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Ústav cizích jazyků

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

High school educational system in the USA and the Czech Republic

Kateřina Navrátilová

I hereby declare that I have worked on this thesis independently, using only the sources listed in the Bibliography.

V Olomouci dne 15. 4. 2024

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podpis

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Jméno a příjmení:	Kateřina Navrátilová
Katedra:	Ústav cizích jazyků
Vedoucí práce:	Mgr. Ondřej Duda
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Introduction

High school is a concept known widely across different countries. However, the way this concept is perceived in each country can be diametrically opposed. Many of us will think of high school as an institution that provides education a few years before adulthood. High schools often have the task of preparing students either for the next level of education or to enter employment. While this may be true for many education systems in different countries, the conditions in which high school education is carried out can vary considerably between them.

First and foremost, it depends on the cultural and historical uniqueness of each country, which can significantly influence most of those conditions. High school is part of a country's education system and is therefore also defined by it - how many years the high school lasts, at which ages do students attend it, and what precedes and follows it in the system. The next step is often an examination of the curriculum, which can potentially define the system of high schools. High schools offer primarily academic education, but in many countries, vocational training can also be focused on during secondary education. While examining the curriculum, it is also possible to observe whether it is chiefly standardised or whether individual areas or schools have the autonomy to produce content that meets their particular conditions and needs.

As a student of the English language, I strive to continuously learn about the countries where the language is spoken. Similarly, as a student of the Faculty of Education, I am interested in both the education system in the Czech Republic and in other countries. Due to the internet and social media, we have more opportunities than ever before to observe high schools in countries on the other side of the world. Therefore, I think it is suitable to explore these systems more closely.

In this bachelor thesis I decided to analyse high schools within the education systems of the Czech Republic and the United States of America. Exploring the differences between high schools in the two countries offers valuable and perhaps surprising insights into the varied approaches to secondary education. This thesis aims to provide and examine relevant information regarding the education systems in the Czech Republic and the United States and to analyse individual aspects of secondary education in each country. This will result in the comparison of the two systems based on set criteria with the objective of determining whether the two high school education systems can be viewed as equivalent.

1 ISCED

1.1 Definition of ISCED

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is one of the United Nations economic and social classifications used to organize education programmes and corresponding qualifications into education levels and fields. ISCED was created in 1976 as a result of an international agreement and is thus accepted by the General Conference of UNESCO Member States (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012, p. 6; The World Bank, © 2023). This system was designed for better clarity of the various national education systems so that their specific structure and the economic situation of the country wouldn't be the main focus when making decisions and comparing data (UNESCO, 1997, p. 7). The data obtained under ISCED are used to compile statistics related to a myriad of different aspects of education that tend to be of interest to various users of international education statistics, such as different policy makers (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012, p. 6; UNESCO, 1997, p. 7). These aspects include, for example, human and financial resources invested in education, educational attainment of the population, and statistics based on enrolments and attendance. ISCED's goal is not to present some international content or philosophy of education, because its authors are aware of different local customs and conditions, which influence the concept of education and make it unique for the specific nation (UNESCO, 1997, p. 9). This classification uses two main cross-classification variables to label programmes according to their content, namely levels of education and fields of education. The ISCED classification is based on three components:

- internationally agreed concepts and definitions,
- the classification systems,
- ISCED mapping of education programmes and related qualifications in countries worldwide (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012, p. 6).

National education programme and their corresponding recognised educational qualifications are the basic units of ISCED. Education programme is defined in ISCED classification as *“a coherent set or sequence of educational activities or communication designed and organized to achieve pre-determined learning objectives or accomplish a specific set of educational tasks over a sustained period,”* and its successful completion is usually certified (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012, p. 7).

1.2 ISCED 1997 and ISCED 2011

First revision of the original ISCED came in 1997 and it used seven levels of education, but the currently used ISCED 2011 changed it to nine 1997 (Statistics Explained, 2023; UNESCO Institute for Statistics et al., © 2015, p. 3). What happened is that tertiary education became more specific and categories ISCED 3 and ISCED 4 had their contents slightly changed (Statistics Explained, 2023).

Figure 1 - ISCED 2011 vs. ISCED 1997

ISCED 2011	ISCED1997
ISCED 01	-
ISCED 02	ISCED 0
ISCED 1	ISCED 1
ISCED 2	ISCED 2
ISCED 3	ISCED 3
ISCED 4	ISCED 4
ISCED 5	ISCED 5
ISCED 6	
ISCED 7	
ISCED 8	ISCED 6

Source: (Statistics Explained, 2023)

1.3 ISCED 2011

Education programmes are now listed by ISCED 2011 and are both formal and informal, and people can follow them at various stages of their lives. Specific national education authorities can recognise the qualifications obtained and these are further used to measure educational attainment as mentioned above. At national level, there is always a clear division of education programmes, which can be, for example, education for pupils with special needs, full-time and distance education, and vocational education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012, p. 11).

Because in every country, the extent and span of each stage of education can greatly differ, ISCED 2011 formulates nine levels of education, which are designed to help compare data from various countries (The World Bank, © 2023). Individual levels were put together to

reflect the progress in education as the complexity and specialisation of the content of education programmes in each level raises. Educational systems in different countries usually offer number of ways of reaching ISCED 8 from ISCED 0 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012, p. 13).

Figure 2 - ISCED 2011 Levels of Education

ISCED 0	Early childhood education
ISCED 1	Primary education
ISCED 2	Lower secondary education
ISCED 3	Upper secondary education
ISCED 4	Post-secondary non-tertiary education
ISCED 5	Short-cycle tertiary education
ISCED 6	Bachelor's or equivalent level
ISCED 7	Master's or equivalent level
ISCED 8	Doctoral or equivalent level

Source: (Statistics Explained, 2023)

1.4 ISCED-F 2013

ISCED-F 2013 brought another change, this time in the division of education and training fields. The structure of the hierarchy of the fields is currently set as following - each broad field is further subdivided into narrow fields and these are then subdivided into detailed fields (Statistics Explained, 2023). The change was implemented in 2016, and consisted also of the fact that the original nine broad fields became eleven and that some of the original narrow fields were either split into more units, renamed or completely new ones were created (Statistics Explained, 2023; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014, p. 15).

Figure 3 - ISCED Broad fields of education

ISCED 1997	ISCED-F 2013
0 – General programmes	00 – Generic programmes and qualifications
1 – Education	01 – Education
2 – Humanities and arts	02 – Arts and humanities
3 – Social sciences, business and law	03 – Social sciences, journalism and information
4 – Science	04 – Business, administration and law
5 – Engineering, manufacturing and construction	05 – Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics
6 – Agriculture	06 – Information and Communication Technologies
7 – Health and welfare	07 – Engineering, manufacturing and construction
8 – Services	08 – Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary
-----	09 – Health and welfare
-----	10 – Services

Source: (Statistics Explained, 2023)

2 Hierarchy of school management

2.1 The Czech Republic

The management of education in the public sector of the Czech Republic showcases a notable level of decentralization, granting considerable autonomy to both distinct administrative levels and individual schools. All schools in the Czech Republic are included in the regional education system except universities, and here the following institutions are involved in their management:

- principals/head teachers/directors of schools and other educational establishments at institutional level,
- municipalities with extended powers, specifically their municipal authorities, at local level,
- regional authorities at regional level,
- the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT) and the Czech School Inspectorate (ČSI) at central level (Eurydice, 2023).

The rights, duties and competences of these institutions are defined by the so-called Education Act, in its entirety the Act No.561/2004 Coll., on Pre-School, Basic, Secondary, Tertiary Professional and Other Education.

Ministry of Education is central state administration authority for not only the regional school system, but also for the whole tertiary education, research and development and also for the children and youth who are in the care of the state. In the head of this government body is a member of the government (The Czech Republic, 1969, §1,7). Among the tasks of the Ministry of Education set out in the Education Act is, for example, creating the conditions and, to that end, establishing or abolishing facilities for the further education of teaching staff. Since the MŠMT administers and then allocates funds from the state budget or from other sources (e.g. the National Fund), it is therefore its duty to control their correct and effective use. The Ministry may also announce experimental testing of innovations in education, such as new methods and forms of education or the way schools are managed (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §169 – 171).

The Czech School Inspectorate is an administrative authority with nationwide competence, which is subordinate to Ministry of Education and is headed by the Chief School

Inspector (The Czech Republic, 1969, §7; The Czech Republic, 2004a, §173). The ČŠI's primary function is being the main authority for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of regional schools and educational facilities. Some of its duties are therefore obtaining and analysing information about pupils' education, monitoring and evaluating how effective the whole education system is and carrying out inspection checks at schools (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §173; Česká školní inspekce, © 2024).

Individual regions are required by law (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §181) to provide mainly tertiary professional and secondary schools. They must also create conditions for the education of pupils with special educational needs. Among other obligations of the regions is establishing basic artistic schools and other facilities for developing personal interests, together with facilities handling institutional education, such as care homes.

