training programmes does not follow the demand dynamically enough, and it rather reproduces the existing and often outdated structure of trades. Here the interestedness of vocational training schools in keeping their teachers and the interestedness of the maintainers in not getting into sharp conflict with the school management can be revealed. However, in a few counties a quality shift can be seen in the supply of secondary school education.

Figure 9.

Supply of secondary education places and demand for them by programme types, 2000-2002 (%)



In the nineties the structure of public education in Hungary radically changed. Expansion took place at both secondary and higher education along with considerable diversification. In secondary education 6-or 8-grade general secondary schools emerged and in tertiary education there emerged new forms of post-secondary training, e.g. accredited non-university

higher vocational training programmes. In spite of this expansion and diversification it can also be seen that for certain strata the school system does not provide real alternatives. Many (10%) do not get into secondary education in the first round of application. It is a warning sign that these pupils apply mainly for vocational training schools where there is a big over-supply. These pupils – despite the fact that the financial interest of these institutions would dictate their admission – are not admitted even by vocational training schools. The fact that among those who were not admitted there were a lot of children from Borsod and Szabolcs counties as well as from Budapest indicates that the expansion of secondary education is blocked not by quantity but quality problems, the Hungarian school system writes off a lot of children too early, which raises the issue of the teachers' preparedness and motivation.

Aspects of choosing a school, motivation for further education

Data from a (non-representative) survey conducted in three small regions in 1997 show that the great majority (more than 60%) of 13-year-old pupils wanted to continue their education in the school of their choice because they considered that to be a good school. One fifth of them said that the main reason for choosing a school was that they could deal with what they liked. This latter argument was present primarily in the responses of those choosing vocational training institutions (*see Table 11*).

Table 11.

Aspects of the school choice of 13-year-olds by the settlement type of the general school, 1997 (%)

Direction of further education and the type of the settlement	Because it is a good school	Because this school is near	Because I want to have a qualification as soon as possible	I deal with what I like	I would not be admitted somewhere else	It will be easy to continue my studies from here	%/N
VILLAGE							
Vocational training school	46.4	19.3	7.2	24.3	1.1	1.7	100.0
Vocational secondary school	52.6	6.3	7.2	31.3	0.3	2.3	100.0
General secondary school	67.9	7.0	0.5	16.0	0.5	8.0	100.0
%	55.2	10.0	5.4	25.2	0.6	3.7	100.0
Total	371	67	36	169	4	25	672
TOWN							
Vocational training school	43.9	9.4	11.8	30.2	3.1	1.6	100.0
Vocational secondary school	54.5	7.0	3.6	30.2	0.2	4.5	100.0
General secondary school	80.9	1.9	0.5	6.4	0.1	10.2	100.0
%	64.9	5.0	3.5	19.3	0.6	6.7	100.0
Total	1070	83	57	318	10	110	1648

	WHOLE SAMPLE						
%	62.1	6.5	4.0	21.0	0.6	5.8	100.0
N	1441	150	93	487	14	135	2320

Question asked: Why did you choose this school?

Source: Pályaválasztási aspirációk (Career aspirations), 1997

Comparing the responses of town and village children it can be seen that in choosing a secondary education institutions village children value that the school is near and that they can get a qualification in a short time while town children value the quality of the school or think they would not be admitted anywhere else. Nevertheless, further differentiations are worth making within this. Proximity plays a strikingly important part in village children's choosing vocational training schools, while quality is emphasized by 13-year-old town children choosing a general secondary school. This may partly arise from the fact that for village children the vocational training schools are within a smaller distance than other schools and partly from the fact that proximity is an important aspect for village children when choosing a general secondary school in the town, while it is a less important aspect with town children. These latter choose this type of education due to the quality of it. This may also indicate that education of the same type may be very different from place to place and education of better quality is more available for town children than for those living in villages.

For both village and town students the chances of further studies beyond secondary education increase with the level of school performance. The better the students learn the more chances they have. However, slightly more town students than villages students realize this chance. This may be explained by diverse cultural capital (in town parents are usually more educated and for families with more cultural capital further education is more acceptable) but it may be explained by cost-benefit arguments as well (in towns institutions of higher education are more accessible therefore there are no additional costs of travel and housing). The prospective further education plays a bigger part in the case of town children (irrespective of school performance) than in the case of village children and the aspirations of town children follow more sensitively their school performance. This is in harmony with the research results that find diverse performances behind the same marks usually in favour of town students (*Andor-Liskó, 2000*) and thus school results probably convey more reliable information for the town students than for the village ones. In the possession of more valid information there is a smaller risk of under- or overestimating the chances of further education therefore town students may be more sure of getting into a good secondary school that will increase the chances of further education.

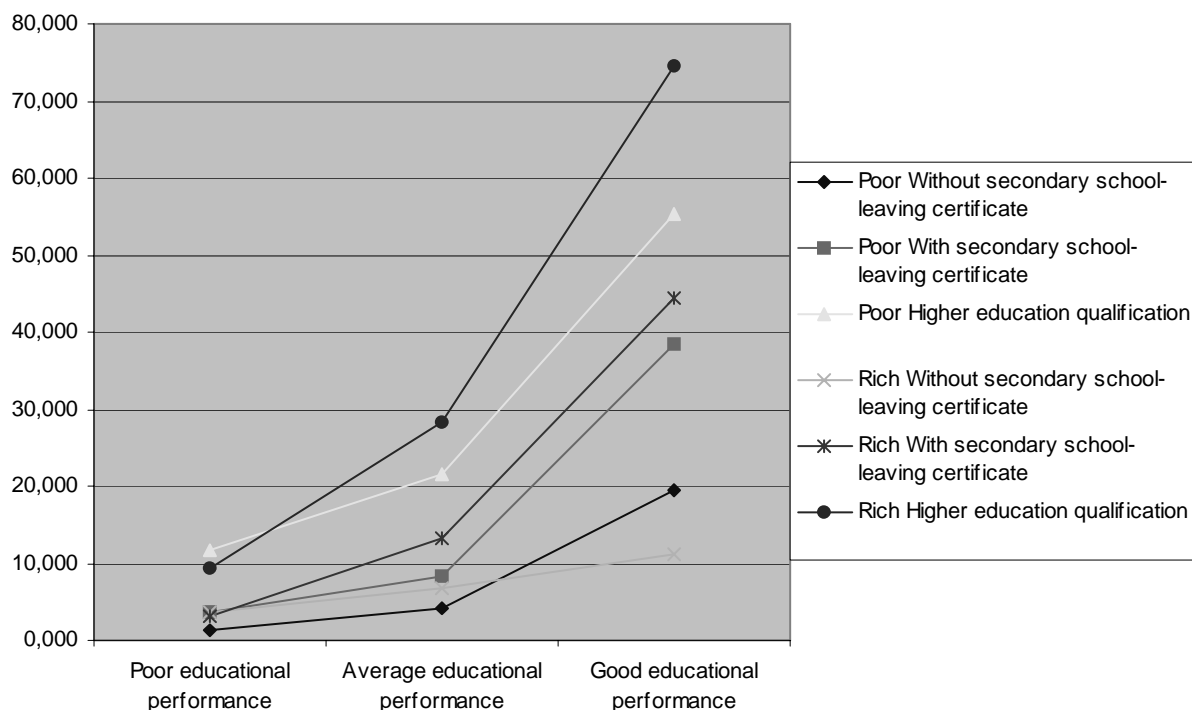
Village children with better school performance choose vocational training institutions in a bigger proportion than town children do. This approach based on rational calculation could provide the explanation: with less cultural capital it seems to be more profitable to choose an institution where the qualification recognized by the labour market can be obtained in the medium run but the way to further education is not blocked, either. The proximity of the secondary education institution is not a major consideration when either village or town children with better educational performance choose a school, however there is a great difference in the case of children with lower educational performance where village children take this aspect into consideration to a much greater extent when choosing a school than town children do. It is worth investing a little more into the further education of village children with better educational performance (i.e. bear the costs and troubles of travelling) whereas it does not seem to be profitable with weaker students. However, in the case of weaker town students these costs do not play such a big part as the choice of schools is bigger in towns and

there is sufficient supply in all types of education. We can say that the kind and accessibility of supply plays a certain part but the proximity of the institutions influences the further education of weaker village students (generally they choose vocational training schools) because in this case distance would make the further education of these children much more expensive compared to the expected or achievable results. Town children, however, choose secondary general school in a bigger proportion than their village counterparts do, which can be explained by the different performance content of the marks given by town and village general schools (*Lannert, 2004*).

