



# **DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION**

## **Policy Concept (*Draft*)**

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## **I. The Need for the "Democracy and Human Rights Education" (DHRE) Policy Concept**

The goal of this Policy Concept is to contribute to the assessment of the situation in democracy and human rights education in the RA public education system and the solution of existing problems through the implementation of the RA State Program for Education Development 2016-2025.

The main task of the policy concept is to ensure carrying out the policy based on respect for and defense of democracy and human rights at all the levels of education: in public education administration, including development of students' self-government, in content definition, in improvement of text-book design, in preparing and training of teachers, in choice and application of teaching methods.

Thus, the policy concept terms and approaches aim at all the participants of the educational process in the educational institutions (students, parents, teachers and other pedagogical staff, administrative bodies, as well as representatives of authorized bodies of state educational institutions, of regional and local government bodies, involved in the council and consultation bodies), as well as institutional structures and experts that develop public school policies and content, NGOs, etc.

## **II. Introduction**

Democracy and human rights values are laid out in the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Armenia. These values also make up the basis of the educational documents, which is lawful, because democracy is not merely an administrative system. In the current situation it is the best way of organizing the social life and is the opportunity to support the further development of the humanity.

There are many political, economic, social, cultural, environmental problems today and their solutions are possible through innovative, inclusive and collaborative approaches. In many cases the traditional approaches and solutions are no longer sufficient. The small groups of the society today, however knowledgeable, active and influential may be, are not able to solve the existing problems alone. It is necessary to ensure awareness for wide circles of society, their participation through discovery, development and realization of competences of each group. Democracy, being based upon human rights and fundamental freedoms, forms a favorable environment to discover competences of society members by compelling them to serve to both personal development and solution of social problems.

Democratization can contribute to overcoming a number of global issues existing in modern times such as the rise of poverty and polarization, the growth of unemployment, uncontrollable flows of information, sustainable development and environmental problems.

A primary means of disseminating democratic traditions is education. Below we shall consider the role of education in solving the above-mentioned three issues.

- 1. Rise of poverty and polarization.** One of the most serious problems today is the continuous rise of poverty and the increase of the gap between wealthier and poorer social strata. It is possible to overcome such a polarization by making high-quality educational services available to poor social groups through democratic approaches.
- 2. Growth of unemployment.** As a result of the mechanization of multiple services, the number of the unemployed is continually growing. In many cases the reason for unemployment is the fact that the standardized knowledge taught to people is no longer in demand. In such a case it is very crucial to expose individual strengths of every learner, due to which he/she would be competitive in the labor market. To ensure such a development it is necessary to democratize education.
- 3. Uncontrollable flows of information.** As a result of IT development, information and knowledge became available and accessible to everybody. If this circumstance is not accompanied by democratization of working methods in educational institutions, the learners will simply cease to put their trust in educational institutions and will be considering them out-of-date. This will result in pushing the study process outside the educational institutions.
- 4. Sustainable development and environmental problems.** The recent economic reforms in the Republic of Armenia and the expansion of the international environmental cooperation scopes will reinforce the formation of a new ecology politics which will provide steadfast guarantees for the present and future generations to live a healthy and welfare life in an ecologically safe environment. Fulfillment of such a goal is a challenging and vital task, and it is impossible without development of environmental education, upbringing and awareness.

The educational system is the first public institution, where a person faces democratic and anti-democratic relations. Therefore reinforcement of democracy and human rights in these institutions can have an essential impact on the way the person thinks and lives.

It is important to realize that human rights and democracy cannot be merely viewed as a field of study or a school subject. DHRE is a complex system which can be inculcated only if the following three components are ensured:

1. Teaching **about** Human Rights and Democracy. This component assumes incorporation of the corresponding subjects, topics into the academic curriculum, into extra-curricular and extra-school activities.
2. Teaching **through** Human Rights and Democracy. This means that the educational process, interpersonal relationships should be built on respect towards democracy and human rights.
3. Teaching **for** Human Rights and Democracy. This component means that learners have knowledge, skills and convictions to apply human rights and democracy in their everyday life.

### **III. Democracy and Human Rights Education as an Important Component of Educational Reforms**

In the recent years significant legislative changes have been brought to life in the educational sphere, definite steps were made and a number of projects were carried out to democratize the administration system and to improve the content of education.