Every municipality in the Czech Republic, doesn't matter it's size or population, is obliged to ensure conditions for compulsory school attendance for every child with a permanent residence there. Thus, municipalities establish primary schools or arrange the possibility of attending a primary school in another municipality. In addition, they are also obliged to arrange a nursery school or places in a nursery school in another municipality for all children who have reached the age of compulsory school attendance and must therefore attend pre-school education. This applies to all children who have reached their fifth birthday before the beginning of the school year. A municipality may establish other schools or educational establishments which are usually established by the region or the Ministry of Education, the only condition being it has to demonstrate sufficient resources, both financial, personnel and material (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §34, 178-179). If individual municipalities have common interests, they can also form a so-called association of municipalities, whose activities can include several things, namely performing tasks related to education. An association of municipalities may therefore also be the founder of schools and educational establishments (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §8; The Czech Republic, 2000, §49-50).

The director of school arranges and is responsible for the proper functioning of the establishment and for the entire pedagogical process (Trojan, 2019, p. 75). Their duties and tasks include ensuring the professional and pedagogical level of education and, above all, the supervision of children and minors in the school or educational facility. The head teacher decides on the organisation and conditions of operation of the establishment and is responsible for the use of all funds allocated to the school, especially if they have been allocated for specific purposes (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §164-165). The directors of schools are furthermore responsible for the implementation of various reforms introduced by legislation, which are

related to education, and for compliance with legislation and guidelines in general. In addition to securing the education as such, the principal's duties include the arranging of various support processes such as technical building management, catering and cleaning (Trojan, 2019, p. 76). With regard to actions relating specifically to pupils, the principal's rights and duties include granting or refusing a request for an individual education plan, a deferral of compulsory schooling or deciding to suspend or expel a pupil from school (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §165).

2.2 The United States of America

2.2.1 Federal role

In the United States of America, the responsibility for education in all its spheres relies predominantly on the individual states. On the Federal level, the contribution to education comes primarily in financing elementary and secondary education, but even that is less than ten percent of all the funds the schools obtain. The government body authorized by Congress to oversee matters regarding education on the federal level is the Department of Education. Since its establishment, the Federal role in education continues to grow and change, but the primary mission with which the Department was created is still at the front of its focus. This mission is *“to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access”* (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Even though the federal government is not the primary entity when it comes to managing the education system, it does have certain means it can use to influence and control the ones that have the power. Spring (©1994, p. 212) calls these means persuasion, categorical aid, civil rights legislation, and research funding. All of the mentioned methods of federal control are tightly connected to money and funding that the federal government can either withhold from a state or school district or it can reward them with more of it. In this way, compliance with different guidelines and policies can be secured, as well as ensuring that the federal body has some influence on the policies made by the states or districts.

Each state creates its own education legislation (Spring, © 1994, p. 194), but the government has also passed laws regarding education. The first key act was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965 and it chiefly provided the federal funding for

schools (Vinovsky, 2022). ESEA was part of a solution to the big social problems that the United States faced at the time. The funds were in the form of categorical aid and together with it the act focused on eliminating the “circle of poverty”, in which education played a vital role. ESEA mainly aimed to improve education for disadvantaged children, which was done through its first part¹ (Spring, ©1994, p. 213; The United States of America, 1965). In the following years, there have been changes made to this act but the most recent reauthorization came in 2015 and is called Every Student Succeeds Act² (Vinovsky, 2022). ESSA added even more flexibility to individual states in terms of education but also introduced new expectations (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020). Among its primary tenets can be included compulsory assessment of students in grades 3 to 8 and one year in high school in reading and math, or the obligation of every state to provide its accountability plans to the US Department of Education (Průcha, 2021, p. 53).

2.2.2 Role of a state

When looking at the Constitution of the United States of America, there is no mention of education, therefore it is thanks to the 10th Amendment delegated as a power of the states (Spring, ©1994, p. 194; The United States of America, 1791). Each state creates its own legislature regarding education (Slasinski-Griem, 1990, p. 474) and most of them take legal responsibility for it (Spring, ©1994, p. 194). The state board of education together with the chief state school officer and the state department of education are usually established in every state and are the administrators of the education system of the respective state. Members of the board can be elected or appointed by the governor (Průcha, 2021, p. 138), depending on the state, and within their duties usually fall assigning of funds and creating policies and regulations affecting primary and secondary education (Slasinski-Griem, 1990, p. 474).

State legislature further creates school districts, which the school board oversees. One town can have one school district that corresponds to its boundaries, or if it is more suitable, several of them in one town, or more towns can form one school district (Slasinski-Griem, 1990, p. 474). There are around 13 500 school districts across the United States (Průcha, 2021, p. 139). The purpose of school districts is they serve as executors of plans and regulations formed by

¹ Title I

² Every Student Succeeds Act – ESSA

the state in which they are located (Slasinski-Griem, 1990, p. 474; Spring, ©1994, p. 194). Voters of the specific school district elect members of the local school board, which is a body responsible for managing the district. Specific responsibilities of the local school boards differ in each state but among them usually belongs creating curriculum, budgets, and hiring school personnel (Slasinski-Griem, 1990, p. 476).

The last level in the school management hierarchy belongs to the schools' headmasters. The headmaster has the main influence on a lot of the school's aspects, therefore influencing the results the school achieves. The person holding this position should be an expert in fields such as curriculum, financial budget, or interpersonal relationships and communication. Most school districts require applicants for the position of headmaster to have some years of experience as a teacher on top of a master's degree in education administration or a master's degree in education (Průcha, 2021, pp. 135-137, 140).

2.3 Summary of the chapter

Management of education in the Czech Republic is decentralized and different institutions and personnel on central, regional, local, and institutional levels are involved. The Education Act establishes in what manner and to what extent are the individual bodies engaged. Among the tasks of the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports declares testing of innovation in education and distributes funds from the state budget and other sources. Together with ČŠI, MŠMT forms the central level. The Czech School Inspectorate is responsible for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of regional schools and educational facilities. The regional level pertains to individual regions, which are required to secure chiefly secondary and tertiary professional schools. Municipalities are required to provide compulsory education, as well as a place in nursery school, to every resident. This is executed on the local level. The institutional level belongs to the headmasters of the establishments. They are responsible for the specific school in terms of, for instance, education as a whole, funds allocated to it, and various support processes.

The responsibility for education in the United States rests for the most part on the individual states. The role of the government lies in the partial funding of primary and secondary education. Even though the majority of the education legislature is created by the states, there are laws and regulations on the federal level. The most prominent one is Every

Student Succeeds Act. Each state usually establishes its state board of education, chief state school officer, and state department of education. The mentioned institutions create the state's policies and regulations regarding primary and secondary education. Each state is divided into school districts, which are operated by the local school board. School districts can usually create curriculum and decide on the personnel matters of the schools located in it. School's headmaster directly influences the achievements of the specific school.

3 Compulsory education

3.1 The Czech Republic

The right to education is in The Czech Republic set in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, which is part of the country's Constitution. The same article of the Charter also states that the law establishes compulsory school attendance (The Czech Republic, 1993, art. 33). Currently the law which includes this part is the previously mentioned Education Act. Before the start of compulsory school attendance, at least one year preceding it children are required to attend pre-primary education. This goes into effect at the beginning of the school year after the child reaches their fifth birthday. The age at which a child starts regularly attending school is in September after they reach age six and it lasts for nine years, or until the school year which includes the child's seventeenth birthday (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §34, 36). The minimum age the children start free education is five, which corresponds with the previously mentioned obligation of attending pre-primary education. But after reaching age three before the start of the school year, and if the parents wish so, a child can also attend pre-primary education, which has to be offered to them and even though it is not free, the law makes sure it is affordable even by families with low income (Eurydice, 2024a; The Czech Republic, 2004b, §6). The maximum age to which free education is offered is not set, because studying at public schools since starting compulsory education is free of charge in the Czech Republic, even after its completion (Eurydice, 2024b; Eurydice, 2024c).

3.2 The United States of America

As mentioned in the previous chapter, most power regarding education belongs to individual states. This includes determining the ages at which the residents of the state must compulsorily attend school. Each state can therefore have this age range different, but all begin between the ages of five and seven and finish between the sixteenth and eighteenth year (Education Commission of the States, 2020). While this may look similar enough, the actual span of the age of required school attendance can differ among the states up to four years (Diffey and Steffes, 2017, p. 1). An example of this can be the state of North Dakota, where the compulsory school attendance age is from six to sixteen, so nine years, and the Oklahoma state, where the range begins at five and ends at eighteen years. Together with setting the age during which the

children must regularly attend school, states also usually set the minimum and maximum age limits, to which free education must be offered, which is always more, than the age of compulsory school attendance (Education Commission of the States, 2020). Therefore, students fulfilling compulsory school attendance, spanning across primary and secondary education, are offered free education (Slasinski-Griem, 1990, 478; Diffey and Steffes, 2017, p. 1; Education Commission of the States, 2020; Průcha, 2021, p. 59). New Hampshire is an example of a state to which this does not fully apply because it does not have a minimum age limit for free education, and it is up to local education agencies to establish it. (Education Commission of the States, 2020)

3.3 Summary of the chapter

While in the Czech Republic the ages of compulsory school attendance are firmly set, in the United States of America, each state establishes the age range individually. As a result of this, the difference in the length of compulsory attendance between two states can span up to four years. At the age of five, children in the Czech Republic must attend pre-primary education, followed by starting the primary at the age of six, which is similar to the US, where children are usually required to start attending school at five or six years. Free education is offered in the United States to all fulfilling compulsory school attendance. This also applies in the Czech Republic, however, there is no upper limit to free education.