Children of more educated parents choose universities not only due to probably greater material security but also because in these families the norm of further education is stronger. The children of educated parents with more modest income would rather choose more prestigious and longer forms of higher education even when their educational performance is not the best. A non-representative survey conducted in 1999 on the sample of 17-year-old students proves that there is no difference between the aspirations of weaker students by family income if the school attainment level of the mothers is the same. In the case of students with good educational performance the further education scissors open up and the children of educated mothers with more income would like to study at universities in the biggest proportion while the children of uneducated mothers with more income would like to study at universities in the smallest proportion. We can see that the further education aspirations differ more by the school attainment of the mother than by family income. Although the proportion of the better students wishing to study at universities is higher at all educational attainment levels of mothers but the children of “poor” educated mothers would like to study at universities in a bigger proportion than the children of better-off mothers with general secondary school certificate. On the one hand we can say that the norm of a strong commitment to studies affect the choice of children of more educated parents, while on the other hand the following figure also illustrates that the material capital cannot be exchanged in a simple way for cultural capital, that is we could also say that this exchange is not made if they do not feel the need for it (*see Figure 10*).

Figure 10.

Percentage of those wishing to continue studies at universities by school attainment of mother and by income situation, 1999



Source: Pályaválasztási aspirációk (Career aspirations), 1999

Satisfaction with the school and school subjects

We do not know of any recent surveys concerning students' priorities of and attitudes towards school and school subjects but several national, representative questionnaire-based surveys (*Tanulói munkaterhek vizsgálat*, (Survey on students' workloads) 2002; *Tanulói terhelésvizsgálat* (Survey on students' loads), 2002; *Szakiskolai felmérés* (Survey on vocational training schools), 2002) included questions that can be used for making some conclusions. In the survey on students' loads mentioned in the section describing parents' expectations the students answered the following questions as well: "If you consider only three aspects, which is the best school in your opinion?" Every tenth student answered the nearest one, the others voted in equal proportions (45-45%) for where they feel best or where it is the easiest to continue studies. According to the basic attitude the utilitarian choice and the one of pleasant atmosphere are balanced. By background variables however, the differences are considerable (see Table 12). In the higher grades of general secondary schools for about three fifths of students the aspect of further education is the most important, although half of vocational secondary school students also mentioned this as the most important aspect. It is noteworthy that one fourth of vocational training school students, who are in principle prepared for the labour market – also chose this aspect. Gender differences are also considerable: boys prefer the more pleasant and more convenient solutions to the investment in the future. Girls are more conform and more ambitious to compensate at least partly for the disadvantages arising from their gender. The strongest is the link to parents' educational attainment: those coming from the most educated families chose the aspect of further education two and a half times more than those coming from the least educated ones.

Table 12.

If you consider only three aspects, which is the best school in your opinion?

	The nearest one	Where it is easiest to continue my studies from	Where I feel best
Programme type / grade			
General school grade 6	19.3	30.7	50.0
General school grade 8	18.4	37.0	44.6
General secondary school grade 8	6.2	52.1	41.8
General secondary school grade 10	3.8	63.6	32.6
General secondary school grade 12	6.2	57.8	36.0
Vocational secondary school grade 10	4.8	43.2	51.9
Vocational secondary school grade 12	4.9	47.6	47.6
Vocational training school grade 10	15.6	25.4	59.0
Gender (all respondents)			
Boys	11.4	39.7	49.0
Girls	8.1	50.7	41.1
Gender (only general school pupils)			
Boys	21.1	28.6	50.3
Girls	16.5	39.4	44.1
Settlement type (only general school pupils)			
Budapest	12.6	32.0	55.3
City of county rank	18.5	41.0	40.5
Other town	14.8	23.8	61.5
Village	25.8	34.4	39.8
Standard of living (only general school pupils)			
Well-off 52%	14.5	37.5	48.0
Less well-off 48%	24.0	30.4	45.6
School attainment of mother (only general school pupils)			
Maximum 8 grades of general school	30.9	22.0	47.2
Vocational training school	19.3	31.7	49.0
Secondary school certificate	14.0	35.7	50.2
College or university certificate	13.9	46.1	40.0
Total of respondents	9.7	45.4	44.9

Source: Tanulói terhelésvizsgálat (Survey on students' load), 2002

Concerning particular subjects several statements could be agreed with. It is important that students attached much more subjects to the positive statements than to the negative ones. In the original question there were 24 statements of which we took 8. Out of these eight statements two – “I like learning this subject” and “The material is interesting” – were chosen for nearly two subjects of the 11 on the average, while the three most negative ones – “The lessons are boring”, “I found most of the material superfluous” and “The material is difficult, incomprehensible” were chosen for one subject on the average. The vocational training school students were in the worst relationship with learning but even in this group the number of subjects attached to positive statements exceeded the number of subjects attached to negative

statements. The subjects classified as boring and causing stress were: physics, chemistry, language (grammar) and mathematics. However, this latter one is confessedly important; the number of those liking it is high. The most favourite, most interesting subjects causing the least failure and stress were: ICT, biology and history¹⁰, the last two were classified as “not too important but pleasant”. ICT is not simply accepted but outright popular in all types of school (even in vocational training schools!), in the light of this – and knowing that it is “future-oriented” knowledge that is valuable in both everyday life and on the labour market – its bottom position in the documents of curriculum regulation in Hungary is especially problematic and is against the intentions of all out-of-school actors.

In this survey both parents and students were asked which subjects they would omit, which subjects they think should be taught in fewer hours and which ones in more hours. While twice as many parents chose the answer “I would increase the number of hours” than the options of reduction or elimination together, that is they would increase their children’s workload – at least in the number of hours – (in contrast to the latest change in regulations), the youth opted for increase and reduction in more or less the same proportion. That means that they do not want to have either more or less workload. They would like to have fewer lessons in the less popular, stress-causing science subjects that offer little direct benefit (in terms of further education) while their demand for ICT, foreign languages or physical education is bigger than what the school offers them. When a school head recently said that “in the schools in Hungary today there is no time for two things: for foreign languages and ICT” he clearly said that today’s Hungarian school is tardy in reacting to the challenges of the outside world even if school users, actors of the economy and representatives of sciences are for change in the same direction.

Parents and students react to the inefficiency of language teaching at school by learning languages outside school as well – if they can afford it. One sixth of boys and one fourth of girls do so. The researchers asked by whose initiation they attended extra foreign language classes. At the age of 10 it was not the pupils’ own initiative but in the case of older students it was. The majority of students, by the end of the secondary school studies the great majority attend extra foreign language classes from their own will. The initiation for attending extra foreign language classes comes from the teacher in every thirtieth case. Although the students’ viewpoint may distort the picture a little (e.g. of the common initiative, which was not among the options, they may say it was their own) but it can be seen that students take part in the decision-making process concerning their studies in an articulate way.