Among important achievements it is necessary to mark out decentralization of the public education, adoption of the curriculum framework, reflection of democracy and human rights in standards and textbooks, provision and implementation of the legislative basis of the inclusive education.

In the public education sphere of the Republic of Armenia the systematized work towards Human Rights and Democracy Education was preceded by general reforms that were realized during the first years of the formation of the independent state. These reforms were rather arbitrary and aimed at a temporary solution of a given problem, and even the principal document regulating school activity was a temporary charter.

In the state of war imposed on our newly independent country, when the Law on Education was not yet adopted, many problems were given situational solutions. The legislative gap was particularly filled with governmental decrees and ministerial orders, whereas the solution of education administration and content issues was adjusted through directives and guidance letters.

At the beginning of 1990s Social Studies, a subject that had a completely political orientation, was removed from the school curriculum. Marxist-Leninist ideology and methodology, too, was extracted from all the subjects. In 1992-1993, the first years of

independence, based on the recommendations of the Methodological Council under the Ministry of Education and Scientific Council of the Pedagogical Sciences Research Institute the following subjects were worked out and implemented to provide public school students with some conceptual knowledge: Introduction to Philosophy, Fundamentals of the State and the Law, Basics of Economics, Logics, and the training program “Basics of Ecology and Environment”. These subjects and the elective training program “Basics of Ecology and Environment” were introduced in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades. These subjects, despite their being complex and loaded with theoretical knowledge, had a positive impact on providing the sustainability of the Social Studies education and on the formation of democracy and human rights basics.

Legislative and content changes in public education were mainly carried out simultaneously and in parallel.

In 1997-2002 the school sample statute was reworked and in the 1999 RA Law on Education was adopted. New legal normative documents came into force, regulations of the school board, pedagogical council, parent association, board of trustees, student council and the orders of their formation were approved. These promoted new, effective ways of administration and financing that were more progressive from the human rights perspectives, namely formation and activities of the school councils, financing of schools according to the number of learners, and ultimately democratization of education. Educators and parents acquired an opportunity to freely participate in school administration; the school became accountable not only to its supervisor, but also to the community. These processes were significant for further democratization of the educational system, reinforcement of self-government mechanisms in educational institutions, allocation of the authorities of various administrative bodies.

A new achievement for the development in the sphere of democracy and human rights education was the introduction of such subjects as Human Rights (8<sup>th</sup> grade), Civic Education (9<sup>th</sup> grade) and The State and The Law (10<sup>th</sup> grade) as compulsory subjects in the 2001-2002 public school curriculum. They involved a list of required textbooks. Thus, the required study of the mentioned subjects through approved programs and textbooks continued till 2006, when there was a transition to the 12-year public education.

During the specified period the major project of reforms was the School Administration and Financing Loan Program supported by the World Bank. Besides, it aimed at reforming educational curricula, at school improvement and creation of textbook circulating system.

Development of Democracy and Human Rights Education content was greatly improved through “Secondary Education Curriculum Framework” approved by the RA government in 2004, a document which was entirely innovative in its nature. Adoption of the curriculum framework was unique also in terms of democratic approaches, public discussion extents and

geographical guarantees. In Armenia no policy concept document concerning right to and content of education had passed through such an extensive and profound, such a comprehensive public discussion prior introducing to the government.

On the basis of curriculum framework in 2004 “Secondary Education State Standard”, subject standards and curricula were elaborated and gradually put into practice. They served as basis for processing and publishing current and final assessment test collections, new generation textbooks and teacher manuals, including textbooks and teacher manuals of new secondary school subjects (“Me and My Surrounding”, “Homeland Studies” “Social Studies”, “Healthy Lifestyle”) directly related to Human Rights and Civic Education that are provided through framework curriculum which is a component of the standard. Achievements in the field of democracy and human rights education are the result of cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Science and international and local organizations. Prior to the regulated implementation of social studies subjects into the curriculum, a number of previously published manuals extended their positive impact. Particularly influential was the manual “Teaching Human Rights: Practical Activities for Primary and Secondary Schools” translated and published through sponsorship of the Armenian Center for Democracy and Human Rights on the initiative of the A.D.Sakharov Armenian Human Rights Center, Charity and Development Fund, National Endowment for US Democracy Support. Among the manuals translated into Armenian later, one can mark out the teacher manual “Human Rights” published through the support of the Norwegian Refugee Council and Catholic Relief Service, as well as the draft of the manual “A Child Meets Another Child. Convention and Rights of Children”, translated through the support of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