4 System of education

4.1 The Czech Republic

The first level of education in the Czech Republic comes in the form of children's groups and they are suited for children from as early age as six months until their start of compulsory school attendance. They don't fall under the School Act or the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, but under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the law that regulates it is Act No. 247/2014 Coll., on the provision of childcare in the children group and on the amendment of related laws, shortly Act on Children's Group (Eurydice, 2024a). It is provided as a non-commercial service and among those, who can start the children's group belong for example employers, municipality, or a single person who decided to provide this service (Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí, 2024). This level of education is specific in the aspect of not having a centralized education programme. However individual groups are required to create their own programme, which is then verified and evaluated (Eurydice, 2024a).

Children's groups are followed by pre-primary education³, which takes place in nursery schools. Children usually attend them from three to six years of age but can be accepted even as two years old. Before starting the first year of primary education, the last pre-primary year is compulsory for every child. They can attend either nursery school or preparatory classes, which are established by basic schools (Eurydice, 2024a). Pre-primary education falls under the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and the School Act (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §1). All establishments providing pre-primary education must follow the Framework Educational Programme for Pre-primary Education⁴ which states mainly the conditions in which the education may happen and the content of it (Eurydice, 2024a; The Czech Republic, 2004a, §3; Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, © 2022a). Following RVP PV, each school then creates its own School Education Programme, which is more detailed and made exactly with regards to the specific school (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §5).

At age six, children start basic education in basic schools, which consist of both ISCED 1 and ISCED 2 levels of education. Basic education lasts nine years and at the end of it children also complete compulsory school attendance (Eurydice, 2024d). Those, who complete the nine years of compulsory schooling, but do not finish basic school, can later accomplish the level

³ ISCED 020

⁴ RVP PV

of basic education in special courses (gov.cz, 2020). Basic schools are divided into two stages – primary and lower secondary level, the first of them lasting five years, the second four. After completing the first stage of basic education, pupils can decide to finish the second stage at an eight-year conservatoire or at a multi-year secondary general school, starting after either fifth or seventh grade. Both of these options require meeting selection criteria in an admission process and after finishing the lower secondary level, it is automatically followed by the upper secondary level of education (Eurydice, 2024d). Similar to pre-school education, basic schools are also administered by MŠMT and regulated by the School Act (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §1, 3). They have to follow the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education (RVP ZV) and create a School Education Programme according to it (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, ©2022a; The Czech Republic, 2004a, §1, 3).

Three types of upper secondary education are possible in the Czech Republic. Those are – upper secondary education⁵, upper secondary education with VET certificate⁶, and upper secondary education with the Maturita examination⁷. Furthermore, art education on the secondary level is offered by conservatoires in either six-year⁸ or eight-year⁹ programmes (Eurydice, 2024e). To be accepted to upper secondary school, students must have completed compulsory school attendance as well as meet the requirements set by the head of the school (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §59). This may include admission or aptitude tests (Eurydice, 2024e). If the upper secondary field is completed with the Maturita examination, students must take the standardized admission tests from the Czech language and literature and Mathematics. Similar to the two previous education levels, schools providing upper secondary education must adhere to the corresponding Framework Education Programme (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §3, 60).

Higher education¹⁰ and tertiary professional education¹¹ form together tertiary education in the Czech Republic (Eurydice, 2024f). The biggest requirement for admission to tertiary education is completing upper secondary education with Maturita examination. Similar to the prior education level, each institution establishes admission requirements, but on this level, there are no compulsory standardized tests (The Czech Republic, 1998, §6, 48; The Czech Republic, 2004a, §93-94). Whereas tertiary professional education is discussed in the School

⁵ ISCED 253

⁶ ISCED 353

⁷ ISCED 344 or 354

⁸ ISCED 354 + 554

⁹ ISCED 244 + 354 + 554

¹⁰ ISCED 645, ISCED 7, ISCED 8

¹¹ ISCED 655

Act, higher education is not part of it. The Act No. 111/1998 Coll. Act on Higher Education and on Amendments and Additions to Other Acts, otherwise known as the Higher Education Act, deals with this level of education separately (The Czech Republic, 1998).

Czechia – 2023/2024

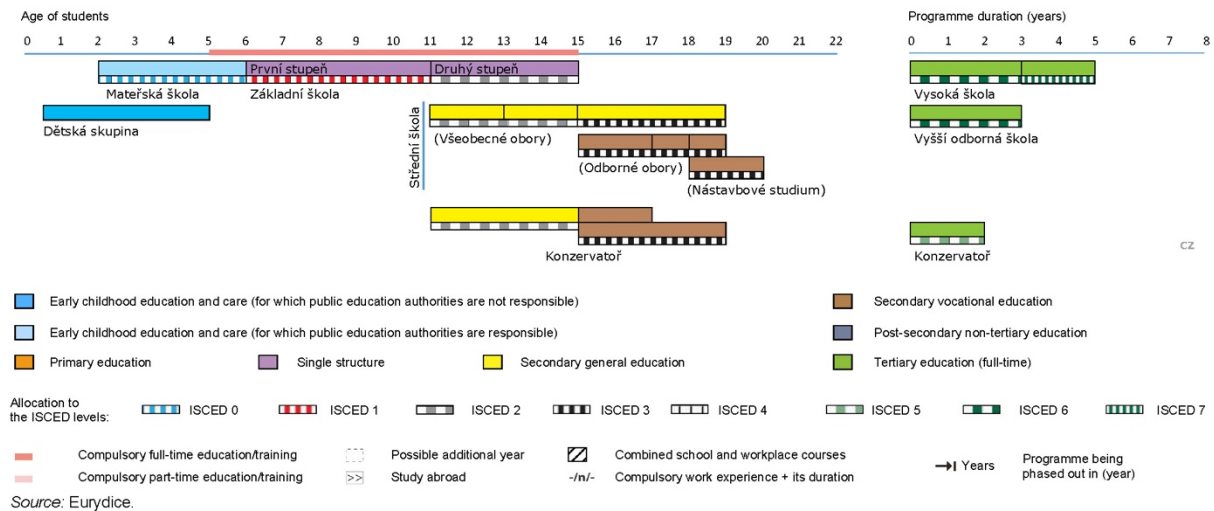


Figure 4: *The Structure of the education system in the Czech Republic* (Eurydice, 2024g)

4.2 The United States of America

Level of education ISCED 0, characterised as early childhood education or pre-primary education, is not part of the public educational system of the United States of America, or at least not completely. The system of pre-primary education can be divided into three stages. Children from an early age can visit nursery school (otherwise known as Day Care) and after that, around age four, they start pre-school (or pre-kindergarten), which is then followed by kindergarten. Kindergarten is usually visited by children one year before they start first grade in elementary school¹², so in the ages five to six. Preschool education is non-compulsory and thus the individual stages can exist on their own, but tend to form units, that differ in sizes, approaches, and fees. Until pre-school, there are no systematic educational programs (Průcha, 2021, pp. 59-63).

The public part of the educational system of the United States is often described as a scale from kindergarten to grade 12, shortly K-12, but this is also used when talking about the system as a whole (Průcha, 2021, p. 59). As mentioned in the Chapter 3.2, states differ in the

¹² ISCED 1

beginning of compulsory school attendance, and as such some of them include kindergarten (Education Commission of the States, 2023). If this is the case, then kindergarten is part of the public educational system and is usually part of the elementary school (Grade K) (Ashwill et al., 1999, p. 4). Elementary schools are usually started at the age of six. Primary and secondary education can be arranged into several possible patterns. The most common are:

- Elementary school + High school¹³
- Elementary school + Middle school + High school¹⁴
- Elementary school + Junior high school + Senior high school¹⁵
- Elementary school + Combined junior senior high school¹⁶

(Ashwill et al., 1999, p. 4; National Center for Education Statistics, 2001; Průcha, 2021, pp. 69-70).

Post-secondary education has many forms in the USA and therefore it can be classified in a number of ways, especially the institutions providing higher education. Průcha (2021, pp. 106-107) describes it in the following terms. Institutions providing tertiary education are community colleges, colleges, and universities. Because higher education is not part of compulsory education, students attending any institution offering it pay tuition fees. Municipalities and states largely fund community colleges, therefore the tuition is significantly smaller than at colleges and universities (Průcha, 2021, p. 77). Community colleges do not offer undergraduate and (post)graduate programs, but only programs lasting two years, which are then awarded with associate degrees (United States Department of State, 2024a). Colleges offer undergraduate four-year education (bachelor's degree), which programs are usually focused on liberal arts and sciences (liberal arts college) (Průcha, 2021, p. 107; United States Department of State, 2024b). Colleges can form individual institutions or be part of universities. Universities offer undergraduate and graduate programs (master's and doctoral degrees) (Průcha, 2021, p. 112). If a student wants to study bachelor's degree, they do not have to necessarily attend college or university from the beginning. Community colleges tend to have agreements with the colleges for the transfer of credits, so students can attend community college for two years and then follow it by completing their studies at college or university and claiming a bachelor's degree (United States Department of State, 2024a).

