



# Weekly Briefing

**Serbia political briefing:**  
**New rulebooks on assessment for students**  
**in primary and secondary schools**  
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# **New rulebooks on assessment for students in primary and secondary schools**

## **Summary**

*In mid-February, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia published a new Rulebook on assessment in 2024, for students in primary and secondary education institutions, as well as the Rulebook on community service, i.e. humanitarian work. However, as soon as it came into force, the new Rulebook on assessment in primary education has already caused divided opinions among educators. And while the Ministry points out that it is necessary to have the Rulebook related to the introduction of order and preventive measures, some believe that it is vague, and some believe that it devastates Serbian education.*

## **Introduction**

The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia published new regulations on the assessment of students in primary<sup>1</sup> and secondary education institutions<sup>2</sup>, as well as the Regulations on community service<sup>3</sup>, i.e. humanitarian work.

The new regulations were adopted in order to comply with the amendments to the Law on the Basics of the Education and Training System, which foresees the numerical evaluation of attitude in primary and secondary schools, starting from the second grade of primary school.

## **Key points of the rulebooks**

Newly adopted rulebooks contain several important changes.

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<sup>1</sup> “Pravilnik o ocenjivanju učenika u osnovnom obrazovanju i vaspitanju 10/2024-51”, Pravno-informacioni sistem Republike Srbije, <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SIGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/ministarstva/pravilnik/2024/10/5/reg.>, accessed on: 29/02/2024.

<sup>2</sup> “Pravilnik o ocenjivanju učenika u srednjem obrazovanju i vaspitanju 10/2024-57”, Pravno-informacioni sistem Republike Srbije, <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SIGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/ministarstva/pravilnik/2024/10/6/reg.>, accessed on: 29/02/2024.

<sup>3</sup> “Pravilnik o obavljanju društveno korisnog, odnosno humanitarnog rada u ustanovama obrazovanja i vaspitanja: 10/2024-49”, <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SIGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/ministarstva/pravilnik/2024/10/4/reg.>, accessed on: 29/02/2024.

**Parents initiate teacher control.** As stated in the new rulebook, if the parents of more than half of the students from the same class believe that a certain teacher does not conduct teaching and other forms of educational work, evaluation, monitoring, checking and evaluation of students in accordance with the law and this rulebook, they have the right to address the school in a letter on that occasion, and then the school acts according to a precisely defined procedure.<sup>4</sup>

The class teacher informs the teacher to whom the remarks refer, the competent professional council and the director. The expert council inspects the parent's letter, obtains a statement from the teacher whose work has been objected to and examines the allegations, and gives an opinion that is submitted to the director. If the objection is founded, the director, professional associate and secretary draw up a plan for enhanced instructional and pedagogical insight into the work of the teacher.

If the applicant is not satisfied with the director's decision, within seven working days of receiving the decision, he can turn to the competent school administration, in order to undertake activities within the competence of the school administration.

**Students have three tests per week.** Years ago, initial tests were organized at the beginning of each year in order for teachers to gain insight into how much and what kind of knowledge students had acquired in the previous school year. Those tests were not for a grade (unless the student performed exceptionally well), but the teachers had no obligation to announce them either. The new regulation changes that. The initial assessment is announced three working days before planned and is not included in the planned number of written checks. The result is recorded in the pedagogical documentation, it is not evaluated, it is used for planning the teacher's work and further monitoring the progress of the students. The teacher provides timely individual feedback on the result of the initial assessment to the student and the parent.

When it comes to regular written tests, there has also been a very important change that the students probably won't like. Until now, each student could have a maximum of two tests in one week, and one test per day. The new rulebook stipulates that the schedule can plan at most one written test per day (as it has been until now), but “in addition to one written task

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<sup>4</sup> Article 5 of the Rulebook, “Pravilnik o ocenjivanju učenika u osnovnom obrazovanju i vaspitanju 10/2024-51”, Pravno-informacioni sistem Republike Srbije, <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SIGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/ministarstva/pravilnik/2024/10/5/reg>, op.cit.

prescribed by the teaching program, two more written tests can be planned in the teaching week”.<sup>5</sup> So one more test per week.

