



EDUCATION FACT SHEET - KENYA

<p>In Brief</p>	<p>SUMMARY</p> <p>Kenya Population: 46.8 million (2016 estimate) Kenya Size: 582,650 sq km/224,962 sq mi</p> <p>National Curriculum: Yes Currently 8.4.4 Pilot program 2018, 2.6.3.3.3</p> <p>Literacy: 78% (2015) Youth Literacy: 86.53 (2014) Female Youth Literacy: 86.14 (2014)</p> <p>Years of Public School: 12 Primary: 8 years, starting age 6 Secondary: 4 years</p> <p>Language of Instruction: English</p> <p>High School Leaving Exams: Yes Date of Exams: October-November</p>
<p>Education Overview</p>	<p>Free Primary Education, Subsidized Secondary Kenya provides free primary school education (FPE) and subsidies for secondary education.</p> <p>Since initiating FPE in 2003, Kenya has added 7,000 schools and seen its annual primary enrollment increase by 3 million. The increase among primary school children shows up in high schools, with the gross enrollment ratio swelling from 43% to 67%. The university system is bursting at the seams, forced by the newly burgeoning number of high school graduates to more than double its intake between 2012 and 2014.</p> <p>On the other hand, 58% of schoolchildren never complete high school and sit for the national leaving exam (KCSE).</p> <p>According to World Education News and Reviews, while one million children were out of school in 2010—about half the number in 1999—Kenya has the world’s ninth highest number of children missing from primary school. “Issues related to educational quality persist, especially at the primary level, with illiteracy rates increasing among students with six years of primary schooling. Over a quarter of young people have less than a lower secondary education and one in ten did not complete primary school,” reports WENR.</p>

	<p>Scholars Abroad Kenyan students seeking higher education outside their country have dropped dramatically in recent years, according to UNESCO. The largest drop has been in those matriculating in the US. Just 3,072 Kenyans enrolled at American schools in 2014/15, compared to 7,000 ten years earlier. In 2013, some 12,000 Kenyans studied abroad, down from 15,000 in 2012 as intake at Kenyan universities exploded.</p> <p>With the increasing availability of Kenyan universities, and the increasing cost of study abroad, more students are staying home. The challenge for Kenya will be funding its swelling campuses and improving their academic quality.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education Expenditure 5.3% of GDP, 28th globally • Teacher: Pupil Ratio, Primary School 1:31 (2015) • Teacher: Pupil Ratio, Secondary School 1:33 (2009) • Languages English (official), Kiswahili (official); many indigenous languages
<p>School System</p>	<p>National Curriculum Kenya’s national curriculum calls for twelve years of schooling, eight in primary school and four in secondary or high school. The language of instruction is supposed to be English throughout, but in rural village schools teachers often resort to the local tribal language or Kiswahili, Kenya’s other national language. Students from urban schools, where the population tends to be ethnically mixed and where teachers are obliged to use English, tend to emerge with better English skills.</p> <p>The Kenyan system is exam-based, with performance on the national primary school leaving exam (KCPE) determining the quality of secondary school for which a student qualifies, and performance on the national high school leaving exam (KCSE) determining much of a student’s future. In the case of students aspiring to Kenyan universities, the KCSE dictates both the university to which a student is admitted and the course (major) the student is eligible to study.</p> <p>Transition to New Curriculum Kenya wants to fully implement a new curriculum by 2027, with 2 years pre-school, 6 years primary, 6 years secondary and 3 years undergraduate higher education. A pilot program began in 2018. The current 8.4.4 system and its national leaving exam is slated to be phased out in 2027. The new curriculum will increase focus on “skills instead of knowledge” as Kenya prepares for rapid social economic development.</p> <p>Secondary students in the new curriculum will choose from three pathways to tertiary education, with specialized subject matter in arts and sports; social science; and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).</p> <p>Cost of Schools Since 2003 education has been nominally compulsory and free for the eight years of primary school, though families must still pay for uniforms and supplies. Secondary school (four years) costs upwards of \$350 a year (per capita GDP is \$1,455), and slightly more than half the appropriate age cohort is enrolled. The best-established secondary schools are boarding schools, because at the time they were founded, high schools were few and</p>

far between, and transportation was limited. A large majority of these government-supported boarding schools are single-sex. They cost \$500 or more per year, while private boarding schools cost roughly double that. A few high-fee private schools that cater to Kenyan plutocrats and expatriates charge fees nearly comparable to those of their Western counterparts and generally follow the British O-level, A-level syllabus rather than the Kenyan curriculum.