Another acquisition, important from the perspectives of Human Rights Education and Civic Education implementation, was the supplemental manual for elementary school teachers (grades 1-3): “Hello, it’s me. My rights and duties”, approved by the MoES in 2000 and also published through the support of the Norwegian Refugee Council. In addition to publication of the mentioned textbooks, in the field of Human Rights and Democracy Education significant progress was ensured through the UN Children’s Fund supported program that was carried out to implement the subject “Life Skills” in schools, as well as through school and teacher training programs realized by Norwegian Refugee Council, OSF, Armenian Constitutional Right and Protection Center, Project Harmony, Junior Achievements of Armenia and other organizations; the evaluations of this are given in the report “Baseline Study on Human Rights Education” (UNDP, Yerevan 2005). 2008 was marked with launching the “Project Citizen” community learning program in Armenian schools, which was designed for the integrated subject “Social Studies” of RA secondary schools and later became a required practical work for Social Studies.

With regard to this policy concept, of great value and interest was the work of designing the Human Rights Education Action Plan launched in 2008. Within the working project of creating the Human Rights Education Action Plan in 2008, in response to the initiative of UN Human Rights High Commissioner directed to Human Rights Education situation in elementary and middle schools, RA Ministry of Education and Science assured that Armenia would join that initiative and that the Ministry would begin working on the Action Plan of Human Rights Education in school educational system. In a letter to the High Commissioner the Ministry informed, that responsibility for elaborating the Action Plan will be assumed by the National Institute of Education (NIE) and that a special working group, composed of NIE two collaborators and a MoES collaborator, was formed to draw the Action Plan. It was supposed that donors would aid to accelerate the process and would ensure compliance to the international standards. A document was drawn to outline UNDP vision and UNDP steps in assisting the joint process with national and international organizations, in enhancing competencies of the corresponding national partners/ beneficiaries and in ensuring proper quality of the “outcome”. Though Human Rights Education Action Plan has to cover all the spheres from elementary schools and public schools to practical educational programs in the working places and training manuals for judicial, civil and community servants, UNDP suggested starting the initial stage from the school educational program.

The present stage of reforms started in 2009 and is now carried out primarily through Secondary Education Quality and Relevance Project. The project carried out in this phase involves not only elementary school and public education sectors, but also higher professional education. It aims at ensuring availability of pre-school education, at establishment of separately operating high schools and enhancement of their capacities, at teacher professional development, at improvement of teacher training and at higher education reforms.

It should be noted that, in addition to the above activities, in 2010 Armenia also joined the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, the goal of which is to be an additional impetus for promoting DHRE in EU countries. This was followed by preparing an evaluation study of the human-rights-based approach and analytical report on the situation of Human Rights Education and elaboration of Education content in the RA public education system carried out according to the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 15.07.2011 between UN Development Program in Armenia and RA Ministry of Education and Science.

Work on this report was preceded by compiling corresponding questionnaires and development of evaluation standards and criteria. The text-books and documents analyzed and

evaluated on the whole during this period were: 10 normative legal acts, 131 textbooks of 1-11 grades, 12 teacher and class master manuals, 2 readers, 5 teacher training programs, manual and guidelines, 1 collection of current assessment tests, 1 student handbook for practical work.

Proposals developed in the result of the analysis are still relevant and assigned to the education state administration authorized body- the Ministry of Education and Science, to its various departments—the National Institute of Education and the Center of Education Projects, to the Textbooks Revolving Fund and people involved in creating textbooks, i.e. authors of the educational materials, heads of the publishing houses and printing specialists, members of the committees examining textbooks, as well as higher and middle level professional pedagogical institutions, organizations dealing with trainings for practicing teachers (including NGOs), experts in teaching methodology, scientists, instructors of pedagogical high schools, school administrations and school councils, teachers, student councils and parent associations (including parents and learners).

The results achieved at the present stage of public education reforms are introduced in the following section of the Policy Concept.

