

Life in French Schools

–Fun fact:

School lunch in France can last one or two hours, and middle school and high school students often go home for lunch!

Here's another one:

French schools don't generally offer extra-curricular activities or have their own sports teams.

In this lesson, you will learn about the French education system, and you will see some similarities and differences between school as you have experienced it and that of typical French students.

Are you ready?

On y va!

French schools start at about 8:00 a.m. and go until about 5:00 p.m. However, on Wednesdays, students usually get out of school at noon. Students involved in sports will usually practice on Wednesdays after school.

The word for 'middle school' in French is *le collège* – so be careful!

A college or university is called *l'université* or *la fac*.

Speaking of college, many colleges in France are public and so cost much less than the average tuition in the United States. However, to get into college, French high school students must pass a difficult, multi-day exam called *le bac*. Scores on this test determine what colleges will accept them.

Schools in the United States usually have lots of different sports teams as well as other extra-curricular activities. In France, that is not the case. French students can join sports teams and other groups outside of school. You won't see school mascots or cheerleading squads in France!

French students also don't have school events like prom, homecoming, or spirit week. They often attend events outside of school, though!

Vacations look different as well. French students start school the first week of September, called *la rentrée*. They have two weeks off at the beginning of November for All Saints (*La Toussaint*) and 2 weeks for Christmas (*Noël*) and New Year's, two more weeks in February, and another two for Easter (*les Pâques*). School ends in June.

There are no school buses in France. Students ride bicycles, take public transportation (trains, subways or buses), walk, or have their parents drive them. Some small towns do not have a high school, so students need to take a train or subway to their school.

What about grades? Students are graded with a numerical score out of 20. At least 16 out of 20 is like getting an "A". The image also shows a typical sheet of notebook paper used by French students.

After passing the *bac*, students can pick up their diplomas from the school. There is usually no special graduation ceremony like we commonly see in the U.S. with caps and gowns.

In the U.S., it is common for teachers to be friendly with students, but in France, the teacher-student relationship is very formal. Students address their teachers as *monsieur*, *madame*, or *mademoiselle*. There are generally not many opportunities for students to get help from their teachers if they do not understand a lesson or concept.

Now that you have a general understanding of French schools, let's see what a typical French education looks like from the time a child enters school, through elementary school, middle school or junior high, and high school. You will also see how going to college works in France. By the end of this lesson, you will have an excellent understanding of the French education system!