¹³ Elementary school (8 years) + High school (4 years)

¹⁴ Elementary school (4 years) + Middle school (4 years) + High school (4 years)

¹⁵ Elementary school (6 years) + Junior high school (3 years) + Senior high school (3 years)

¹⁶ Elementary school (6 years) + Combined junior senior high school (6 years)

Another way of classifying the USA's higher education is with the Carnegie Classification, which is used by Ripková (2006, pp. 64-67). This framework is updated every three years and offers several methodologies used to classify the system (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2024a). Ripková (2006, pp. 64-67) used the basic classification, which was last updated in 2021. It divides higher education into doctoral universities, master's colleges and universities, baccalaureate colleges, baccalaureate/associate's colleges, associate's colleges, special focus institutions, and tribal colleges and universities. Besides the last two mentioned categories, this methodology divides institutions into categories based on which degrees (associate's, bachelor's, master's, or doctorate) and at what quantity they awarded them in the year of the update. Special focus institutions are schools with a high concentration of degrees in a single or a set of related fields (Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2024b). Tribal colleges and universities form American Indian Higher Education Consortium and are located in reservations (Ripková, 2006, p. 66; Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2024b).

Community colleges most commonly require nothing more than a finished high school education from a person applying there. Colleges and universities are interested in Grade Point Average¹⁷, which depends on success in high school classes, and SAT or ACT results¹⁸. Other than that, students are often asked to submit application essay and their list of extracurricular activities. Based on this, colleges and universities accept students who best meet their requirements (Průcha, 2021, pp. 77, 108-113).

Apart from colleges and universities, students may attend vocational/technical institutions, which prepare them for their future careers. Depending on the complexity of the course, it usually takes from one to five years to finish it and the dual education system is the main part of this level of education. This system is based on apprentices spending a bigger part of their course in companies and other institutions practicing their craft, and a smaller part in the classrooms (Průcha, 2021, 79-80).

¹⁷ GPA

¹⁸ Standardized tests

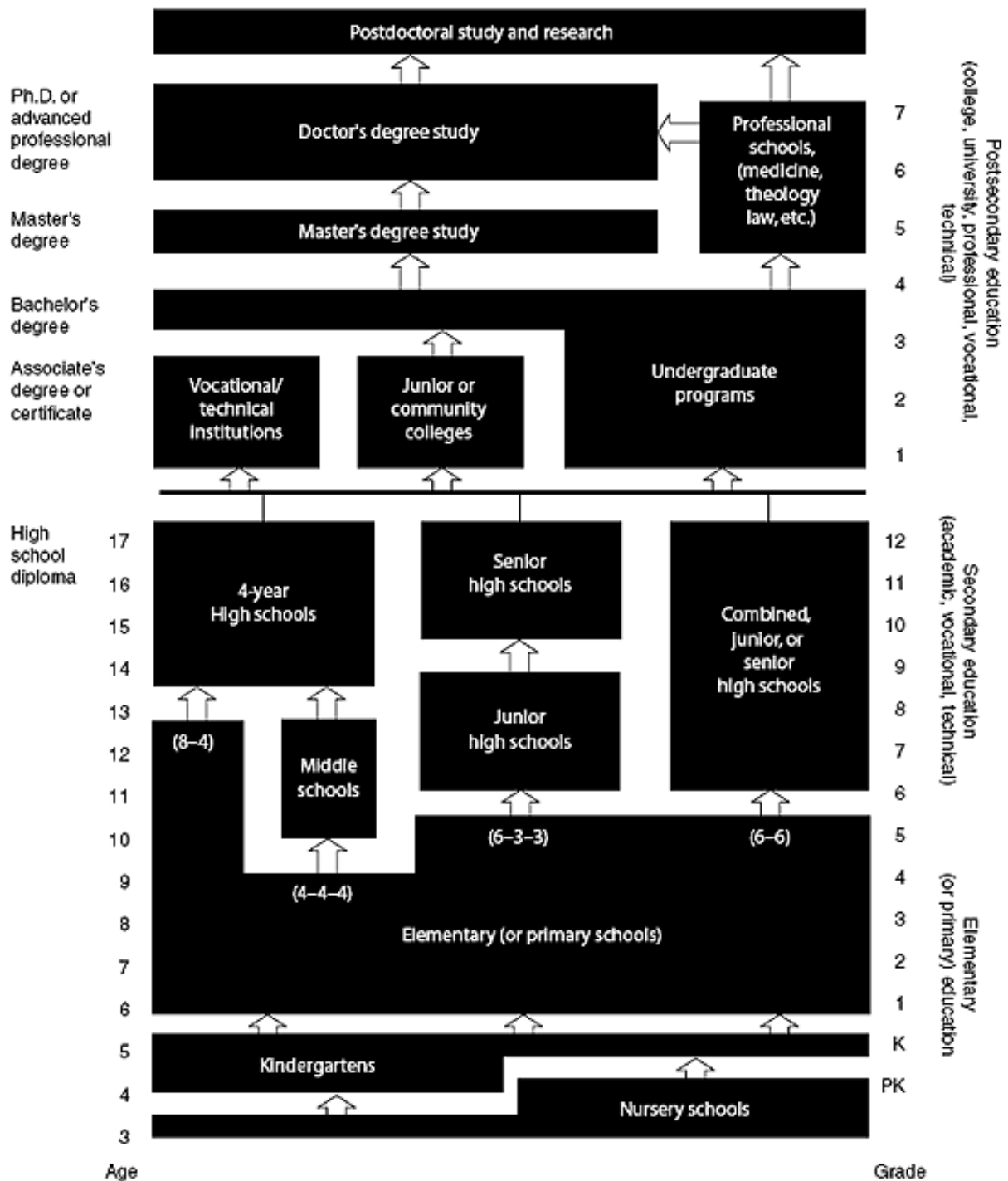


Figure 5 - *The Structure of the Educational System in the United States* (Edited from: National Center for Education Statistics, 2001)

4.3 Summary of the chapter

Education in the Czech Republic begins with children's groups, which children can start to attend from the age of six months. In contrast to other education levels, which fall under the MŠMT, children's groups are regulated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Act on Children's Group. Nursery schools offer pre-primary education and are the subsequent step after children's groups. In the year preceding primary education, children are obliged to attend pre-primary education, as it is part of compulsory education. Primary and lower secondary education is realised in basic schools, which children start usually at the age of six. Nevertheless, whole or part of lower secondary education can be accomplished in multi-year secondary general schools or conservatoires. Before starting a school of upper secondary education, students must have completed basic education. In order to be accepted to a field of upper secondary education with the Maturita examination, students must undergo compulsory standardized tests in Czech language and literature, and Mathematics. The successful completion of the Maturita examination is the only standardized requirement for attending tertiary education. Higher education is the only level of education, besides children's groups, not included in the Education Act.

Nursery, pre-school, and kindergarten form together pre-primary education in the United States. In some states, kindergarten is part of compulsory education and can be therefore part of elementary school. Children usually start primary education at the age of six. Primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education span across twelve grades and can be organized in several ways. For instance, an elementary school can incorporate grades 1 to 8, and grades 9 to 12 then form together a high school. Higher education can be classified as community colleges, colleges, and universities. Carnegie classification divides higher education into doctoral universities, master's colleges and universities, baccalaureate colleges, baccalaureate/associate's colleges, associate's colleges, special focus institutions, and tribal colleges and universities. Together with vocational/technical institutions, higher education forms post-secondary education in the United States.

5 High school

The term high school is typically used to refer to ISCED level 3. Upper secondary education is the official term for this level of education. Pupils begin it usually between the ages of 14 and 16, so 8 to 11 years after starting ISCED 1. Upper secondary education is finished around the age of 17 or 18 meaning the whole process of primary and secondary education lasts anywhere between 11 to 13 years. Contrary to ISCED 2, ISCED 3 programs are characterized as more specialized, can be either general or vocational, and their teachers are usually more qualified in the field. Only pupils who completed ISCED 2 or have knowledge and skills on the same level can attend education on the ISCED 3 level. It is so they can handle the content of the upper secondary education. The purpose of schools on this level is to provide skills that are needed for the future work career of the pupils or to prepare them for tertiary education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012, p. 38-39).

5.1 The Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, a few types of schools organize upper secondary education. Later in the chapter is described that schools providing upper secondary education can also include lower secondary education and in the Chapter 4.1 was mentioned that some can provide even tertiary education¹⁹. This does not offer a clear specification of the concept of high school. Nevertheless, there is a term *střední škola*, which is partially defined in the Czech legislature. Therefore, in this thesis, I chose to put the term high school as an equivalent to the Czech term *střední škola*.

Three institutions are considered high schools in the Czech Republic, those being secondary general school, secondary technical school, and secondary vocational school (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §7). This typology of high schools is not further defined by law and is rather just based on the previous strict subdivision that was in place up until 2004. Currently, schools are usually differentiated by which level of secondary education they provide – upper secondary, upper secondary with VET certificate, and upper secondary with Maturita examination. If a school can fulfill all requirements necessary, it can provide more than one education level (Eurydice, 2024h).

Secondary general schools sometimes offer with their four-year programme finished with the Maturita examination additional two or four years of lower secondary education. It

¹⁹ conservatoires

then becomes a multi-year secondary general school programme and it lasts eight or six years. Pupils will therefore finish their compulsory school attendance and elementary education by successfully completing their fourth year in the eight-year programme, or their second year in the six-year programme (Eurydice, 2024h).

Upper secondary education programmes last one or two years and are completed with a final examination. Upper secondary education with VET certificate is as well completed with a final examination, but compared to the aforementioned, the programmes last from two to three years. Nevertheless, upper secondary education with VET certificate can be also obtained in a shortened study lasting one or two years. This is allowed if the student has already completed this level of education in a different programme or successfully completed the last year of a programme finished with the Maturita examination. Similarly, a person who finished secondary education with VET certificate in a programme lasting three years can apply to a follow-up study of a programme with the Maturita examination, which lasts two years. Upper secondary education with the Maturita examination can be obtained by either the mentioned follow-up study, or by completing either eight-, six-, or four-year programme finished with the Maturita examination (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §58, 72, 83-84).