In another national, representative questionnaire-based survey of 1999 also examining students’ workloads among pupils of grades 7 and 9 (*Tanulói munkaterhek (Students’ workloads), 2002*) pupils were asked how much they liked going to school. One fifth of 7th graders liked going to school very much and the attitude of more than two thirds of them is very positive to going to school (*see Table 13*). This, of course, may reflect that the school is the main scene of their social relations. However, it can also be seen that among those who are more successful at school and come from better cultural background there are more who like going to school and/or fewer who do not like going to school at all. Among the Roma and other minorities the ratio of those whose attitude to going to school is negative is also higher. Although from the statistics of absence from school it is not clear what proportion of it is due to illness and what proportion – not always justified – is due to other causes, it can be telling that the less the students like going to school the more often they are absent from it.

¹⁰ It is important to note here that the very popular subjects – P.E., arts and music are not listed here only the so-called „learning-intensive” subjects

Table 13.

How much do you like going to this school? Percentage of responses of 7th graders

	Very much	Quite	Not very much	Not at all
Boys	17.6	45.8	26.2	10.4
Girls	26.4	45.7	23.2	4.6
Roma	12.8	42.6	34.0	10.6
Other nationalities*	20.8	46.9	17.7	14.6
School attainment of mother				
Maximum 8 grades of general school	18.3	43.1	35.3	3.2
Vocational training school	20.1	45.9	27.9	6.1
Secondary school-leaving certificate	25.1	48.3	16.4	10.2
University or college certificate	25.1	50.1	18.4	6.3
Want to continue studies in general secondary school	27.0	48.1	18.6	6.3
Want to continue studies in vocational secondary school	19.6	44.2	28.3	7.8
Want to continue studies in vocational training school	13.5	49.0	28.1	9.4
Did not fail in the first semester	22.9	47.5	22.3	7.4
Failed in the first semester	17.3	36.0	37.5	9.0
Mean number of days of absence from school of respondents	8.3	8.8	9.4	12.8
Total	21.8	45.6	24.9	7.7

Source: Tanulói munkaterhek (Students' workloads), 2002

*Croatian, German, Slovak, Slovene, Serb, French, Arab, Dutch, Cuban, Austrian etc.

Surveying 9th graders led to similar results (*see Table 14*). In the first year of upper secondary education there are slightly more students who like going to school than among those who are two years younger. In this age group as well there are fewer boys showing positive attitude towards school. The enthusiasm of the Roma and of other nationalities towards school is less. Those who like going to school less constitute half of this group, which is a much bigger

proportion than in the similar group of 7th graders and nearly twice as big as in the whole age group. Among general secondary school students there are twice as many students who like going to school than among vocational training schools students, and these indicators are even higher for students of 6-grade and 8-grade secondary schools that educate elite groups. The groups of those showing dislike towards school also change along success and perspectives but with a smaller scale. The group of vocational school students is also stratified: those learning economics, commerce and ICT in vocational secondary schools have a more positive attitude towards school than those learning in industrial or agricultural vocational secondary school and their attitude is even more positive than that of 4-grade general secondary schools students. Failure considerably discourages the students concerned from going to school. Much less favourable is the attitude towards school of those who did not apply to that school in the first place but got there as a result of external constraint – e.g. because students with better performance also applied there and they were admitted. Dislike towards school of those two years older considerably increases absence and thus the chance of truancy.

Table 14.

How much do you like going to this school? Percentage of responses of 9th graders

	Very much	Quite	Not very much	Not at all
Boys	17,2	57,8	19,9	5,1
Girls	27.5	46.0	22.1	4.4
Roma	20.7	34.5	31.0	13.8
Other nationalities*	17.5	34.9	41.3	6.3
School attainment of mother				
Maximum 8 grades of general school	16.5	41.0	25.2	7.3
Vocational training school	19.7	51.4	24.7	4.2
Secondary school-leaving certificate	24.8	53.8	17.6	3.8
University or college certificate	25.5	51.5	18.3	4.7
<i>General secondary school students</i>	<i>29.1</i>	<i>50.1</i>	<i>17.6</i>	<i>3.2</i>
From them:				
Attending 6- or 8-grade general secondary school	33.9	49.1	14.6	2.5
Attending 4-grade secondary school	20.7	52.0	22.9	4.5
<i>Vocational secondary school students</i>	<i>22.5</i>	<i>51.6</i>	<i>20.2</i>	<i>5.7</i>
From them:				
Industrial or agricultural profile	17.3	56.6	22.4	3.6
Commerce, ICT,	27.0	48.9	18.7	5.4

economics profile				
<i>Vocational training school students</i>	15.1	55.4	25.5	4.1
Never failed in the first semester	25.6	53.2	17.6	3.6
Failed in the first semester	14.5	49.6	29.3	6.6
Applied here in the first place	23.4	52.8	20.1	3.7
Did not apply here	18.1	48.8	24.7	8.4
Mean number of days of absence from school of respondents	8.4	9.5	13.2	16.7
<i>Total</i>	22.3	52.0	21.0	4.7

Source: Empirical study on pupils' burden, OKI KK, 2002

*Croatian, German, Slovak, Slovene, Serb, Romanian

The mental hygienic state of the majority of school children is considerably affected by their attitudes to learning. From the data of an international survey on the lifestyle of school-aged children conclusions can be drawn concerning mental hygienic state. Nearly one third of the 6,000 students asked find the school difficult (35% of 5th graders, 37% of 7th graders, 40% of 9th graders and 30% of 11th graders). Slightly higher is the proportion of those students who are fatigued by school tasks. The ratio of these students increases from grade to grade (in grade 5 this ratio was 37.2%, in grade 9 – 47.3%). With all this, about two thirds of teenagers have rather positive attitudes to school (Aszmann *et al.*, 2003). Another internal survey also supports that students in Hungary like going to school but an equally big proportion of them agreed with the statement that they don't want to go to school (*see Table 15*).

Table 15.

Broader engagement of 15-year-olds with school in some countries, 2000. Percentage of those who agree with the statement that "My school is a place where

	I make friends easily"	I feel like I belong"	other students seem to like me"	I do not want to go"	I often feel bored"
Hungary	87	89	85	38	29
Finland	84	86	84	26	60
Austria	86	85	72	29	49
Portugal	91	83	90	13	24
Ireland	89	83	93	34	67
Greece	88	83	85	22	66
United Kingdom	91	83	93	28	54
Germany	81	82	67	25	49
Norway	85	79	86	23	58
Sweden	87	78	88	20	58

USA	81	78	83	35	61
Czech Republic	86	73	84	29	47
Poland	78	63	53	28	38
France	87	44	86	37	32
OECD total	82	75	77	29	48

Source: Education at a Glance. 2002

Differences between parents' and children's views

According to a survey conducted in three small regions between 1997 and 1999 on career aspirations students were generally satisfied with their school and choice of school. Half of the 7th graders classified their then schools as being among the better schools of the settlement and the region, another one fourth of them classified it as the best. This in itself shows that *in the view of children their school had a good professional reputation*. The differences in settlement types are expressed in the local rating of the school in and educational performances. More town children consider their schools to be the best than those living in its region. It seems that in Hungary the general schools also play a part in the survival of the traditionally considerable hierarchical relationships between towns and the country.