#### **IV. The Current State of Democracy and Human Rights Education**

*Legislative basis.* According to the RA Law on Public Education adopted by the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia in 2009, the public education sphere is regulated by the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, RA Law on Education, RA Law on Elementary Education, RA Law on the Education of Persons with Special Education Needs, and RA Law on State Non-profit Organizations. The Law on Public Education contains a provision stating that if international treaties of the Republic of Armenia define norms other than those stipulated by this Law, the international treaties shall be applied. A further Law to regulate the sphere is the RA Law verifying the State Program for Education Development 2011-2015, adopted in 2011 by RA National Assembly. In public education, organizational basis for state policy is provided by the state program for education development. The law specifies that the state policy is implemented by ensuring democratic and secular nature of education. It is prohibited to carry out political activities or propaganda in educational institutions. Public education of the national minorities in the Republic of Armenia can be organized through their native language or national language with mandatory study of the Armenian language. Regardless their affiliation and ownership, all the educational institutions realizing the RA public education programs, are part of the public education.

Goals of the state policy principles of public education are completely consistent with requirement and approaches of international documents on human rights. According to the RA Law, the state guarantees and oversees:

- 1) the humanitarian nature of public education; priority of national and universal values, human life and health, free and comprehensive development of an individual; emphasis on civic consciousness; respect to individual rights; fostering dignity, patriotism, diligence, responsibility, tolerance, environmental worldview;
- 2) equal opportunity and accessibility, continuity, consequentiality of public education and its compliance with the level of development, peculiarities and level of preparedness of learners;
- 3) ensuring the principles of democratic governance in the field of public education;
- 4) fostering creativity in educational institutions; priority of learners' analytical and critical thinking, independent acquisition and application of knowledge, development of information technology usage skills;
- 5) continuous improvement of public education quality, compliance with international standards, as well as integration into the international education system;
- 6) balancing autonomy of the educational institutions and state control supervision;
- 7) equal rights of learners and employees of the educational institutions and schools despite the institution's organizational-legal form;
- 8) concordance between the public education and other educational programs.

For the first time in RA the rights of the learners, educators and parents were thoroughly specified by law. In the educational institutions the learners have equal rights and responsibilities that are defined by the law and regulations of the educational institution. One of the rights emphasized among others is the right to choose an educational institution and the form of study, as well as the faculty in an educational institution, with the parent's consent. In terms of human and children's rights valuable are the following provisions of the Law on Public Education:

- the right of the learner to be protected from any physical and psychological pressure, abuse, such actions or inactions of the educators or other employees and learners, that violate the learner's rights or encroach upon their honor and dignity;
- the right to participate in the educational institution's governance ;
- the right to free inquiry and access to any information except for cases provided by the law;
- the right to freely express own opinions and convictions;

- the right to enjoy other rights specified by the law and regulations of the educational institution.

In the context of human rights and children's rights one should also mention the learners' right for health care, the articles encouraging their awareness of it, which describe the right for medical aid and services to be morally and materially encouraged.

Awareness of the rights and responsibilities of educators and parents, laid out in the legislation in detail, is also important for analysis and assessment of the educational sphere and values. RA Law on Public Education shall be considered from the viewpoint of possibilities for free activity.

The Law defines the right of the educator:

- to freely participate in the educational institution's administration;
- to participate in discussing and resolving issues related to the academic process;
- to participate in trainings, symposiums, debates and hearings;
- to create organizations, trade unions or to join them to advocate their interests, in the order regulated by the legislation of the Republic of Armenia;
- to elect and be elected in the relevant positions and in relevant administrative bodies;
- to be protected from such activities of students, educators and other employees, that would undermine his/her professional reputation and dignity.

In the issues relating to the content of education the educator has the right to:

- make suggestions on improvement of subject standards, curricula, textbooks;
- freely choose and apply such methods and ways of teaching that ensure high quality of the educational process;
- use his/her judgment textbooks and teaching materials, manuals and methods of assessing learners' knowledge, skills and competencies, guaranteed by the state authorized body.

Equally important are the educator's obligations towards the students, their parents, and the results of his/her own work. Thus, the educator is obliged to:

- respect and protect learners' rights and freedoms, their honor and dignity;
- promote the child's right to education, taking into account each child's peculiarities of educational needs;

- provide mandatory minimum learning by the students of the program content required by the public education state standard while applying more effective teaching methods and modern technologies; cooperate with parents in organizing children's education and family education (upbringing), and carry out other duties based on the nature of his/her activities.