**The class teacher "scans" the students four times.** Class teacher is obliged to inform parents in a timely manner, at least four times during the school year, in an appropriate manner about the student's achievements, progress, motivation for learning and progress, attitude and other issues of importance for education and upbringing.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, if the parent does not come to the parent and individual meetings, the class teacher is obliged to inform him in a timely manner, in writing, about the success and grades, possible difficulties and absences of the student and the consequences of the student's absence and invite him to an individual interview. “If the parent does not respond to the invitation within 15 days from the day of receiving the invitation, the school will inform the competent center for social work and request its action”, Article 20 of the new Rulebook states.

**Six items for attitude assessment.** When deciding about the attitude grade, which from the second grade will be numerical and will be included in the general average, the school class council will take into account: engagement of students in extracurricular activities, engagement of students in planning and implementation of preventive activities, his/her behavior towards other students and employees, performing school duties, absences, imposed educational and educational-disciplinary measures.<sup>7</sup> In close connection with the last one is the Rulebook on performing socially useful, i.e. humanitarian work. The purpose of its adoption is to develop empathy, solidarity and cooperation and activism. Socially useful activities in schools are no longer just a tool of enhanced educational work, as was the case until now, but are an integral part of the preventive plan for protection against violence, which is planned in an annual plan and is implemented in order to include all students.

### **Different points of view**

Revealing newly adopted Rulebooks on the assessment of students in primary and secondary schools, Serbian Ministry of Education point out that “the new regulations are part

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<sup>5</sup> Article 12, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> Article 20, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> Article 17, op. cit.

of the activities that strengthen the educational role of the school and the educational system for the prevention and response to violence”.<sup>8</sup> They consider that all the proposed instructions with the complete autonomy of the schools to analyze all the instructions, and depending on the age of the students and the type of school of assessment and application, are good, because the improvement of educational processes in the school still requires changes and novelties, which were concluded by consulting the experts that related to those adopted by this rulebook

Minister of Education, Ms. Slavica Đukić Dejanović, explained that the regulations specify the procedure and criteria for evaluating student attitude, which is carried out twice per semester and affects the overall success of students. As she explained, “the aim of this measure is to be preventive. It is important for students to know that their behavior is also evaluated and that the evaluation of attitude affects their results and overall success”.<sup>9</sup>

Minister believes that with the implementation of the regulations adopted by the Ministry of Education in the field of education, safety in schools is also increased, which, according to her, is crucial. New regulations that have been introduced will raise the role of the school to a higher level. The essence is that they strengthen the role of the school, and the importance they have in the prevention of violence. The goal of all these proposed measures is for teachers, parents and children to know that the results of education are important, but that the safety of children in schools is the most important of all, minister Đukić Dejanović pointed out.

Apart changes referred to the assessment of behavior, new rulebooks brought changes in the method of grading students who have been excused from classes for a longer period of time, the number of written tests in one week, as well as the school's procedure in the event that half of the parents express an objection to the work of a teacher or professional associate.

In addition, the specifics of grading in music and ballet schools, and the already existing provisions related to the cancellation of written knowledge tests when more than 50 percent of the grades are negative have been specified.

Milan Pašić, assistant to the Minister of Education, pointed out that the Rule book will promote an approach to assessment that is focused on learning and student development, instead

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<sup>8</sup> “Ministarka do detalja o novom pravilniku u školama: Evo šta čeka đake i roditelje, na snagu stupaju velike promene”, *Espresso*, 14.02.2024, <https://www.espresso.co.rs/vesti/drustvo/1428484/pravilnik-o-ocenjivanju-u-osnovnim-skolama-detalji>, accessed on: 29/02/2024.