The headmaster of the individual high school decides on the criteria on which pupils will be admitted to the school. If a school offers a programme of upper secondary education with the Maturita examination, the obligatory part of the admission process is a standardized admission examination. The only exemptions are a shortened study of a programme and programmes that based on the Framework Education Programme must include in the admission process an aptitude test. The standardized admission examination is composed of two tests, one in Czech language and literature and one in Mathematics and its applications, and the results from it must represent at least 60% of the final result of the whole admission process (The Czech Republic, 2004a, § 60).

Every institution providing education and documents representing proof of it, must be registered in the School Register (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §142). The law in the Czech Republic does not define the term private school. Nonetheless, three types of educational establishments can be formed based on the founders of the establishments. First are schools founded by the state, region, or municipality. Further, there are denominational schools. The last type are all schools founded by someone other than those mentioned and those are usually seen as private (Eurydice, 2024i). Depending on the programme of the schools, the number of private high schools ranges from one-sixth to one-quarter of the number of all high schools in

the Czech Republic (Embassy of the Czech Republic in Ottawa, 2004; Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, 2024).

5.2 The United States of America

As mentioned in the Chapter 4.2, the United States' educational system can vary among states and even among school districts. This can make it more complicated to define the term high school. Education in establishments with high school in its name can last from three to six years, so it is not possible to think about high school and upper secondary education as equivalents. If a system is composed of elementary school and combined junior senior high school²⁰ the high school education in this case overlaps with elementary education in a system with elementary school and high school²¹. To unite the definitions and to make it possible for the collection and comparison of statistical data, the following definitions have been made. Lower secondary education²² spans from grade 7 to grade 9 and is usually compared to middle schools and junior high schools, and upper secondary education²³ tallies with grades 10, 11, and 12 (Matheson et al., 1996, p. 19 - 20). In this thesis, I will therefore refer to the term high school as a facility providing upper secondary education in the first place. However, as it was explained, high school can be an institution, which incorporates lower secondary education as well.

High schools in the USA do not focus in most cases on a certain field and therefore offer comprehensive education (Matheson et al., 1996, p. 27). Nevertheless, schools can offer vocational training programmes and college preparatory. High schools can be distinguished as either public or non-public. Public high schools are funded mostly by the state government and students attend them for free. Public schools can be further divided into traditional and so-called alternative schools. Traditional ones are public schools, which accept pupils based on their home address (Průcha, 2021, pp. 74, 86 - 87). Because of this were created charter schools, which belong among the alternative public schools. Charter schools have usually open enrollment, meaning any child from the district or even state can potentially attend the school. Another difference is that even though both charter and traditional schools are public and therefore operated by the state, charter schools have more freedom in terms of state and district regulations. This gives them more options when making certain decisions regarding the school,

²⁰ Elementary school (6 years) + Combined junior senior high school (6 years)

²¹ Elementary school (8 years) + High school (4 years)

²² ISCED 2

²³ ISCED 3

for instance in terms of budget or curriculum (Gleason et al., 2020, p. 1). Magnet schools are another example of alternative schools. The distinctive feature of magnet schools is that they offer a special curriculum (Walton et al., 2018, p. 4). They can focus for example more on teaching foreign languages or art courses. Whereas traditional and charter schools don't accept pupils based on their skills, magnet schools can set selective enrollment (Průcha, 2021, p. 91). A specific example of this is the City of Chicago school district, which states that applicants must first meet certain academic criteria before applying. If a magnet school has incorporated a performance-based program, applicants must also pass an audition or submit a portfolio of their work, depending on the program (Chicago Public Schools, 2022).

Non-public schools are funded predominantly by the pupil's tuition and other non-government contributions²⁴. Private schools is a term often used for this segment of the US school system and it consists of church-related private schools and non-sectarian private schools (Průcha, 2021, pp. 87, 97). Traditionally private schools make up around 30% of all educational institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023a). In the school year 2021/2022 there was a total of 29 727 private schools and of them, 64% were church-related (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023b).

5.3 Summary of the chapter

Neither the Czech Republic nor the United States of America have a system, where the term high school can be clearly defined. Thus in both cases, the concept under discussion incorporates in some instances, in addition to upper secondary education, parts of lower secondary education as well.

Czech high schools are clearly differentiated based on which level of education they provide. The levels are upper secondary, upper secondary with VET certificate, and upper secondary with Maturita examination. Secondary general schools, whose programmes last four years, can include additional two or four years of lower secondary education and become therefore multi-year secondary general schools. Therefore, upper secondary education programmes finished with the Maturita examination last four, six, or eight years to complete. Upper secondary programmes last one or two years compared to the ones with VET certificate, which are three or four years long. Apart from programmes finished with the Maturita examination, whose admission process must include standardized tests, the admission

²⁴ foundations, company donations, etc.

requirements are solely established by the headmasters. Private are usually schools that are not denominational or founded by state, region, or municipality.

US high schools are typically generally focused and offer vocational education in the form of individual programmes. Public high schools can be divided into traditional and alternative, which are for instance charter and magnet schools. Admission processes of traditional high schools and magnet high schools are usually in the form of selective enrollment. While traditional high schools accept students based on their residency, magnet schools can demand certain knowledge or skills. Opposite to the aforementioned, charter schools have open enrollment and therefore do not have any criteria set. Church-related private schools and non-sectarian private schools form the system of private, or non-public, schools. These establishments are financed chiefly by students' tuition and donations, and not by government funds.

6 Subjects

6.1 The Czech Republic

6.1.1 Subjects

What and how is taught at Czech high schools is determined by the already mentioned Framework Education Programmes²⁵. Framework Education Programmes are documents created by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for all branches of education in pre-school, primary, basic artistic, language, and secondary education. They set all necessary conditions and rules of education, for instance, goals and content of education or requirements for a successful conclusion. Each school then creates its own School Education Programme²⁶, which is based on the corresponding RVP (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, ©2022a). ŠVP is more detailed and made with the specific school in mind. Therefore, there are not two schools with identical School Education Programmes.

For high schools, the main division of the RVP documents is into RVP for secondary general schools and then RVP for secondary vocational education. RVP for secondary general schools are namely RVP for secondary general schools²⁷, RVP for sports training secondary general schools, and RVP for bilingual secondary general schools (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, ©2022b). RVP for secondary vocational education encompasses 273 individual RVP documents for almost as many fields²⁸ (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, ©2022c).

Subjects as such are not defined in Framework Education Programmes. Eight education areas are introduced in RVP G. Those are created by one or more education fields, and based on them are then in ŠVP formulated individual subjects. The educational areas are:

- Language and Language Communication - Czech Language and Literature, Foreign Language, Second Foreign Language;
- Mathematics and Its Application - Mathematics and Its Application;
- Man and Nature - Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Geology;
- Man and Society - Basics of Civics and Social Sciences, History, Geography;
- Man and the World of Work - Man and the World of Work;

²⁵ Rámcové Vzdělávací Programy – RVP

²⁶ Školní Vzdělávací Program – ŠVP

²⁷ RVP G

²⁸ founder, aviation mechanic, telecommunication, etc.

- Arts and Culture - Music, Fine Arts;
- Man and Health - Health Education, Physical Education;
- Computer Science – Computer Science (Balada et al., 2021, pp. 11, 84).

Furthermore, the binding document for general high schools also determines the minimum weekly time allotment for individual grades, which is 27 class hours (Balada et al., 2021, p. 84). The maximum is set by the Education Act (The Czech Republic, 2004a, § 26) on 35 class hours. RVP G also specifies if an education area and field are compulsory in certain grades, or if it is up to the school and its ŠVP to determine that. Apart from time allotment for the educational areas, general high schools have at their disposal Available time allotment, which are unassigned class hours that the schools may or may not use for adding more class hours to the educational areas, implementing cross-curricula and new subjects, or making the school profiled in a field (Balada et al., 2021, pp. 83, 85).

Educational Areas Educational Fields	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	4th Year	Minimum Time Allotment in 4 Years
Language and Language Communication	C	C	C	C	12
Czech Language and Literature	C	C	C	C	12
Foreign Language	C	C	C	C	12
Second Foreign Language					
Mathematics and Its Application	C	C	C	0	10
Man and Nature	C	C	0	0	36
Physics					
Chemistry					
Biology					
Geography					
Geology					
Man and Society	C	C	0	0	
Basics of Civics and Social Sciences					
History					
Geography ⁵					
Man and the World of Work	←-----→				X
Arts and Culture	C	C	0	0	4
Music					
Fine Arts					
Man and Health	C	C	C	C	8
Physical Education					
Health Education					
Information Science and Information and Communication Technologies	0	0	0	0	4
Optional Educational Activities	0	0	C	C	8
Cross-Curricular Subjects	←-----→				X
Available Time Allotment					26
Total Compulsory Time Allotment					132

Time allotment in individual forms must be at least 27 class hours, not exceeding 35 hours.