There is consensus concerning the local value of particular schools. It is indicated by the data that in 37% of the cases the opinion of 7th graders and their parents are identical when the schools are judged. In case of disagreement the children are of better opinion of their schools than their parents (in 34% of the cases). If we take the responses of those who consider their school the best with those who say it belongs to the best, the agreement is even more (654%) between children and their parents. It is especially those living in Kecskemét who are satisfied with their school: three quarters of children and their parents have good opinion of it. So the schools can make themselves accepted by their clients and for the majority they play a positive role in shaping the long-term relationship to the educational system (*Szabó I, 2004.*)

Judging the prestige of the secondary schools is contradictory among the 7th graders. *Children's judgements differ considerably from those of their parents as well*. According to 57% of parents today the 14-year-olds should learn in vocational secondary schools, according to 25% they should go to general secondary schools and it is only the vocational training school where children's and parents' judgements are the same. In one third of the families the parents and their children consider the same type of school desirable. It is especially the vocational secondary school that is judged identically. *Especially striking are the generational differences in judging general secondary schools*. 58% of the parents of children who prefer general secondary schools consider vocational secondary schools the best, 8% - vocational training schools. The majority, 66% of the parents of children who prefer vocational training schools also consider vocational secondary schools the best from the aspect of further education, while 20% of them prefer general secondary schools (*Szabó I, 2004.*)

Educational performances basically determine the emotional relations to education. As to the disliked subjects, there is nearly total agreement among 7th graders but their positive emotions towards school subjects divide them. The most popular subjects are: P.E. and biology (14-14%), mathematics, history and Hungarian language and literature (10-10%); the least popular ones are: physics (17%), mathematics (15%), chemistry (14%) and Hungarian language and literature (11%). It can be seen that mathematics and Hungarian language and literature divide them most. The 7th graders that achieve at least an average of 4 (5 being the best) like the

subjects that traditionally have a high prestige in Hungarian public education: mathematics, history, Hungarian language and literature and foreign language. As opposed to that those who achieve an average of 3 prefer P.E. and technology. Biology is popular in both groups (see Table 16).

Table 16.
Most and least favourite subjects among 7th graders

Most favourite subject	Hungarian language and literature, history	Maths, physics	Biology, geography	Foreign language	Technology	Music, arts, P.E.
Students with an average achievement below 3	11	7	19	2	13	39
Students with an average achievement between 3-3,9	16	11	22	6	7	28
Students with an average achievement above 4	23	17	20	11	2	16
<i>Least favourite subject</i>						
Students with an average achievement below 3	29	33	5	9	1	9
Students with an average achievement between 3-3,9	20	34	11	10	1	7
Students with an average achievement above 4	20	31	11	10	3	13

Source: Pályaválasztási aspirációk (Career aspirations), 1997

Parents do not have an exact picture of their children's emotions concerning school subjects. Only every tenth parent named the same subject as their children's favourite as the children themselves. This ratio was slightly higher, about 15% concerning the least favourite subjects. Although the subjects named by the parents usually belong to the same group of subjects as the ones named by their children the differences indicate that in the family communication the emotions of children towards subjects are not defined enough.

Tasks of the school in students' view

From the survey conducted in the small regions it also emerges that among the various functions of the school those connected to acquiring knowledge are considered less and less important by the 17-year-old students from general secondary schools to vocational training schools (see Table 17).

Table 17.
How important are these tasks of the school – on a scale from –100 to +100¹¹

	8-grade general secondary school	6-grade general secondary school	4-grade general secondary school	Vocational secondary schools	Vocational training schools	Total
1. Preparing for further education	91	98	92	83	73	83
2. Developing thinking, the mind	92	90	91	82	70	82

¹¹ The task that was considered very important got +100 points, that was considered as little important got 0 point, and those that were considered unimportant got –100 points.

3. Teaching foreign languages	89	90	86	78	47	74
4. Training for a good trade	14	-1	30	86	90	70
5. Appropriate acquisition of the mother tongue	70	72	79	69	58	69
6. Developing individual competencies	81	87	79	66	50	67
7. Educating for honesty, high morals	42	59	60	53	55	55
8. Ensuring opportunities and facilities for physical exercise and sport	69	59	60	54	48	55
9. Education for co-operating with others	63	45	52	54	54	54
10. Transferring scientific information	58	74	65	53	37	53
11. Providing a caring atmosphere	40	43	50	44	51	47
12. Developing the sense of community	53	50	47	37	23	37
13. Educating for order, discipline	29	25	34	30	45	34
14. Educating for patriotism	15	39	34	23	37	29
15. Providing opportunities for games, amusement, pleasant activities	7	18	12	22	29	20
16. Acquainting students with Hungarian traditions	19	31	34	10	6	16
17. Sexual education	5	12	6	14	30	16
18. Civic education, politics	17	12	17	1	-9	3
19. Providing appropriate meals, day-care	1	16	-2	1	-1	0
20. Religious education	-67	-38	-53	-80	-77	-72

Source: Pályaválasztási aspirációk (Career aspirations), 1999

General secondary school students expect the school to provide services connected to further studies: preparing for further studies, developing thinking and the mind, developing individual competencies and teaching foreign languages. With the exception of two, those in secondary vocational education also find these tasks important but to a slightly less extent than those at general secondary schools. Vocational training school students find language learning and developing individual competencies much less important. In their view the main task of the school is to train them for a good trade. This, however, is much less important for general secondary school students. Developing the sense of community is also much less important for vocational training school students than it is for others. The reason for this may be that the school is seen much less to be the organizer and the scene of community life for them than for others. However, they see education for order and discipline, education for patriotism, sexual education and games, amusement much more important school tasks than vocational secondary school or general secondary school students do.

Questions related to the functions of school were asked in several surveys. Thus the expectations of the school of the 17-year-old students in the surveyed regions can be compared to the data of some national surveys. The comparison of the rankings is instructive because it can be seen that most of the functions are considered to be less important by students than by either teachers or the adults who continuously increase their expectations, while preparation for further studies, training for a good trade and games, amusement, pleasant activities are considered to be much more important by students than by other actors of education (*see Table 18*).

Table 18.

Percentage of adults, teachers** and 17-year-old secondary school students considering particular tasks of the school very important*

	Adults			Teachers	17-year-old students
	in 1990	in 1995	in 1997	in 1996	in 1999
1. Educating for honesty, high morals	68	74	89	92	61
2. Appropriate acquisition of the mother tongue	65	76	86	93	72
3. Developing thinking, the mind	64	79	85	96	84
4. Training for a good trade	61	64	83	43	77
5. Educating for order, discipline	63	63	82	81	43
6. Developing individual competencies	-	-	81	92	70
7. Preparing for further education	57	72	79	76	85
8. Educating for patriotism	51	51	76	73	43
9. Teaching foreign languages	56	72	74	74	77
10. Education for co-operating with others	40	46	72	75	58
11. Transferring scientific information	44	50	70	55	56
12. Providing a caring atmosphere	49	58	70	83	55
13. Providing appropriate meals, day-care	37	49	70	49	29
14. Acquainting students with Hungarian traditions	40	45	67	67	31
15. Developing the sense of community	32	44	67	71	45
16. Ensuring opportunities and facilities for physical exercise and sport	46	59	66	69	60
17. Sexual education	19	27	53	39	35
18. Civic education, politics	11	14	43	25	23
19. Providing opportunities for games, amusement, pleasant	22	20	38	26	35

activities					
20. Religious education	28	15	24	10	6

Source: *Oktatásügyi közvélemény-kutatások (Educational opinion polls), 1990, 1995 és 1997, and **Szabó I, 1999

Structural diversity of the school systems and the impact on curricula

School structure and further education

In the Soviet era the public education of Hungary was characterized by high degree of centralization and homogeneity. The educational institutions were maintained almost exclusively¹² by the state and everything – from the school structure to the content of education – was regulated by very detailed directions (decrees, party decisions, curricula) defined by central (party) policy¹³, the execution of which was strictly controlled by local public administration, party organizations and educational inspectorates (from the 80s to the fall of the system this control was slightly looser). Parents' demands could not be met before partly due to the structural, ideological and content homogeneity of supply and also because parents could only enrol their children in the pre-school and the eight-grade general school of their district. Choice of school was only possible in upper secondary and higher education.