<sup>9</sup> “Novi pravilnik o ocenjivanju: Uvođenje reda ili Pandorina kutija”, 13. februar 2024, *S.Z/Danas*, <https://vreme.com/drustvo/novi-pravilnik-o-ocenjivanju-uvodjenje-reda-ili-pandorina-kutija/>, accessed on: 29/02/2024.

of just evaluating results.<sup>10</sup> He observed that this can encourage teachers to use different learning methods and strategies to support the development of students' skills and abilities and that, overall, the new Rulebook on evaluation in primary school will contribute to the improvement of the quality of education through the mentioned changes. It is expected that the new rulebook will improve interaction between students, parents, teachers and school staff by creating a transparent, clear and communicative environment for all parties involved. In that sense, rules can help prevent misunderstandings between parents and teachers regarding grading and also reduce the possibility of subjectivity or non-compliance in the evaluation process.

On the other hand, teachers are mostly negative oriented towards the new regulations.

The target of criticism are the new provisions of Article 5 of this rulebook, which, according to the members of the Branch Union of Educational Workers of Serbia “Nezavisnost”, will bring great problems to employees in education.<sup>11</sup> The contested decision stipulates that, in the event that the parents of more than half of the students from the same class believe that a certain teacher does not conduct teaching and other forms of educational work, evaluation, monitoring, checking and evaluation of students in accordance with the law and the Rules on Evaluation, the school conducts the procedure in which his responsibility is determined and appropriate measures are taken. This also applies to the special education teacher, who teaches in a school for the education of students with developmental disabilities and disabilities and a school that has a department for these students. As stated in the Rulebook, parents of students who have objections address the head of the department through the parents' representative in the parents' council in a letter, which was previously filed. Jasminka Marić, member of “Nezavisnost” stated that in practice this can mean that, for example, in combined classes, three or four parents come to an agreement and file a complaint against the teacher. She notes that the representatives of this union were categorically against the mentioned solutions, but that the Ministry of Education insisted on them and some other unions also supported them.

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<sup>10</sup> Ministarka do detalja o novom pravilniku u školama: Evo šta čeka đake i roditelje, na snagu stupaju velike promene”, *Espresso*, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Počeo da važi novi pravilnik o ocenjivanju: Novine izazvale negodovanje nastavnika, 021, <https://www.021.rs/story/Info/Srbija/367158/Poceo-da-važi-novi-pravilnik-o-ocenjivanju-Novine-izazvale-negodovanje-nastavnika.html>, accessed on: 29/02/2024.

<sup>12</sup> Op. cit.

Valentina Ilić, president of the Education Union of Serbia, believes that this solution can be a relief for the school in some cases, but also that it can be easily abused. “The law defines the way in which an objection to the evaluation is submitted, and it is not clear to us why the mentioned provisions were included in the Evaluation Rulebook. This is so unbelievable and inappropriate towards educators. What is expected of us? Shall we share the best possible grades so that we can be good teachers and that no one 'calls us out'? Is that the solution? Are we aware of what we are getting education into? Even so, young people are not interested in working in education, and the question is what kind of message is being sent by this,” says Marić.

The president of the Forum of Belgrade High Schools, Aleksandar Markov, advocates trust in the professional credibility, understanding and ability of teachers to negotiate with students.<sup>13</sup> “A grate portion of teachers took their own initiative and made special examination plans. Now that it is in the form of an obligation, it is not entirely clear whether a student who returns from sick leave at the time of a planned written assignment or control exercise must complete it immediately,” Markov explains. He adds that the number of absences that students can make, without having their grade in governance reduced, has also increased. His stance is that it's not good because we have a large number of absences in schools anyway, and now the calculation with absences will increase when it comes to knowledge tests. In the administrative sense, all this increases the administrative duties of teachers. In his opinion, it would be much more useful if it was possible for students who are on sick leave to follow the classes online. Of course, this requires technical prerequisites, which implies certain allocations. At the same time it is necessary to take care about interrelations because if a link in the chain of class teacher-pedagogue-teacher breaks, the possibility of parental complaints about the grade increases.