In terms of ensuring democracy and human rights, notable is the clear and almost comprehensive definition of the rights and responsibilities of the learner's parent in the legislative act regulating the sphere of education. Under the RA Law on Education the learner's parent has the right to choose the educational institution and the form of education for the training of his/her child and to participate in the administration of the educational institution and in assessment of its activities. The parent can freely address the relevant authorities in the issues of the child's development, education and training; protect his/her and the child's legitimate interests before those bodies. From the perspective of ensuring and protecting the child's rights, parents are first and foremost obliged to:

- provide adequate conditions for acquiring education, to constantly care for the child's physical health and mental state;
- create a favorable environment for the development of the child's endowments and abilities and to meet the child's educational needs;
- respect the child's dignity;
- cultivate diligence, kindness, amicability, tolerance, compassion, respect for the family, seniors, state and native language, national traditions and customs;
- nurture respect for the country and for national, historical, and cultural values, caring attitude towards historical-cultural heritage and towards the environment and cultural wealth, a tolerant attitude towards other peoples and cultures;
- cultivate respect towards the educational institution and educators.

The most up-to-date document describing the current situation of education, including public education, is the "State Program for Education Development 2011-2015", which is built on 3 main provisions:

1. maximum ensuring of access to education
2. ensuring education quality
3. assessment of the effectiveness of education

From the point of view of the human right to education, the document contains an objective analysis of the carried out reforms and defines realistic goals. The program states: "...the educational system is still far from the complete and full realization of its mission, whereas new challenges have emerged, the overcoming of which will decide the future of education". The problems of the education quality improvement and provision of equal access to education for citizens according to their aspirations and abilities have gained primary importance. The educational system is greatly characterized by the rates of involvement in education, based on which one can judge on the availability of educational services for this or that social group. According to the education development program, in terms of accessibility the most vulnerable of education levels is elementary education. In order to create equal starting conditions for children's comprehensive development and school education, the government is undertaking steps to drive the involvement of the pre-school age group (5-6 years old) up to 90% by 2015 through introducing cost-effective educational services. In this process priority is given to the poor families and to those communities, where pre-school institutions do not function.

The program notes that there is no significant problem of enrollment in public education and that total enrollment in secondary education is relatively high. In recent years it was in average about 90%. Enrollment in basic education in 2009 was 92.1%, which is homogeneous in terms of regional, gender and poverty groups. In this sense there are no significant inequalities. However, compared to primary school there is a difference in enrollment of poor and not poor populations in high schools. The total number of enrollment in high school of the wealthiest group is 1.3 times higher than that of the poorest group, since the majority of those who leave the educational system after completing primary school are poor. This, however, does not mean at all that they remain outside the realm of education; a part of them continues their education in the pre-professional and vocational/specialized training institutions.

In the sense of involvement in high school education there exists also a disproportion of involvement as to gender. According to statistics, boys predominate among students of elementary and middle schools. In high schools, however, where the number of girl students increases, the situation is different. This proves that after acquiring fundamental education it is boys who most frequently leave schools.

The Program also introduces availability of education for children with special needs, which not only directly refers to the right to education, but also excludes any discrimination. It is noted that the enrollment data of children with special needs are not complete. According to rough estimation there are about 8000 children with special needs in the republic, while the number of children enrolled in special public education institutions and inclusive education is

about 4000. Since the system of detecting children with special needs and inclusive education is not widely implemented yet, it is impossible to say definitely, whether these children remain outside the sphere of education or attend public education institutions, however are not officially recognized as having special needs.

From the viewpoint of ensuring children's right to education the increase in the number of children not attending school has become especially alarming in recent years. According to the results of the study of learners' absenteeisms, the cases of school dropouts have been relatively small as compared to other developed and developing countries, however, they have been rising from year to year. The causes of these phenomena need further study and they need to be prevented, since Armenia has determined to reach 99% of the total enrollment in primary schools and 95% in high schools as its 2nd goal of the millennium development by 2015.

Rating of textbooks in the education development state program also merits mentioning. In particular, Subparagraph 10 of Article 2.5 notes that "the quality of textbooks needs improvement in terms of content." Remarkable is also the fact that, in the national context of ensuring education development, the program fixes the principle of "strengthening independent statehood and developing a civil society" as one of the main objectives. Taking into consideration the importance of this matter for our study, Paragraph 73 of Article 3 of the program is cited in full: "73. Strengthening of independent statehood and developing a civic society. The Republic of Armenia is undergoing a challenging process of establishing its statehood and building a civic society. In this process raising of the new generation has a tremendous importance. The objective of the educational system is to develop an active citizen, who will be a bearer of national values combined with the progressive culture of the civic society".