Compared to this state in the last 15 years very rich educational supply has been developed owing to the fact that the first act on public education after the transition declared the freedom of school establishment, the freedom of choosing a school and the professional autonomy of schools. The educational institutions ceased to be state-owned and were taken over by local communities, and thus the municipal governments became responsible for the provision of public education services. Education became clearly the part of local public services and so the opportunities for asserting school users' interests increased tremendously. Along with these changes – due to a lasting unfavourable demographic trend – the number of children dropped by 30 to 40% in pre-schools and general schools and thus the educational institutions interested in attracting children due to per pupil capita financing found themselves in a very sharp competition situation. The more institutions a settlement has the more programmes are offered by pre-schools and general schools thus competing for parents' favours.

Diversity can be found in all dimensions of the public education system and in all stages of schooling, among others in the *school structure* as well.

In Hungary compulsory education lasts until the age of 18¹⁴, pre-school education is compulsory from the age of 5, and general school education from the age of 6-7. Until 1990 the first career decision had to be made at the age of 14 when children and families had to/could choose which type of upper secondary school they favour. In the years around transition the earlier uniform structure consisting of 8-grade primary and lower secondary education +4 (3)¹⁵ grades of upper secondary education became less uniform/changed 8see *Figure 11*). First the 8-grade educational programme involving early selection (at the age of 10) was introduced – between the two world wars it was prevalent among denominational

¹² From 1948 to the transition only ten church schools (mainly Catholic ones) could function.

¹³ The congresses, decisions of the only party (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) decided on the development lines, concrete steps of reforms of education.

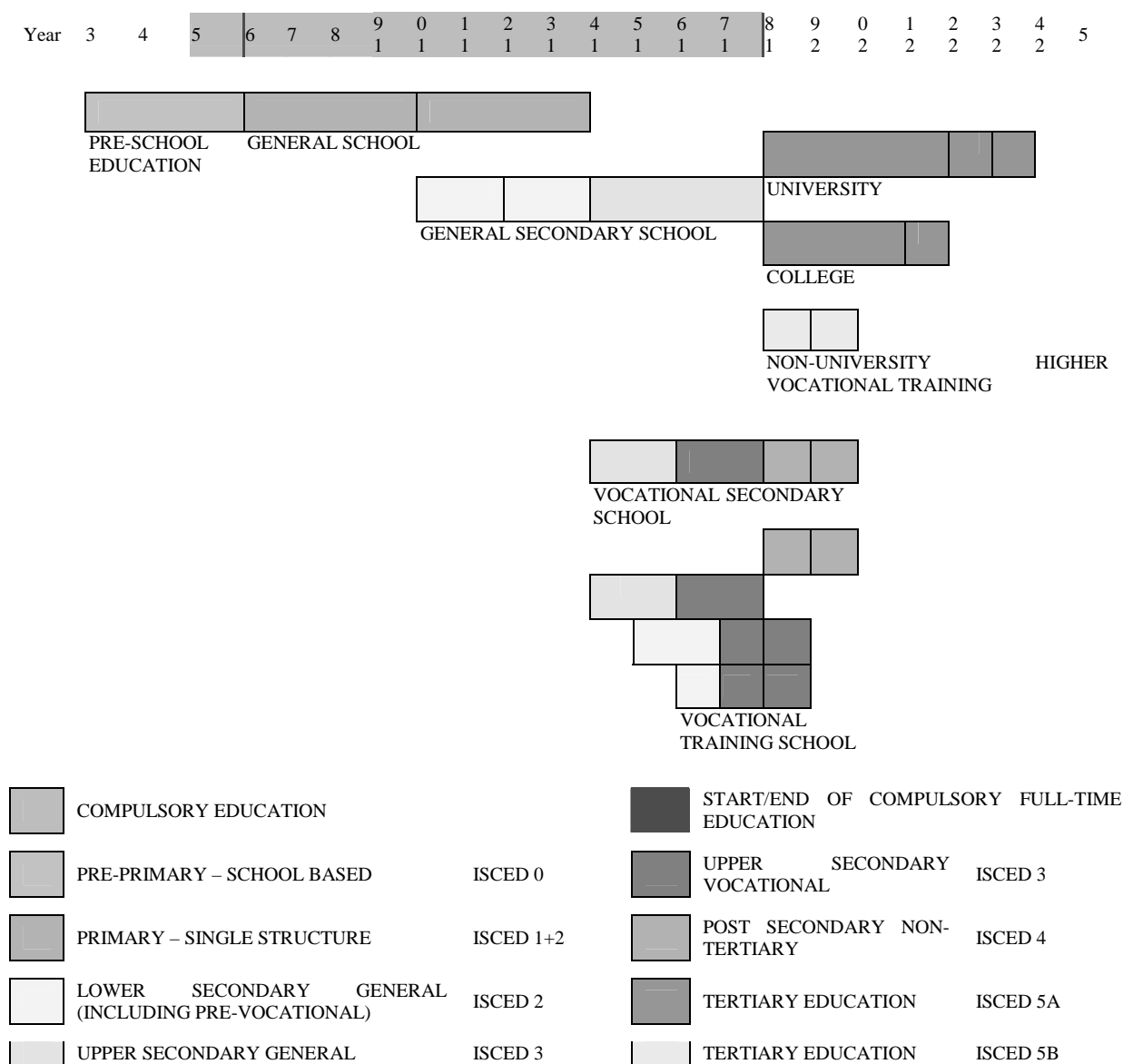
¹⁴ For those who were born before 1992 – until the age of 16.

¹⁵ In schools leading to secondary school-leaving exams (too) there were 4-grade programmes, in vocational training schools 3-year ones.

schools – then from the beginning of 1990 following foreign patterns more and more general secondary schools offered a 6-year secondary programme built on 6 years of primary education. Today there are five upper secondary programme types that the parents can choose from: 8-, 6- and 4-grade general secondary schools, vocational secondary schools that have a programme leading to a school-leaving examination and also to a professional qualification and vocational training schools with a programme leading to a professional qualification. The minority of schools work with a pure general secondary school, vocational secondary school or vocational training school programmes, the majority of upper secondary schools, however offer various combinations of the programmes with a comprehensive character (schools of mixed type).

Figure 11.

Structure of mainstream school and tertiary education in Hungary 2003



In the nineties along with the expansion of secondary education the considerably structured school system became even more segmented and more and more programmes were offered at various entry points. While there is a dynamic expansion of secondary and tertiary education the ruptures seem to have remained in the area of further education but while they gaped between types of institutions before, now they may be found between institutions with the same educational programme in the form of very diverse quality. This process is accompanied by the situation that the information necessary for developing a strategy for further education are less accessible and we can learn less about the work, efficiency of particular institutions. Therefore by the end of the nineties quality and selection had become key issues in education.