In spite of the cost of high school, even the poorest families commonly struggle to give their most promising children a secondary education. Younger siblings – especially females – are often obliged to wait for an elder sibling to finish high school because the family can't pay for more than one at a time. Indeed, families often borrow heavily and sell precious assets like land or cattle to pay the fees of the best high schools for which their children qualify.

Qualification is based on the national primary school exam (KCPE). Top scorers nationwide are eligible for places in highly selective “national” government-supported secondary schools or in comparable private schools. The next highest scorers qualify for so-called “county” schools, and the rest — the vast majority — are consigned to lowly “district” day schools, which may be all the students’ families can afford, no matter how well the students scored on the KCPE.

“National” High Schools

The “national” school designation has been somewhat diluted since the reorganization of local government that followed the adoption of Kenya’s new constitution in 2010. There is now at least one national boys school and one national girls school in each of Kenya’s 47 counties. But Kenyans almost universally recognize the old national schools, of which there were just 17 nationwide, as the ones to aim for. And to that end, families frequently spend what for them are extravagant sums to place their children in private primary schools for at least the last two years before the KCPE in hopes that the more rigorous tuition expected in the private primary will enable the children to score well enough on the exam to qualify for a higher quality government-supported high school.

High School Leaving Exam

Not surprisingly, in view of the school system’s hierarchical structure, most top scorers on the national high school leaving exam (KCSE) come from the old, elite national schools. The KCSE is administered each October and November to more than 500,000 Form Four students (high school seniors) throughout the country. Students commonly take exams in eight subjects, most of which they have studied for four years. Their aggregate mark is based on seven subjects: English, Math, Kiswahili, two sciences and two additional subjects. In a typical year, about ½ of 1% of the students who take the KCSE score an aggregate or “mean grade” of “A plain,” while about 30% score C+ or better, which qualifies them for places in state-certified colleges or universities. Prior to 2016, girls had a lower standard than boys for a place at a state school. See “*Atypical Results in 2016*” in “*Issues with Education System*” section.

In 2017, 615,773 students sat for the KCSE.

Higher Education

In the last five years, the Kenyan government has prompted the expansion of higher learning institutions in order to facilitate the increasing number of students finishing high school. The Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service lists 30 public universities, 33 private universities, 50 public “colleges” (institutions that issue diplomas or certificates but not bachelor’s or advanced degrees), eight private colleges and 10 national polytechnics. These numbers have grown rapidly in recent decades to meet rising demand, but the quality of education offered has not kept pace.

Public universities are plagued by overcrowding, under-staffing, deteriorating physical

	<p>plants and often demoralized faculties. Both student and faculty strikes are common – so much so that public university students usually expect to spend between five and six years to complete a four-year bachelor’s degree. This has led to a growing interest in university education abroad. Only a tiny minority of Kenyan families can even consider paying for university education in most Western countries, but the number of top students applying particularly to the relatively few American universities that offer full financial aid has grown exponentially in the past dozen years, fostered by the establishment of several college-access programs such as KenSAP, EaSEP, Zawadi Africa, EducationUSA and the Equity Leaders Program.</p>
<p>Issues with the Education System</p>	<p>Fundamental Factors Limiting Progress</p> <p>While the Kenyan government has put into place measures to improve the education system, there are numerous issues that have slowed their implementation. These issues are social, financial and political in nature.</p> <p>For instance, the high poverty level in Kenya is one of the fundamental factors that have affected the success of the global goal of “Education for All” (EFA). Free primary education has over the years increased the number of children going to school. However, there is a significant drop in completion and enrollment levels into high schools. The same goes to the number of students who successfully transition from high school to university. The reason for this significant drop is that the government is able to fund only a small portion of high school and university tuition fees. The rest is left to the school management to find avenues to run the school, for instance, by requesting parents of the students to contribute money that proves to be unaffordable for most of them.</p> <p>Additionally, in drought-stricken areas response to hunger through ad-hoc food relief is often costly for the government to deliver and leaves little to no flexibility in terms of extending aid beyond food consumption. Even with the growth of the education system in Kenya, there are major disparities in resources allocated to the schools. For one, the high teacher-to-student ratio affects significantly the performance of both the teacher and the student, especially in primary and secondary schools. Most teachers tend to lose the morale to work due to the overwhelming number of children in the class.</p> <p>Furthermore, access to technological learning aids like laptops and e-books that may enable the students to further their research and make learning more enjoyable are limited by lack of both electricity and internet connectivity.</p> <p>Kenya’s social sphere also faces gender disparity. Girls in most marginalized areas of the country may be forced to leave school due to early marriage. Some communities view girls as a source of “income” and others are married off due to the patriarchal values that govern their communities. Cases of female genital mutilation go in tandem with early marriage. Even with efforts from the government and non-profit organizations this issue still stymies the system.</p> <p>Finally, there are many children orphaned by AIDS or who live with HIV that are unable to go to school. In response to the HIV pandemic that hit the country a decade ago, the government incorporated syllabus teachings in line with the prevention of HIV/AIDs. However, over time, that has been of little help to the children affected by the pandemic as there are no mechanisms in place to support them. Instead, most forego school to help support their families.</p> <p>Motivational Transcripts</p> <p>It’s important to note that in an exam-based system like Kenya’s, a student’s term-by-term grades are not necessarily valid indicators of that student’s actual achievement. The term grades tend to be used as motivational devices —“must work harder”— rather than accurate assessments of course work. Most high school transcripts should therefore be</p>