But, even among teachers can be found those who share the view of the Ministry of Education. The president of the Belgrade School Union, Snežana Romandić Petrović, is one of them and she believes that teachers have gained more than lost with the new Rulebook. The

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<sup>13</sup> “Novi pravilnik o ocenjivanju: Uvođenje reda ili Pandorina kutija”, 13. februara 2024, *Vreme*, <https://vreme.com/drustvo/novi-pravilnik-o-ocenjivanju-uvodjenje-reda-ili-pandorina-kutija/>, accessed on: 29/02/2024.

public's attention was drawn to the fact that, for the first time, the way and procedure for parents dissatisfied with the work of a teacher to file a complaint against a teacher was specified. The public is talking about it the most, and what is not known is that we were notified frequently and on regular basis. Up until now, parents have reported complaints directly to the school principal. Most often, these were anonymous reports. In her opinion, the Ministry wanted to solve a large number of applications from dissatisfied parents, so they specified part of the procedure and returned it to the schools. Now half or more of the class must declare that the teacher did something wrong. Registration is done within the school, so only after several procedures is the opinion given to the school director, who, together with the professional secretary and based on the council's opinion, makes a decision on the sanction.

The Departmental Committee for Education of the Democratic Party asked Minister Slavica Đukić Dejanović to immediately withdraw the new Rulebook on Evaluation, because it was adopted without consultation with educators and contains provisions that make the position of educators more difficult and degrading and lead to the further collapse of the education system in Serbia.<sup>14</sup> As stated in the announcement of this party, “this decision goes in the direction of further devastation of Serbian education.” It is added that the provision which, at the request of more than half of the parents, initiates the procedure of control and evaluation of the work of teachers, enables the opening of Pandora's box. Already after several actions initiated by disgruntled parents, a large number of teachers will further lower the already low criteria for evaluation or leave education, because they will not allow that persons who are not qualified to evaluate the work of educators can now initiate processes for examining the quality of their work. The teaching staff is already overwhelmed by the administration, they are expected to be psychologists and security guards, and all for a salary lower than the national average. The new Rulebook on evaluation is just a drop in the bucket of bile that is already overflowing, stated in the Democratic Party.

Taking into account the fact that attitudes on the rulebook on assessment in primary schools differ significantly among different groups of stakeholders, including teachers, parents, students and educational experts, the minister's reaction followed. Namely, the minister Đukić Dejanović said “if there is a need to review the Rulebook on the assessment, we will review it.

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<sup>14</sup> DS: Ministarka da povuče novi Pravilnik o ocenjivanju koji urušava obrazovni sistem, 13.02.2024, Novi magazine, <https://novimagazin.rs/vesti/316066-ds-ministarka-da-povuce-novi-pravilnik-o-ocenjivanju-koji-urusava-obrazovni-sistem>, accessed on: 29/02/2024.



Changes to this document or its withdrawal, if it violates the dignity of the teacher, is not a disaster.”<sup>15</sup> She added that that she will once again discuss the withdrawal or amendment of the Rulebook with all those she spoke with during the preparation of the document, namely the four representative trade unions and the Directors' Association of Serbia, which she claims had no objections to the content of the document.

After the uproar, President Vučić also reacted, stressing that teachers are the ones people have to have the most trust in, and parents are there to help, not to decide instead of teachers. “We need teachers, completely liberate, who know better than all of us parents how to work with children. I can't imagine how I would know better than any teacher, teacher or professor how one of my children learns and behaves in class, and from where would I have the right to evaluate teachers”, stressed Vučić.<sup>16</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Adoption of the new Rulebooks on the assessments in Serbian primary and secondary schools caused great turmoil in Serbian society. Notwithstanding that as all other areas in everyday life, education also is suffering from deep crisis and as such requires substantive changes; recently adopted acts could make even bigger damage. What Serbian society needs are transparency and objectivity meaning that the rulebook should ensure transparency and objectivity in evaluation. Transparent assessment criteria and standards would help students and parents understand what is expected of them, which can increase student motivation and satisfaction with the school system. Even more, such criteria should align with best educational practices and societal needs.

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<sup>15</sup> Đukić Dejanović za "NOVOSTI": Povlačenje pravilnika ne bi bilo katastrofa, 27.2.2024, Novosti, <https://www.novosti.rs/drustvo/vesti/1337847/djukic-dejanovic-novosti-povlacenje-pravilnika-bilo-katastrofa>, accessed on: 29/02/2024.

<sup>16</sup> Op. cit.