Within Hungarian education – along with and in spite of the expansion of secondary and tertiary education in the nineties – some kind of *structural and quality inequality* can be seen in further education indicators and educational performances. The schools of different types (especially at secondary level the general secondary, vocational secondary and vocational schools) offer different routes for students. In addition, there are huge differences between the schools of the same type concerning provision and students' educational performances. This distribution of students between schools of different types and of different standards has shown a close correlation for decades with the school attainment of parents. Similar consistency is shown by the data concerning the social composition of various school types; in the sixties, seventies and eighties the ratio of children of parents with low prestige jobs is very little in the general secondary schools providing the most chances for becoming an intellectual. Research on the inequalities of chances in schools of Hungary (which can be seen in the routes of further education as well) back in the seventies proved that the majority of students attending the secondary schools offering better chances for getting into tertiary education come from families of intellectuals while children of manual workers or less educated parents are represented in a higher ratio in vocational training.

In the nineties there were several large-scale surveys examining the further education decisions. Researches conducted by Andor, Mihály and Liskó, Ilona also emphasized that the very strong selection mechanisms that had already existed before in the school system of Hungary became even stronger and the social background of 6-or 8-grade general secondary schools, traditional general secondary schools, vocational secondary schools and vocational training schools differ considerably. The structural hierarchy between secondary schools is well illustrated by the data of various surveys according to which nearly 80% of children of parents with university qualification, 60% of children of parents with college qualification, 40% of children of parents with secondary school-leaving certificate and only 20% of children of parents with vocational training qualification attend general secondary schools. (*Andor-Liskó, 2000*).

Although the central educational government of both the consecutive conservative and liberal governments attempted at reducing the above mentioned differentiation of lower secondary education that involved early selection and an increase in the inequalities of chances they could neither ban nor roll back the 6- or 8-grade general secondary schools due to the explicit demand of the most powerful parents' stakeholder groups. The 6- or 8-grade secondary education preparing for further education in 2 or 4 more years than an average secondary school was of great importance until the mid-nineties when only 10% of a given age group could get into higher education institutions. Now that 50% of a given age group get into universities or colleges, the early and tough selection is not justified from the aspect of getting into higher education, although the ratio of those admitted is still the highest in the 6- or 8-grade general secondary schools. Now parents send their children to these schools first of all

because they know that owing to strong selection their children can learn among more motivated students with better abilities and good family background where more serious behaviour problems or drug abuse is less frequent.

Curriculum and structural supply

While in the structure of education new variants emerged only in the general secondary school sector educating only one third of students, in the whole of education a diverse supply of schooling resulted from the termination of the state monopoly of school establishment and maintenance, which also dates back to the years of transition. The maintainers of the educational institutions became the *local, municipal self-governments*; the *churches* got back their pre-schools and schools in a short period (about 5 years) and *foundations* and *individuals* established educational institutions. The Act on Public Education of 1993 declared the parents' right to ensure that their children receive education in accordance with their religious and ideological beliefs. The assertion of this right is guaranteed not only by enrolling the children to an educational institution maintained by a denomination but by making faith and religious education organized by a church legal entity possible in the ideologically neutral governmental and municipal pre-schools or schools on parents' request.

Statistical data on education allow for drawing careful conclusions about the real ratio of the demand for religious, ideologically committed education. According to the statistics 90% of the younger children (aged 3-14) attend an ideologically neutral governmental or municipal pre-school or general school financed from the central budget, in secondary education, however, the ratio of the non-governmental sphere increases considerably (*see Table 19*). The fact that one sixth of general secondary school students attend a church school does not necessarily indicate the religious commitment of the parents but often a demand for high-level education, and nostalgia for the good quality education that the 8-grade general secondary schools could provide during the two world wars and the few tolerated church schools in the Soviet era. Experts, however were aware from the very beginning that the hopes attached to the general secondary schools with new structure and maintenance were illusory because they expect the outcomes of the period before the expansion, especially from church general secondary schools (*Andor, 2004*).

Table 19.

Distribution of students by school maintainer, 2002/2003 (%)

	Total governmental	Denominational	Foundational	Other
Pre-school	95.88	1.86	1.92	0.34
General school	95.00	3.98	0.78	0.24
Vocational training school	90.33	2.24	5.88	1.55
Special vocational school	90.21	2.03	7.76	0.00
General secondary school	80.06	15.97	3.15	0.82
Vocational	86.65	1.85	8.17	3.32

secondary school				
Tertiary education	88.62	5.84	5.54	0.00

Source: Data of Education 2002/2003, KSH, 2003

The diversity of supply is increased by *national minority* pre-schools, schools (at primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels), in which education is provided in the languages of the seven¹⁶ fairly small-sized (altogether 100, 000 people) national minority groups in all or in some subjects. In these educational institutions the language of the particular national minority is taught as a foreign language to children whose first language is Hungarian or another national minority language.

A considerable part of the Hungarian population (according to estimates 6-700,000 people) is of *Roma* ethnicity, whose educational attainment at both secondary and tertiary level is far behind the national average. The schooling of Roma (and in general of disadvantaged) children is a top priority, in spite of this education is not provided in the Roma language, which is partly due to the specific features of the language and partly due to the lack of parents' demand. Nevertheless the Lovari and Beash languages used as a mixed language by the Roma population whose first language is usually Hungarian, Romani literature and ethnography are taught in several schools. The educational government takes every step against segregated education of Roma children and legitimates the Roma schools – first of all upper secondary schools – only if they are established or supported by the Roma minority self-governments.

The *Hungarian-owned* so-called *dual language* general and secondary schools constitute a special supply. At these schools all subjects or a part of them (a minimum of 3 subjects) are taught in a foreign language (English, French, German, Italian, Russian or Spanish). In addition there are several *foreign-owned* (e.g. American, Austrian, German, etc.) schools that Hungarian students can also attend where the *language of instruction is not Hungarian*.

From among the *alternative educational programmes* widespread in Europe the Waldorf – Steiner programme is present in Hungary with the most extended network (from pre-school to teacher training) but a few Freinet and Montessori pre-schools and general schools and also Rogers school functions as well as 2-3 alternative educational programmes developed by Hungarians¹⁷, one or two of which have a several-decade-long history and considerable general school and secondary school network. These schools are characterized by markedly different child image, conception of teacher's role, different curriculum and classroom organization and therefore are suitable for meeting very special parents' demand. The foreign alternative educational programmes operate exclusively in the form of foundations, while the majority of alternative Hungarian ones are financed by local government governments.

However, the supply of primary and secondary education is very diverse in the average schools as well. Schools organize the education and teaching of their students according to

¹⁶ Greek, Croatian, German, Romanian, Serb, Slovak, Slovene.

¹⁷ These programmes are in the order of how widespread they are: Value transmitting and competence developing, Comprehensive, and Humanistic – Cooperative

their educational programme, their own school curriculum¹⁸ based on the National Core Curriculum. A considerable part of general and secondary schools offer an *advanced programme* (more lessons) in one or more cultural domains or subjects, most often in a foreign language, mathematics, science, P.E., music, etc. In this way schools can prepare the students better for further education in the given direction and can develop the students' competencies, skills in particular areas more quickly and more effectively. A part of schools offers *subjects* that are not taught at other schools or only *per tangente* (e.g. history of art, drama, spatial informatics, etc.). Naturally, it is possible that in a school only the compulsory subjects are taught but it is usually the schools of small settlements (less than 1,000 inhabitants) that do so, in town schools two or three extra subjects are offered on the average but sometimes 15 or 20.

In pre-schools *children with special educational needs* are usually educated integrated. For general school pupils there are totally *segregated* special schools by types of disability or special classes in regular schools and there are also opportunities for the disabled students to participate in *integrated* education together with other students – on parents' request.

Private education and private schooling

In Hungary compulsory education – depending on the choice of the parent – may be performed by attending school or as private student. The school head, the guardian authorities or the child welfare services are obliged to examine whether the parent's choice is in harmony with the interest of the children. If they are of the opinion that the child will not be able to fulfil compulsory education successfully as private student, they may turn to the notary who will decide how the child should perform compulsory education.