Legend:

- C - the educational content of the fields of the educational area in question must be included in the respective form (forms)
- 0 - inclusion of the educational content of the fields of the educational area in question in individual forms is determined by the SEP
- ←→ - the educational content of the educational area (or field) defined in the FEP SGE must be included in the SEP during the designated period; in which form (forms) and how the educational content is implemented is determined by the School Education Programme
- X - time allotment is determined by the SEP

Figure 6 - Minimum time allotment for education areas, RVP G (Balada et al., 2007, p. 83)

Framework Education Programmes for secondary vocational education also introduce educational areas. As an example, I chose RVP for the field of education Optician, which is a four-year programme that includes vocational training and is completed with the Maturita examination. Education areas in this document are:

- Language education and communication;
- Social Science Education;

- Science education;
- Mathematics education;
- Aesthetic education;
- Education for health;
- Information Education;
- Economic education;
- Vocational education (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, 2023, p. 15-16).

Other fields of education have often similar education areas, including the curriculum of each area and its educational outcomes. The documents themselves state that in this level of education, the areas regarding general education are unified, and different is for each field only the vocational education area (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, 2023, p. 4).

In contrast to secondary general education, Framework Education Programmes for secondary vocational education do not set compulsory time allotment of education areas for each grade, the documents set only the weekly and total number of class hours during the whole education. Depending on the field, individual notes regarding the time allotment requirements can be found in the specific RVP. For example, the RVP for the field of education Optician states that due to the specific aspects of the field, four weekly hours must be allocated to the Physics education field. What remains the same as in RVP G is that the document sets the minimum weekly time allotment, which is 29 class hours in the RVP for the field of education Optician (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, 2023, p. 61).

Figure 7 - Minimum time allotment for education areas, field of education Optician

Education areas and Education Fields	Minimum time allotment during the whole education period	
	weekly	total
Language education and communication		
Czech language	5	160
Foreign language	10	320
Social Science Education	5	160
Science education	6	192
Mathematics education	10	320
Aesthetic education	5	160
Education for health	8	256
Information Education	4	128
Economic education	3	96
Optical components and products	14	448
Optics production	38	1216
Available Time Allotment	20	640
Total	128	4096

Source: (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, 2023, p. 61)

6.1.2 Grading

Students of the Czech Republic's high schools have their achievements graded differently at each school. It is the responsibility of every school to establish its grading system, which is then detailed in its School Code, but at the same time it needs to be based on the corresponding RVP and ŠVP (The Czech Republic, 2004c, § 4). At the end of each term, students receive a school report with an evaluation of their achievements in each subject. The headmaster of the school decides on the form of the grading and chooses one of three options - either marks, verbal assessments, or a combination of both mentioned. If needed, school using marks is required to transfer the evaluation of a student into the verbal assessment, and vice versa. An example of a situation this might be needed in is when a pupil is applying to high school (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §51). Other parts of a school report are the assessment of student's behaviour and the overall assessment (The Czech Republic, 2004c, §3). The assessment system mentioned here is established in this way for secondary school students. However, multi-year secondary general school students attending grades corresponding to basic school are assessed according to the rules applicable to basic schools (The Czech Republic, 2005, §24).

Figure 8 – Assessment of subjects and behaviour, the Czech Republic

Assessment of subjects using marks		Assessment of behaviour	
1	Excellent	1	Very Good
2	Very Good	2	Satisfactory
3	Good	3	Unsatisfactory
4	Satisfactory		
5	Failed		
"Not assessed"	if it is not possible to assess the student		
"Excused"	if the student was excused from the subject		

Source: (The Czech Republic, 2004c, §3)

Figure 9 - Overall assessment, the Czech Republic

Overall assessment	
Passed with distinction	no mark of compulsory subject is worse than 2
	1,5 is the maximum average of all results in compulsory subjects
	behaviour is assessed with mark 1
Passed	no mark of a compulsory subject is 5
Failed	at least one compulsory subject is assessed with mark 5
	at least one compulsory subject is assessed as "not assessed" at the end of the second term
Not assessed	at least one compulsory subject is assessed as "not assessed" at the end of the first term or on an alternative date

Source: (The Czech Republic, 2004c, §3)

6.2 The United States of America

6.2.1 Subjects

Because the United States' education systems differ from state to state, and even the individual districts can alter it slightly, subjects offered at schools vary as well, together with their content. Nevertheless, in 2009 began an effort to create academic standards that would to some extent unify standards of individual states. Eventually Common Core State Standards²⁹ were created through a coordinated effort of experts and government officials from the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. CCSS is formed from the most effective standards from individual states and even other countries. The standards characterize what knowledge and skills should students have at the end of each grade, and therefore what the students should gain throughout the whole K-12 education (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2021a). However, the documents do not specify which forms of teaching and what materials to use in order to meet the standards (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2021b). This leaves enough freedom to individual states, districts, and schools to specify it according to their requirements. Currently, forty-one states, the District of Columbia, and four territories have included CCSS in their education policies (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2021c).

Two separate documents were created – English Language Arts/ Literacy Standards and Mathematics Standards. The standards do not define specific subjects. They set goals for individual grades in areas that form the field the standards address³⁰. CCSS for English Language Arts/ Literacy Standards divide the K-12 system into two parts, K-5 and 6-12. The second part, setting goals for grades 6-12, further distinguishes areas Standards for English Language Arts and Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects separately (Common Core Standards Initiative, © 2010, p. 2). CCSS for Mathematics provides a description of the goals for individual grades from Kindergarten to Grade 8. Grades 9-12 are included in the section High School, which is not structuralized based on grades, but based on conceptual categories. Those categories are:

- Number and Quantity;
- Algebra;
- Functions;

²⁹ CCSS

³⁰ English language or Mathematics

- Modeling;
- Geometry;
- Statistics and Probability (Common Core Standards Initiative, © 2010b, pp. 2, 57).

Figure 10 - *CCSS for English Language arts and literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*

Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subject K-5	Standards for English Language Arts 6-12	Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subject
College and Career Readiness Anchor for Reading	College and Career Readiness Anchor for Reading	College and Career Readiness Anchor for Reading
Reading Standards for Literature	Reading Standards for Literature 6-12	Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12
Reading Standards for Informational text K-5	Reading Standards for Informational Text 6-12	Reading Standards for Literacy in Science and Technical Subjects 6-12
Reading Standards: Foundational Skills K-5	College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing	College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing
College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing K-5	Writing Standards 6-12	Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects 6-12
Writing Standards K-5	College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language	
College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language	Language Standards 6-12	
Language Standards K-5	Language Progressive Skills, by Grade	
Language Progressive Skills, by Grade	Standard 10: Range, Quality, and Complexity of Student Reading 6-12	
Standard 10: Range, Quality, and Complexity of Student Reading K-5		
Staying on Topic Within a Grade and Across Grades		

Source: (Common Core Standards Initiative, © 2010a)

Beside CCSS, National Research Council created in 2012 *A Framework for K-12 Science Education*. The goal in creating this framework was to ensure that students have enough knowledge and are able to utilize it outside of school in their everyday lives, including broadening it on their own, not to mention offering the students the opportunity to choose from a wide range of careers (National Research Council et al., © 2013, p. 1). Since its publication, 44 states and the District of Columbia have implemented standards based on the framework, one of them being Next Generation Science Standards³¹ (Next Generation Science Standards, © 2013a). NGSS originated similarly to CCSS. Different organizations from 26 states coordinated in directing a writing team of 40 experts in various fields of education (Next Generation Science Standards, © 2013,b).

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, because of the legislation regarding education the content of the school subjects and the subjects themselves vary mainly among the individual states. Therefore, I decided to choose one state, which regulations I will analyse, and that is the state of Michigan. Michigan belongs among the states that implemented CCSS (Common Core Standards Initiative, © 2021c) and together with it the state sets standards and guidelines for the following subject areas:

- Arts;
- Career and College Ready Skills;
- Computer Science;
- English Language Arts;
- Health;
- Mathematics;
- Personal Finance;
- Physical Education;
- Science;
- Social Studies;
- Technology;
- Worlds Languages (State of Michigan, © 2024).

Michigan does not set compulsory courses or curricula, it allows the districts to be flexible in developing systems that align best with their specific requirements and needs. What the state does set are the high school graduation requirements, which are formulated

³¹ NGSS

in the Michigan Merit Curriculum³². This document articulates the minimum number of credits students must obtain in individual areas in order to receive a high school diploma. MMC offers in some areas more than one way of reaching the requested credits. The number of credits required by the state is 18 (Michigan Department of Education and Michigan State Board of Education, 2017, p. 1-2).

