**The US Educational System**

The US educational system is very decentralized and schools vary greatly from state to state. There are three levels of subsidizing of education: federal, state and local. They subsidize 3-5 per cent on a federal level, around 20 per cent on a state level and 70-80 per cent on a local level.

There are 15,000 school districts which are different in size. A school district is governed by the Board of Education/School Board/School Council which is elected every two years by the residents of the school district. Members of school boards perform their responsibilities on a volunteer basis, that means they do not get any salaries. They are to define the policies for the administration of the school district. Teachers, in turn, decide about the program and approaches of teaching.

Every resident pays a school tax to the school district he/she lives in, no matter he/she has school children or not. School education in the United States is free and parents are free to choose a school for their children. But if parents send their child to a school of another school district they have to pay the sum equivalent to the school tax directly to the school the child goes to.

There are also a lot of private schools, mainly religious, and parents have to pay for them. The cost is $ 5,000 - $ 10,000 a year.

There is no home education in the United States. Each invalid is supposed to attend school. School provides all the necessary conditions for them to study.

The school system structure in the United States looks like this. Children start going to school at the age of five. First they go to eight-year elementary school and then to high school or if they go to five- or six-year elementary school, they then attend three- or four-year middle school, and then high school. Teenagers study at high school four years and graduate from it at the age of eighteen.

Members of each grade in high school have special names:

a ninth grader is called a Freshman,

a tenth grader - a Sophomore,

an eleventh grader - a Junior,

a twelfth grader - a Senior.

The completion of high school is called graduation. In order to graduate, students must accumulate a certain amount of credits during their four years at school. Credits are points given for every subject that is passed successfully. In addition to that, students must successfully complete specific subjects required by the state or local educational authorities, such as US history, English, mathematics and physical education. This may vary from state to state.

Over 60% of school graduates continue their education in two- or four-year colleges or universities. At least 10% of high school students are allowed to finish school at the age of 16.

A school year starts at the beginning of September or at the end of August and ends in late June or early July, just before the Independence Day, and is divided into three terms/trimesters or four quarters. School children have winter and spring breaks for two or three weeks and summer vacation for six up to eight weeks.

There is a great variety of Saturday, Sunday, vacational and other schools. The most popular one is summer school. It is for students who want to get a deeper knowledge in a particular subject, or to skip a year, or just fail their examinations. It lasts six weeks and parents have to pay for it.

Students go to school five days a week. They get to and from school by a school bus. A typical school day in America starts at 7.30 AM with the Pledge of Allegiance in which the US flag and the whole nation is glorified. Then follows the homeroom period during which a homeroom teacher calls the roll and the principal makes his/her announcements over the intercom. Every day students usually have seven periods which last 50-55, sometimes 45 minutes. In some schools there are four periods lasting 90 minutes. There are 2-5 minute passings between periods and a break of 30 minutes for lunch

American schools today house a large number of students but making friends can be difficult, as the same group of students does not attend all the classes. In order to encourage meeting and knowing a broader population at school, special emphasis is placed on so-called extracurricular activities where interests, rather than academic ability, bring students together.

Extracurricular activities are the many club meetings, music or drama rehearsals, and sport practice sessions that take place in American high school in the afternoon after classes. These meetings are a very important part of high school life, since they are a link between different groups of students who are placed in various academic programs. Students who usually would not meet in the classroom get to know each other in areas of common interest. They give students the opportunity to further their specific interests in various fields and to spend their free time together.

Even though they are not mandatory, many students get involved in different extracurricular activities. Since students spend a lot of time participating in various activities, school becomes the center of social life for students. They not only go to school to study the material presented in class, but they also meet together to socialize and to pursue their interests.

Other important activities in American high school are sports teams. Most schools offer a variety of teams for both boys and girls. American football, basketball and base- ball are played in the majority of schools. In addition, one may find tennis, gymnastics, hockey, swimming, golf, volleyball, cross-country, and track and field teams, depending again on the size and financial resources of the school. Soccer is also growing in popularity.

Usually schools have varsity teams, which complete with other schools and which have very intensive training, and intramural teams, which play other teams within the school itself. In most schools, there is a great deal of competition between students to join the varsity team. There often are schools regulations that make it difficult for new students to join. On the intramural teams most students are welcome to participate.

In many schools girls have fewer possibilities than boys. Smaller schools may not have some of the above-mentioned teams for girls. But a special group of girls and boys play an important part at the football and basketball games. They are called cheerleaders and they lead the crowd in cheers for their team.

In addition to clubs and sports teams, one will find the Student Council and the class officer meetings. Students are elected by their school and classmates to represent them in these bodies and to organize activities for their school

U.S. colleges and universities offer a vide variety of programs ranging from highly academic courses to very practical ones. Students can be educated not only for academic professions, but also for technical professions, such as mechanics, nursing, medical technology, computer technology and book-keeping.

In universities young people study four years to get bachelor’s degree. If one wants to get master’s degree he/she must study two years more and do a research work. If one has master’s degree, studies more, does a research work and passes an oral, comprehensive examination he/she gets doctor’s degree (PhD).