Private students are exempted from attending all classes but at the same time are obliged to take exams in compulsory subjects – depending on the teachers' decisions every 2 or 4 months but at least once at the end of the school year. If the child with special educational needs, learning difficulties or behaviour problems becomes a private student on the basis of advice of the rehabilitation committee or is obliged to continue studies as private student due to serious illness, teachers will prepare them in 10 lessons a week but if the child is a private student on parents' requests or because of special educational principles of the family or for other reasons, the parents will have to take care of the child's preparation for the exam. The private student status is generally a very good opportunity for adjusting to the special needs, abilities, and lifestyle specialities of children more flexibly, but there have been misuses of this institution.

In 2001 the Parliamentary Commissioner for National and Ethnic Minorities received several complaints which alleged that in certain schools parents of "problem" children are persuaded to request that their children should be registered as private pupils. In some schools parents were even threatened that unless they do so their children would be expelled from the school. Therefore the Parliamentary Commissioner for National and Ethnic Minorities asked the Ministry of Education to review the legal conditions of a child's becoming a private pupil and to supplement the law with guarantee elements that would prevent schools from using this legal institution as a means of discriminating against Roma pupils. Having received notification of the problem the Ministry of Education amended the decree in question as follows: "if a pupil – based on the choice of the parent – satisfies the learning requirements as a private pupil, within three days of notification of this the head of the school shall obtain the opinion of the child welfare service that is competent according to the place of residence of the pupil or, where this is unavailable, his place of stay, with a view to deciding whether this solution is

¹⁸ Schools can prepare their own school curricula based on the frame curricula accredited by the ministry; general schools can now choose of seven different frame curricula.

deleterious to the pupil or not. The child welfare service must send its opinion within fifteen days". In his report of 2002 the Parliamentary Commissioner for National and Ethnic Minorities states that: „Despite the amendment, we continue to receive complaints in this area. More often than not, the local municipal government, the school and the child welfare service take the same position. Several complaints objected to the fact that even the child welfare service [...] supported expert opinions approving of the pressure exerted by the school and the municipal government. At the root of the phenomenon is the often-desperate situation of Roma parents and the idea that one can deal with differences by means of detachment and segregation.”

The number of private students is relatively small, among them there are many who are seriously ill or disabled and exempted on the advice of the rehabilitation committee or the exceptionally gifted children who in a year take exams in the material of two years and also the sportsmen, musicians, actors of compulsory education age who could not be able to attend the school every day. Classic “home schooling” is a rare phenomenon, the most renowned examples being the Polgár girls¹⁹ who did not go to school at all and whose father developed and carried out a special development programme from their babyhood.

The freedom of school choice

Hungarian law ensures that the free choice of school should not be restricted by the material situation of the families. Pre-school education of children aged 3-6 is free, and so is compulsory education – from the age of 6 to 18 – basic education in art (music, dance, fine arts and acting) as well as residence hall provision, day-care and educational services supplementing school education (e.g. educational counselling, logopedic treatment, remedial physical education, etc). At public education institutions a modest amount of money has to be paid for meals and textbooks, at primary music school for the use of musical instruments but parents with three or more children and disadvantaged families can receive all this free of charge.

The majority of foundational pre-schools charge a modest fee for the extra services, foundational general schools charge a monthly fee or leave it to the parents how much they pay into the foundation but they also reserve places for needy gifted children.

The state pays the maintainer of the institution a per student capita grant for each child from the central budget. The amount of this grant varies by educational cycle and by professional task. The per student capita grant covers about 60 to 80% of the costs of provision for a child, the remaining part is covered from the budget of the maintainer of the institution, most often the municipal government. The foundational schools try to raise this missing amount from parents' contributions and the donations of other supporters and also from the tenders that the Ministry of Education calls once a year for the foundational educational institutions specialized for educating disadvantaged children or children with partial disabilities or behaviour problems. Financing church institutions is different from this because since 1997 – in the sense of the contract between the Hungarian state and the Holy See first the Catholic schools received but by now all denominational schools in Hungary receive the amount that covered the costs of a child's schooling the year before (100% per student capita grant funding). Recently many attack this form of financing in the light of sector-neutrality and propose that churches should also supplement the per student capita grant from their own

¹⁹ Polgár, Zsuzsa chess world champion among women, Polgár, Judit chess world champion among women and international grandmaster among men.

budget²⁰, otherwise the tendency will continue that the poorer municipal governments will hand over their schools to the more affluent churches.

In Hungary the geographical location of the living place or the size of the settlement does not restrict the use of educational services because the institutional infrastructure is well developed (out of 3,177 municipal governments 2,349 maintains an educational institution), pre-schools, primary and lower secondary schools usually exist in the settlements with some hundred inhabitants as well, and in towns with more than 3,000 inhabitants there is usually at least one secondary school, too. If an educational institution needed by the child is not available in the settlement, attending a pre-school or a school involves a lot of extra burden especially for the smaller children despite the fact that the settlements are usually not too far away from each other and public transport timetable is adjusted to the time when school starts and finishes. The starting time is the same for all schools but the number of compulsory lessons is different by grades so the younger general school pupils have to wait for the older ones to finish, whose school day may be two hours longer – because only a few small settlements have school buses that would take the children to the school and home adjusting flexibly to the different groups of pupils with different programmes.

Living in a small settlement does not prevent access to public education, but asserting the right of free choice of school is naturally more difficult. While it is true that from any settlement another two or three may be reached in half an hour; but parents do not like to make the smallest children, that is the pre-school pupils and the 1st and 2nd graders travel. A representative national survey of 2001 showed that only less than half of parents had real choice of pre-school and the number of institutions to choose from increased by the size of the settlement (*see Table 20*).

Table 20.

Real choice of pre-school by settlement type based on parents' opinions

Settlement type	Choice available (%)		Total (persons)
	Yes	No	
Capital	82.5	17.5	405
City of county rank	78.9	21.1	639
Other town	78.5	21.5	917
Big village	46.6	53.4	371
Village	11.4	88.6	1770
Total (%)	47.1	52.9	100
Total (persons)	1932	2170	4012

Source: Török, 2004

Admission to pre-schools, general and secondary schools is regulated by the Act on Public Education and by the ministerial decree issued annually on the order of the school year. The main rule is that at pre-schools and general schools entrance exams²¹ must not be organized and the pre-school and general school of the parent's choice is obliged to enrol the child of compulsory education age living in the district that belong to the institution. As to the

²⁰ The state supports churches by various instruments and through various channels, for instance it makes possible that citizens offer 1% of their personal income tax to churches, from which first of all the Catholic Church enjoys considerable incomes.

²¹ The only exceptions are classes with advanced programme of singing and music that may organize short aptitude tests during which children may be asked e.g. to sing a song.

admission of those living outside this district admission may only be denied due to lack of places.

In pre-schooling compulsory education starts at the age of 5, therefore pre-schools may deny the admission of 3-4-year-old children. The number of children whose admission is denied due to lack of places is not high (<5,000 children/year, about 1.5% of pre-school children), but research shows that the reasons for denying admission (children whose mother stays at home with a smaller child or because she is unemployed) make the system suitable to discriminate the children coming from poor families with several children, the majority of whom is Roma (Vágó, 2003). The 2003 amendment of the Act on Public Education in order to stop this practice ordered the obligatory admission of each child of 3 years of age or older who has at least two siblings, who receives regular educational support due to bad financial situation of the family or who is registered as being at risk by family protection services if the parents want to enrol their children in the pre-school.