Figure 11 – Credit Requirements, Michigan

Subject Area	Number of Required Credits
English Language Arts	4
Mathematics	4
Online Learning Experience	-
Physical Education and Health	1
Science	3
Social Studies	3
Visual, Performing, and Applied Arts	1
World Language	2
Total	18

Source: (Michigan Department of Education and Michigan State Board of Education, 2017, p. 1)

6.2.2 Grading

High school students across the US have their academic achievements evaluated usually in the form of the Grade Point Average (GPA). It is a four-point scale and the final points are determined from grade and course credit information. The grades can have several forms and usually differ among schools. Numbers and letters are just two examples. Even if two schools use the same form of evaluation, they can have for example different letter equivalents for numeric grades. Due to the variety of grading systems, the National Center for Education Statistics³³ created for statistical purposes Standardised Number Grade Conversion³⁴ (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). The number of credits per course is usually calculated based on the number of class hours together with the number of hours assigned to homework (Průcha, 2021, p. 72). NCES uses in its studies the Carnegie unit for the purpose of

³² MMC

³³ NCES

³⁴ Figure 12 – Standardised Number Grade Conversion

standardising the data (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Carnegie unit corresponds to the number of credits that are acquired for a course, which for a whole school year, is taken one period every day (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). High school students receive for each grade the equivalent number of grade points. The GPA is then calculated from the total achieved grade points divided by the total credits of the courses they took (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

Figure 12 – *Standardised Number Grade Conversion*

Number Grade Conversion		
Numeric Grade	Standard Grade	Grade Point Average
90 - 100	A	4.0
80 - 89	B	3.0
70 - 79	C	2.0
60 - 69	D	1.0
Less than 60	F	0.0

Source: (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011)

6.3 Summary of the chapter

In both analysed high school education systems, it is within the authority of individual schools to create the subjects. Nonetheless, they must abide by certain conditions. The Czech Republic presents these conditions in the form of Framework education programmes. RVP provide among other things standards the students must meet in order to achieve the education level successfully. The standards are formulated for separate education areas, from which the schools formulate the subjects. The form of grading is as well, to a certain extent, within the scope of a school’s competencies. It can have several forms, for instance, verbal assessment or marks.

Even though there are no federally mandated standards in the US, the majority of states use Common Core State Standards. CCSS set goals for individual grades in English language and Mathematics. Another widely implemented standards are Next Generation Science Standards, which together with others were created based on a Framework for K-12 Science Education. In the United States, the form of grading is also in the competencies of the schools. Letter or numeric grades are examples of the form of a grading system. A significant part of the US grading system is the GPA. The Grade Point Average of a student is calculated based on the credits assigned to the courses, together with how successful the student was in them.

7 Graduation

7.1 The Czech Republic

Secondary education in the Czech Republic high schools is completed either by a VET final examination or with the Maturita examination. The purpose of both examinations is to verify if and to what extent the students managed to fulfill the goals set by the respective RVP and ŠVP. It is supposed to test if the students have the necessary knowledge and skills to continue in their education or engagement in a profession or specialised activities (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §72-73).

7.1.1 VET final examination

The content of a VET final examination depends on the level of education. In upper secondary education the examination consists of a practical examination and a theoretical examination, and the content and form of the exams are set by the headmaster of the school. In upper secondary education with the VET certificate, the exam includes a written examination, an oral examination, and a practical examination in practical training. In this case, the high schools must use standardised assignments with the corresponding documentation (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §74). Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports currently assigned the task of providing these assignments to the Centre for Evaluation of Educational Achievements³⁵ (Eurydice, 2024i).

The written examination can have either paper or electronic form. The time allocated for its finishing is 240 minutes, which can be increased in the case of students with special needs. Each student is given a topic, which has detailed evaluation criteria and rules. The exam is assessed based on points students manage to acquire and those are then transformed into classification. Students must reach the minimum limit of 30% or 40%, depending on the field of education, to be successful in the written examination (Centrum pro zjišťování výsledků vzdělávání, © 2019a).

Some topics of the oral examination are public, the rest is known to students only through content standards. Content standards are general areas from which the rest of the topics are established and they serve as a tool to help students prepare for the exam. At the oral

³⁵ CERMAT

examination, the student randomly chooses one out of twenty-five topics which they then have around fifteen minutes to answer. For each of the 25 topics, one of the publicly known topics is allocated. These topics are from an area called Questions from the World of Work³⁶ and are supposed to give the students knowledge such as the possibilities of future education or employment or the pay conditions when starting a job. Answering the OZSP topic should last between two and four minutes and can only slightly affect the final grade of the oral exam (Centrum pro zjišťování výsledků vzdělávání, © 2019b).

For practical examination, the headmaster chooses at least one topic, which is then prepared by the students. All topics assigned to a field of education have the same time limit. The minimum for all fields, except for one, is five hours (Centrum pro zjišťování výsledků vzdělávání, © 2019c). Some fields of study³⁷ also include so-called Independent Vocational Paper³⁸ (Centrum pro zjišťování výsledků vzdělávání, © 2019d). In SOP students produce a written adaptation of their work on an assignment of a complex task related to testing their knowledge and skills in the field. Part of the SOP may also be a practical task that is closely related to the topic and it is subsequently presented during the defence of the thesis (Centrum pro zjišťování výsledků vzdělávání, © 2019e). Schools can also choose to add another part to the practical examination, which focuses on the specifics of the individual school stated in the ŠVP. In that case, the school creates the content of that part of the exam and as with the OZSP, the final grade of the practical examination can be affected only to some extent by it (Centrum pro zjišťování výsledků vzdělávání, © 2019f). Similar to the written examination, each topic has detailed evaluation criteria and rules. The minimum for passing the examination is 40% or 50%, depending on the field of education (Centrum pro zjišťování výsledků vzdělávání, © 2019c).

For a successful execution of a VET final examination, the students must be successful in all parts of the exam. The examination committee is the body that evaluates students during the examination. Its chairman is appointed by the regional office and needs to be qualified in the field, cannot be employed by the school whose examination committee he chairs, and has never been a high school teacher of the students taking the exam (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §74-75).

³⁶ Otázky se světa práce - OZPS

³⁷ e.g. apiarist or confectioner

³⁸ Samostatná odborná práce – SOP

7.1.2 Maturita examination

The Maturita examination consists of two parts for all students taking it – standardised and profile part. As with the VET final examination, students must pass all subjects and parts of the Maturita examination to be successful in it (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §77).

The standardised part includes didactic tests in two compulsory subjects. Czech language and literature is set for everyone, but the second subject can be chosen from either a foreign language or mathematics. In addition, students can decide to take up to two non-compulsory subjects, which can be mathematics extending, foreign language, or mathematics, if not chosen as the compulsory subject (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §78). The time allocated for the didactic test in the Czech language and literature is 85 minutes, in foreign language 110 minutes, in mathematics 135 minutes, and in mathematics extending 150 minutes (The Czech Republic, 2009, §5 – 10). The knowledge expected for this part of the Maturita examination is set out in the Catalogues of requirements created by MŠMT. Together with VET final examination, CERMAT is authorized by MŠMT to secure many tasks related to the standardised part of the Maturita examination, mainly to prepare and evaluate the didactic tests (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §78, 80).

The profile part of the Maturita examination follows up the standardised part with a written essay and oral examination from the Czech language and literature and from a foreign language if chosen. Together with the mentioned one or two subjects, the profile part consists of an additional two to three examinations, depending on the RVP. As with the standardised part, students can choose to take up to two non-compulsory exams from other subjects. The exams in the profile part can take various forms, for example, an oral exam or a practical examination. The form and content of the profile part examinations, as well as the list of the subjects offered to students for this part of the Maturita examination, is set by the headmaster of the school with regard to the corresponding RVP. The individual subjects of the profile part are evaluated by the examination committee, with its chairman. The same conditions applied to VET final examination committee, apply to the Maturita examination committee as well (The Czech Republic, 2004a, §79 - 80).

7.2 The United States of America

The conditions and necessary requirements for graduating high school in the United States of America are inconsistent across the country and, as many other things regarding education, are in the hands of individual states. The one thing that all states have in common is the certification of a student who successfully completed secondary education, which is the high school diploma. Although the requirements for it differ, no matter what state granted the diploma, the other states recognize and accept it (Průcha, 2021, p. 74).

High school students in some states graduate high school without any exit examination (Ripková, 2006, p. 82), while in other states certain form of the exit exam is ordered. Many states have different numbers of subjects listed as so-called End-of-course assessment subjects (Zinth, 2017, pp. 1 - 5). For example, North Carolina uses its End-of-Course Tests to evaluate the knowledge of students in regard to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, © 2022a), which states the content standards for the state's public schools (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, © 2022b). The exit exam is then based on passing one or more of the End-of-course assessment subjects (Zinth, 2017, pp. 1 - 5).

However, just because a state has set End-of-course assessment subjects does not mean it will require an exit exam (Zinth, 2017, pp. 1 - 5). For example, the mentioned North Carolina tests subjects are English II, Math 1, Math 3, and Biology (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, © 2022a), but no matter whether students pass or fail the End-of-Course Tests, they can graduate high school and receive the diploma (Zinth, 2017, pp. 1 – 5; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, © 2022c). Even though the state of North Carolina does not insist on the exit exam, it has formulated high school graduation requirements and those consist of earning a minimum number of 22 credits in the Future-Ready Course of Study, which is composed of English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Health and Physical Education areas together with a number of elective subjects (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, © 2022c).

The state of Maryland on the other hand introduced the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program End of Course exam³⁹ to which all students beginning ninth grade in the 2023-2024 school year will be subjected. Only the High School Life Science and American Government course has an MCAP EOC exam requirement and 20% of the final grade is made

³⁹ MCAP EOC exam

of the exam. To meet the graduation assessment requirement, students need to take the exam, but if the final grade is passing, it is not necessary to pass the exam (Maryland State Department of Education, 2022, p. 7-9).

7.3 Summary of the chapter

High schools in the Czech Republic culminate in successfully passing either the Maturita examination or a VET final examination. In schools of upper secondary education with the VET certificate, the examination has standardised assignments provided by the Centre for Evaluation of Educational Achievements. It consists of three parts and students must achieve success in each of them in order to attain a passing grade. VET final examination in upper secondary education is formulated by the school's headmaster. The Maturita examination includes standardised and profile parts. In the first mentioned part, students must take didactic tests from the Czech language and literature and either mathematics or a foreign language. The didactic tests from the Czech language and literature and foreign languages are accompanied by an oral exam and a written essay in the profile part. The remaining portion of the profile part is composed of another two or three subjects, whose form and content are formed by the headmaster of the particular school.

