



To all parents of NRW students

Yvonne Gebauer MdL

**An open letter with information on the resumption
of school operations after the school closure
due to the corona pandemic**

Ladies and gentlemen,
dear parents,

the federal government and the federal states have reached agreements
that cautiously loosen Corona restrictions passed in mid-March. The
reopening of our schools was also under deliberation.

I am addressing you personally today to inform you of the Ministry of
Education's plans to cautiously reopen schools next week.

It needs to be emphasized that our top priority for all measures will be
health protection. In such fragile times, we are aware that all decisions
taken in the school sector, amongst others, resemble a difficult balancing
act and might be judged differently.

For the schools in our country, yesterday's decision allows for a
thoughtful and gradual resumption of operations. Next Monday, April 20,
2020, the secondary schools in North Rhine-Westphalia will reopen.
Initially, however, only for teachers and non-teaching staff in order to take
organizational and necessary measures with respect to upcoming
exams. We want to provide three days prior to the first students' return to
school on April 23, 2020. This first group of students will solely comprise
of those who are about to acquire their school-leaving qualifications at
the end of this school year. In addition to those graduating (Abiturienten),
it targets, above all, the students of year 10 who are about to acquire their

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secondary school leaving certificate (Hauptschulabschluss) or their middle school leaving certificate (Mittlerer Schulabschluss). April 23, 2020 also applies to pupils at schools for special needs (Förderschulen) who are about to graduate, as well as to students of vocational colleges who have completed their technical college entrance qualification (Fachhochschulreife), before completing vocational qualifications, before graduation (Abitur), or before completing vocational or further training (Berufs- / Weiterbildungsabschlüsse).

For the general reopening of schools hygienic conditions are paramount to permit limited school operations. The Ministry of School and Education reached a consensus with the municipal head organizations on this matter. The district governments have already arranged for school operators and school board members to agree on a satisfactory hygienic environment of the respective schools.

With the reopening of schools on April 23, 2020, we want to ensure the best possible preparation for important exams in our students' educational careers – even in times of Corona. Since we will have to reduce the size of our classes for infection protection, this will not mean a return to normal for year 10 students. It might also imply a change of teachers and a range of lessons, above all the core subjects, to be adapted to school conditions.

For this reason and with due regard to the students' preparatory work of varying degrees, the usual central examination (ZP10) will not take place this year. Instead of a central final examination, teachers will devise exam papers this year based on the ZP 10 requirements, yet will also consider their own lesson content to a larger degree than would be possible in centralized exams. To implement this step, an amendment to school law will be required.

In contrast to the school leaving certificates at the end of lower secondary education (Sekundarstufe I), the national recognition of the Abitur is tied to firm agreements made within the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs. All ministers have confirmed that they will remain committed to the Abitur exams. Needless to say, the exams will be conducted meeting the requirements for health and infection protection. While some countries have maintained their original Abitur exam dates, we in North Rhine-Westphalia decided to postpone the start of the central Abitur exams by three weeks to May 12, 2020. In doing so, we will provide extra school preparation time for students. It is not meant to be lessons according to timetable but rather targeted learning offers in

the respective examination subjects which students can make use of voluntarily. Because I know that there are also young people who, for various reasons, prefer preparing for their exams at home.

The postponement of the Abitur exams by three weeks also allows for conducting the so-called pre-Abitur exams (Vorabitur) which, due to school closures, some students at grammar and comprehensive schools, colleges of further education and vocational grammar schools have not had the chance of taking yet. The emergency care offer for years 1 to 6 will be maintained and opened up for other occupational groups.

During the process of cautiously reopening primary schools from May 4, 2020, fourth-grade pupils should be given priority. For them, the transition to secondary schools is due in the summer. In order to make this transition as smooth and successful as possible, they should be the first to be reintroduced to the classroom, although certainly in a different manner. However, this will also take place in classes of reduced sizes and, hence, partly with different teachers than before.

Because of the dynamic development of the situation these plans, initially, will remain in effect until May 4, 2020. After that, we want to react in analogy to the developments, which, at best, would make it possible to offer classes to more pupils of different grades or to students with a particular need for assistance. However, as long as there is a need to limit the size of student groups, there will be no return to normal operations. The range of classes will also be limited when further year groups will be added from May 4, 2020.

For this reason, different kinds of learning offers for students who have not yet returned to school will be increasingly important in the coming weeks. Yet, distance learning cannot and should not replace real lessons, the more so as we are aware that the prerequisites are neither comparable in schools nor in families. The teaching staff, and particularly teachers belonging to at-risk groups who are currently not teaching in the classroom, will provide learning offers. Such offers, however, should not aim at performance assessment or evaluation, but, above all, help your children prepare well for the time of school reattendance. I am sure that teachers will continue supporting your children with great commitment.

Dear parents,

I am aware that many questions might arise with regard to your personal situation and the key decisions applied in the coming days and weeks. As in all areas of life, we will have to continue planning ahead with caution in order to avoid a possible return to more serious restrictions.

In the coming days, we will continue to answer as many questions as possible in the FAQ list on the homepage of the Ministry of School and Education at www.schulministerium.nrw.de. A support offer can also be found on our school psychology website, to which we have currently added special information on the subject of school and corona (<http://schulpsychologie.nrw.de/schule-und-corona/eltern/index.html>).

I also assure you that we will do everything in our power to develop educational support in your children's interests which will increasingly lead to sustainable and reliable structures.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to thank you again for your commitment in the past weeks. I know that you are currently performing a balancing act between working, taking care of your children and supporting them with their homework! Therefore, I am extremely grateful for your careful support of your children in this difficult time.

Stay healthy!
Sincerely yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yvonne Gebauer', with a stylized, flowing script.

Yvonne Gebauer