General schools try to meet parents' demands because due to fewer children nowadays it is especially the institutions belonging to this type of education that have *free capacities* (see Table 21). In addition to the previously enlisted general school supply a group of parents prefer schools offering early foreign language teaching, while another typical group of parents would like their children to enjoy real childhood therefore look for schools with a child-centred educational programme, moreover they wish to select the teacher whose personality suits the needs of their children. Among general schools there are ones with better reputation in every town where most children would like to go than there are places available. Such schools take the children first who come from their district, then admit first of all those whose brother or sister also attends that school or make decisions based on a conversation with the child in the presence of the parents.

Table 21.

Proportion of pupils applying for admission to general schools as compared to places available by type of settlement and number of inhabitants (%)

	Budapest	City of county rank	Town >10,001	5,001–10,000	1,001–5,000	Below 1,000	Average
Fewer	33.8	32.7	21.8	25.1	49.2	69.8	43.9
About the same	32.6	47.1	54.2	63.7	44.7	27.8	43.0
Much more	33.6	20.2	24.0	11.2	5.9	2.4	13.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Imre, 2004

In principle, parents' choice concerning various programmes is not restricted by anything; a child can be enrolled in a school of a national minority even if the parents do not belong to the given national minority, or in a dual language school even if the child does not speak a word in the given language and so on. The Hungarian public expect the church schools as well to open their gates not only to the committed believers of the given religion or the children of believers but anybody – because in the Soviet era the number of those practising their religion dropped dramatically. Churches follow their own ways in this respect, Catholic schools usually ask for credentials concerning the belief of the parents, other denominations are much more permissive.

In principle, the free choice of students/parents of secondary schools concerning various school types and programme variants. Students choose not only schools but within a school programmes as well, which they rank when apply. A part of six- or eight-grade general secondary schools and very specific schools (e.g dual language general secondary or vocational secondary schools and vocational secondary schools with an artistic programme)

organize entrance examinations but the majority of secondary school do not. Since their emergence the 6- or 8-grade general secondary schools attract the most students, which led to the situation that some schools organized several-hour or in certain cases two-day performance tests for 10-12-year-old children. Eventually, the Ministry of Education ordered that only those 6- or 8-grade general secondary schools may organize an entrance exam that had at least twice as many applicants as places and this can only be done by using a short competence test developed centrally every year. The majority of general secondary schools, vocational secondary schools and vocational training schools rank pupils by their educational performance at general school and admit them based on this ranking. This performance ranking is strongly correlated to the school attainment of parents thus the present school admission system, moreover admitting students based on ranking even to the various classes working with programmes of higher or lower reputation within the same school is very selective and reflects the social status of the parents.

Influence of parents and the civil society on the curricula

The school year of 1998/99 was a milestone in the history of Hungarian public education. Since then each educational institution has been obliged to develop and implement their educational programme. The educational programme includes an analysis of the situation, the description of the boundary conditions of teaching and learning, curriculum guidelines and the school curriculum itself. Schools prepared their curriculum documents within three years (1995-1998). This process was examined by several significant, representative national surveys, among others from the aspect which groups were involved in defining the school curriculum and how these groups were involved by the teaching staffs.

Slightly more than 60% of the school maintainers entitled to approve of the educational programmes and to control and evaluate the professional work of schools said that there had been conciliation discussions with school heads beforehand concerning the content of the educational programmes of the schools. Data of a questionnaire-based representative national survey in which school heads were asked show that the direct procurers and consumers of school services, i.e. parents and students were only little involved in defining the content of education – irrespective whether it was a general or secondary school. More than 50% of schools involved parents in the analysis of situation by asking them to give their opinions but less than 10% provided opportunity for parents to contribute to the development of the educational programme, lesson schedules and curricula (*see Table 22*).

Table 22.

Involvement of parents in various phases of the educational programme of the school (%)

Work phases	Not or only little involved	Involved	Intensively or very intensively involved	Total
Analysis of the situation	45.1	30.5	24.5	100
Developing the educational programme	86.8	9.7	3.5	100
Developing the lesson schedule	82.9	13.5	3.8	100
Developing curricula	89.6	8.0	2.4	100

Source: NAT kutatás (1998/99) adatbázisa (Database of National Core Curriculum survey 1998/99)

The needs and satisfaction of parents and students are monitored more or less regularly in the 20% of schools where a quality assurance system is introduced. According to estimates about 20% of vocational training schools have such relations with the employers and chambers of their direct environment (small region, town) that they could discuss curricula issues, requirements with them.

In addition to the collection of opinions organized by the educational institutions parents can assert their interests first of all through the school board or at parent-teacher meetings. Considerable parent activity can be seen in selecting the foreign language to be taught and influencing the proportion of particular subjects in the lesson schedules, other priorities being the key subjects that are important from the aspect of further education: mathematics and Hungarian language (in secondary schools the compulsory subjects of the school-leaving examination). Foreign language communication and ICT are regarded as two important pillars of competitive knowledge, therefore they fight – irrespective of school type – for teaching these subjects in small groups subjects and starting as early as possible and in as many lessons as possible.

Although the formal influence of parents can be classified as weak (the recent amendments to the Act on Public Education slightly changed this situation), the informal influence – due to fewer students and the ever more frequent closure of pre-schools, schools – is very strong especially in medium-sized or bigger settlements.

Families at the bottom of social hierarchy are still not willing to set requirements or get into conflicts with the school, teachers, however the well qualified 30-40% of parents send their children to another school very shortly if the school does not meet their expectations. Parents' associations function in the majority of schools formally and less efficiently but there are well organized, common parent actions concerning the content of education as well. At a school in the capital the school management – despite the protest of the parents – wanted to stop an alternative programme for 7th graders, and the maintainer did not take up the case, either; the parents organized that the whole class together with two teachers be accepted by another school in another district, with another maintainer, where the head of the school promised to continue the given programme

Curriculum principles and values

The new National Core Curriculum²² similarly to its predecessor lists on about half a page the common values of school education that are deducted from international and Hungarian decrees (The Constitution of the Republic of Hungary, conventions of human, children's, national and ethnic minority rights, on the equal chances of men and women). The basic values are: democracy, humanism, i.e. respect for the individual, evolvement of co-operation of basic communities (family, homeland, Europe, the world), equal chances for both sexes, solidarity and tolerance. The National Core Curriculum equally emphasizes the service of common national values and of national (national minority) identity as well as European values and the responsibility of each individual and community for solving global problems. The core curriculum serves the openness and tolerance towards diverse cultures.

The national core curriculum lists among priority educational tasks civic education as the area of the development of social competences. A main task of the school is to educate active, responsible young people who know and assert their rights and participate in public life. Among the aims and development areas of the cultural domain “Man and society” one can

²² The new National Core Curriculum was published as the supplement to the Government Decree 243/2003. in December 2003 and in 2004 it was also published in book form.

also find the enhancement of civic consciousness and the development of skills and competencies necessary for using the system of democratic institutions.

In Hungary the cultural domain “Man and society” is taught predominantly by teachers of history who, according to experiences, show less affinity for knowledge of the present, civics or the knowledge about Man and they rather rearrange a part of the teaching time and teach about the past. (*Kerber, 2002*).

Along with the values declared in the national curriculum other values can also be present among the guidelines of school curricula. Similarly, it is the school curriculum that gives information on the ideological, religious or philosophical commitment that determines the value-transfer and socialization activities of the school. When choosing a school for their children parents acquaint themselves with the educational programme of the school and decide whether the values made explicit would make the school suitable for their children. The public schools should not commit themselves to any philosophical paradigm and/or religion; ideologically they are neutral.

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