	<p>regarded in that light, particularly in Kenya where schools are very conscious of their reputations for rigor and high standards.</p> <p>A school's top student may emerge with an aggregate A plain on the all-important KCSE but be rated only B on his or her school transcript— intended to keep the student from becoming complacent.</p> <p>Atypical KCSE results <i>The results of the 2016 KCSE were highly atypical. Under a new Minister of Education, a concerted effort was made to crack down on suspected widespread "leakage" of exam questions, and this crackdown was accompanied by a new ministry-mandated standard for marking. These policies resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number of high scores. Whereas in 2015, a total of 2,685 students scored mean grades of A plain (about ½ of 1% of all test takers), in 2016 just 141 scored A plain in all of Kenya (about 0.025%), no one earned an A plain in English and only 28 were awarded an A- in English.</i></p> <p><i>Results in 2017 were no improvement. While 142 students earned A's, an increase of a single student, the number receiving A-minuses dropped dramatically from 4,645 to 2,714, of the 615,773 who took the exam.</i></p>
<p>Academic Calendar</p>	<p>The Ministry of Education releases the academic calendar for colleges and high schools annually. It is mainly limited to the institutions that follow the national curriculum. A typical public high school would have three terms; 1) First term: January to April —14 weeks and a four-day mid-term break 2) Second term; May to August —14 weeks and a mid-term break half way through the term 3) Third term: August to October— 9 weeks. National exam (KCSE) is administered from October to late November. It is worth noting that students have only two long holidays in between terms which consist of 3-8 weeks in April and December and a short holiday break in August.</p> <p>Those who qualify and need government support to meet their university expenses (about 95%) generally have to wait at least ten months after taking the KCSE before enrolling, since the universities follow the conventional September-to-June academic year. This creates a gap year for the students waiting to enroll in public universities. Private universities admit nearly every quarter.</p>
<p>SAT Test Centers</p>	<p>Typically Aga Khan Academy, Braeburn School, Brookhouse International School, West Nairobi School, International School of Kenya, Eldoret Polytechnic, Rift Valley Academy and Augustina College.</p>
<p>ACT Test Centers</p>	<p>Centers: The number of students who sit for the ACT paper is significantly lower than SAT in Kenya. Rosslyn Academy and Rift Valley Academy are the only two centers.</p>
<p>IELTS/TOEFL</p>	<p>Not normally needed for Kenyan students applying to the US as their education will have been in English for at least 12 years prior to applying to university. Some US universities and other countries, however, require a proficiency certificate of the language of instruction.</p>
<p>Best Time to Visit Schools</p>	<p>Students take the national high school exam late October to November and results in 2017 were out in late December, about two months earlier than usual. Best time to visit high schools is during their second term that runs March-August. The schools are open more and students have more time to consider their options before they take the national</p>

	<p>exam. This is also a good time to visit some access organizations since that's when they start preparing their students to apply. Others operate on a June-November schedule.</p>
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Sources:

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