High schools in the United States have various requirements for the high school graduation, depending on the state. End-of-course assessments are performed in many states and are often used to measure the completion of the state's education standards. Simultaneously, the assessments can be used as an exit exam, making it a part of the graduation process. The state of Maryland is an example of such a state. Even though students don't need to pass the exam, they are required to take it. Conversely, the state of North Carolina belongs among states with no exit exam. In order to graduate, high school students in this state need to gain the minimum number of credits from specific courses. Even though the requirements differ, all high school students in the United States who meet the requirements of the state they study acquire a high school diploma, which is recognized in every state.

Results

In this thesis, I have used mainly primary sources issued by the governments and secondary sources dealing with subjects related to the topic of my thesis to describe two high school education systems. The main aim of the thesis is to assess, with the use of the information obtained, whether the two systems of the Czech Republic and the United States of America can be perceived as equivalent. On the basis of the literature review, I have established criteria that I will use to determine the outcome of the stated objective.

Figure 13 - *Criteria*

Number	Criterion	The Czech Republic	The United States of America
1	compulsory upper secondary level	No	Yes
2	tuition	No	No
3	private education option	Yes	Yes
4	high school structure	lower and upper secondary education	lower and upper secondary education
5	residency-based selective enrollment	No	Yes
6	academic-based selective enrollment	Yes	Yes
7	admission	standardized/own creation	own creation
8	national standards	Yes	No
9	grading	non-standardized (school managed)	non-standardized (school managed)
10	credit system	No	Yes
11	grading system	school report	GPA
12	school leaving examination	standardized/own creation	own creation
13	tertiary education requirement	high school education	high school education
14	high school graduation requirements	Yes	No

The first criterion determines whether high school is part of the compulsory education in the researched countries. In the Czech Republic, students finish compulsory school attendance in basic schools and are not therefore obliged to attend a high school. Although some states in the United States allow the completion of compulsory education before the end of high school, still at least a portion of it corresponds to high school grades. High school is therefore part of compulsory education in this country.

Whether students are obliged to pay tuition for their high school education is the content of the second criterion. In both countries, students have the option of free high school education.

While in the Czech Republic every level of education, except for pre-primary, is free of charge, in the United States only the levels of education in which students fulfill their compulsory school attendance are available without any form of tuition. Therefore, high school students in the United States have the option of attending public high schools, which are funded predominately by the state government. Chapter 3 includes the information used for evaluating the first and second criterion.

When analysing whether students in each country have the option of free secondary education, the question regarding the private education option arises. In the Czech Republic, private school is a term used for a school established by someone other than the state, a region, or a municipality and which is not at the same time a denominational school. In the United States of America, private schools are facilities funded by non-government contributions, for instance students' tuition. Opposite to Czech private schools, United States' private schools include church-related schools as well. This is further discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 also describes the possibility of a high school including, apart from upper secondary education, lower secondary education as well. Secondary general schools and conservatoires in the Czech Republic can include either four or two years of lower secondary education. In the United States, the whole primary and secondary education can be structured in various manners. Upper secondary education is classified as grades 10, 11, and 12 in this country's education system, and in some versions of the structure, high school lasts four or six years, thus incorporating lower secondary education as well.

Criteria five and six examine, whether high schools in the Czech Republic and the United States of America accept students based on their residency and academic achievements. Together with criterion number seven, the criteria address the high school admission requirements, which are in more detail described in Chapter 5. Czech high schools do not accept students on the basis of their residency, which is on the contrary conducted in traditional public high schools in the United States. However, certain high schools in both countries accept students after considering their academic achievements. In the United States, if a high school accepts students on the basis of academic achievements, the specific conditions are set either by the state or by the school itself. Individual schools set their own admission requirements in the Czech Republic as well. The only exception are upper secondary programmes with the Maturita examination. Students applying for these programmes must take the standardized admission examination in order to be accepted.

High schools in the Czech Republic must abide by the nationally set education standards called Framework Education Programme. The documents specify the knowledge and skills

students should possess at the end of the education level, as well as the certain conditions under which high school education may take place. In the United States, no national education standards are established. Even though most of the states accepted particular standards, it was not their obligation to do so. I expressed this in more detail in Chapter 6.

The evaluation of high school students is divided into criteria 9, 10, and 11. In both countries, no standardized system of grading high school students is established. Even though some conditions for grading and conversions between the individual forms are set by the respective institutions in each country, it is usually in the competencies of the school to create its grading system. In the United States, there is in addition to a grading system also a credit system. Course credit and grade information determine the Grade Point Average. GPA reflects students' academic achievements in the course of the entire high school education and is often assessed as a part of the admission process by post-secondary institutions. Because credits are not used in Czech high schools, no specific alternative to GPA exists. The overall assessment on the school report is the only part of the Czech Republic's grading system that is, similarly to GPA, based on the grades from all subjects. But contrary to GPA, which is affected by every subject grade received during high school, overall assessment pertains only to grades presented on the school report. Therefore, it indicates subject grades received during a single term. More information on this topic is included in Chapter 6.

Whether high schools in the Czech Republic and the United States include a standardized examination as a part of the graduation process is part of criterion number 12. In Chapter 7 I describe that in the Czech Republic, a VET final examination in upper secondary education with the VET certificate and one part of the Maturita examination have standardised assignments. Nevertheless, the assignments of the second part of the Maturita examination and a VET final examination in upper secondary education are created by the schools themselves. In the United States of America, no nationally standardised examination is included in the graduation process. In Chapter 7 I provided examples of high school requirements in a specific state and explained the role of exit exams.

The last two criteria were created to answer questions related to differences in requirements for tertiary education. In both examined countries is successfully completed high school education a condition for pursuing tertiary education. Nonetheless, in contrast to the United States where any high school education is sufficient, in the Czech Republic the upper secondary education with Maturita examination is a condition for applying to institutions providing tertiary education. Additional information on this topic is included in Chapter 4.

After evaluating all the established criteria for each country, I have further evaluated whether both countries either did or did not meet the criterion. I set a total of fourteen criteria. Both countries received the same evaluation for one criterion a total of six times, whereas differing results occurred a total of eight times. The criteria significantly related to entire education systems received primarily the same evaluation. In contrast, criteria focusing on specific aspects of high schools were in most cases evaluated with different results.

Based on these data I concluded that although both high school education systems share several common or similar aspects, the differences between them predominate. Therefore, the results of my thesis state that the high school education systems of the Czech Republic and the United States of America should not be viewed as equivalent due to the nature and amount of the differences.

A more precise comparison may be achieved by comparing the Czech high school education system, with the system of one specific state from the United States of America. This could be further explored in a master's thesis building upon the foundation established by this bachelor's thesis.

Conclusion

In order to avoid confusion and misinterpretation of certain terms and concepts, the first chapter of this thesis introduces the International Standard Classification, known as ISCED. ISCED was designed to simplify comparing education systems from different countries. High school is a term found in various forms in both Czech and American education. ISCED refers to high school as an equivalent to ISCED level 3, officially known as upper secondary education, which pupils begin at the ages 14 to 16 and finish between 17 and 18.

Establishments in the Czech Republic providing ISCED 3 can be distinguished in several ways. Most of them provide only upper secondary education, but some can include lower secondary and tertiary education as well. Therefore, it is not possible to define high school in the Czech education system simply as equivalent to upper secondary education. In this thesis, I decided to use the Czech term *střední škola* and apply it as a definition of high school. Střední škola is a concept defined and used in the Czech legislature and it further distinguishes the establishments either based on their specialisation (general, technical, or vocational) or based on the level of secondary education the schools provide.

Education systems in the United States of America can have various forms. Establishments with *high school* in their name can provide both lower or upper secondary education or a combination of both. Due to the individual states having the majority of influence on their education systems, distinct variations exist across the country. Nevertheless, the whole education system tends to be classified as K-12, and ISCED level 3 corresponds to grades 10 to 12. To unify the definition, in this thesis I used the term high school to describe facilities providing chiefly upper secondary education, but with the possibility of including lower secondary as well.

Even though the concepts of high school in both analysed countries are similar, the conditions in which they provide it are quite diverse. In the United States, students applying to public high schools are usually admitted without any sort of admission process, even though traditional high schools require residency in the district. Magnet schools are an example of a high school potentially requiring meeting certain criteria in order to be accepted. In the Czech Republic, schools offering programmes completed with the Maturita examination must include a standardized admission examination.

Differences arise also in terms of finishing the high school education. In the Czech Republic, high school can be completed either by a VET final or the Maturita examination.

VET final examination is, depending on the level of education, either created by the headmaster of a high school or standardized. The Maturita examination is composed of two parts, one of which is also standardized. In some states of the United States, high school students can graduate without any final examination, while other states require an exit exam as a part of the graduation process. Nonetheless, even if a state does not require an exit exam, it can set certain subjects or subject areas as compulsory for high school students.

The main objective of this thesis was to determine based on the information gathered from the research of the literature whether the two high school education systems can be viewed as equivalent. After the evaluation of the set criteria, I concluded that the systems of the two countries Czech Republic and the United States of America should not be viewed as equivalent.

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