As with many other state program documents, here, too, education is viewed among the main priorities of poverty reduction and of welfare increase. The provisions in the strategic approaches, set out in the program, especially emphasize promoting cooperation and participation in all the areas of education; receiving civil society support; ensuring equal opportunities for affordable and qualified education for citizens; fair distribution of resources.

The process of cooperation and participation in the strategic approaches is made complete through the following crucial provision: "95. This will simultaneously expand possibilities of participation of the civil society, of business community, as well as of each representative of the educational system in the education administration and implementation of projects".

The problem of improving educational content and standards, which is also mentioned among education development priorities, is of great significance. Priorities of importance of teaching certain secondary school subjects, applying modern teaching methods, developing

learners' collaborative, explorative, creative abilities and skills, are clearly defined here. Paragraph 5 of Article 101 of the Program is also crucial: "In order to improve the content quality of the textbooks, professional support will be provided for groups of authors and publishers of textbooks; based on the best international experience, guidelines for developing textbooks will be created"; while from the perspective of democracy, human rights and child's rights, provision 6 is essential, which states the importance of "encouraging community activity of public education and other educational institutions, learners' participation in solving community problems".

*The current situation in educational institutions from the perspective of democracy and human rights.* The results of the current situation study prove that the first of the main problems is ensuring democratic governance of the educational institution. Though advisory mechanisms of democratic governance (collegial management body: the board, students' council, parent association, pedagogical council, etc) have been created in the public education institutions of the Republic of Armenia, the effectiveness of these mechanisms is low. The board is the collegial body of public education administration which due to its authority determined by the RA legislation can palpably contribute to the process of school democratization. In particular, it is the board that elects the school headmaster the latter being accountable before the council for his/her activity in a number of areas. The existence of the board, however, is mainly superficial. The process of the board formation is not transparent and participatory. The board is usually active during the election of the school headmaster (and the election of the headmaster is often directed). The board does not consider itself an authorized body, which can demand and ensure the headmaster's accountability. As a rule, the board tacitly accepts any decision or recommendation of the headmaster. The board members show no interest in contributing their efforts and time to the work of the board. Furthermore, the student council is the circle that can contribute to improving democratic governance of educational institutions through making learners' opinion audible, as well as thorough the protection of their rights. The activity of the student councils, however, has a number of serious shortcomings. In particular, during the elections of the student councils and the presidents of the councils, the learners' right to equal opportunities is often violated. The cases are numerous when the teachers or school administration interfere and direct the election process through direct or indirect means. Teachers' and administration's intervention in elections mainly takes place for the purpose of formation controllable and "presentable" student councils. The scope of student council activities in Armenian schools is extremely limited. The activity of the students' council is mainly reduced to organizing cultural events. The student councils usually do not use their advisory voice in the

school councils; they are too passive in the development and implementation of norms regulating the school's internal life and in practice do not represent and protect learners' rights and interests. The examples of student council's involvement in the process of solving community problems are extremely rare. School administrations do not take active steps to expand the area of student council activities and to make their role in the school life more meaningful. Activity of the students' councils is more or less effective in those schools which have been at the origins of the formation of student councils in the schools of the republic.

Parent associations can also have a significant part in controlling the quality of a public education institution, as well as contribute to the increase of school administration efficiency serving as a link between the school and the outside world. The activity of parent associations, however, has a number of shortcomings. Parents included in a parent association are usually too passive. They are mostly not aware of parent association's competences and are reluctant to bring forward their legitimate requirements, when needed. Members of parent associations show no interest in donating their efforts and time to the association's work. School headmasters often intervene in the process of parent association formation. As a result, the parent association, as well as representatives of the parent association, in the school board manifest their loyalty to the school headmaster. Parents involved in parent associations consider their membership as a lever to protect the interests of their own child rather than as a means to solve general problems of the students. The problems with the mentioned associations in high school are much deeper.

Educational programs (eg. short-term courses), which would train teaching and administrative staff, students of public education institutions as well as parents to have an active participation in school advisory bodies, are rare in Armenia.

## **V. Priorities in Democracy and Human Rights Education**

The School is an institution with numerous interested parties. The School's effective functioning is possible only in the case when all the interested parties (the state, learners, parents, teachers, administrators, society) operate on the basis of democracy and human rights. The School is a sensitive structure and neglecting any of the involved parties would create impediments. An effective functioning of the school can be reached only through mutual respect and participatory approach.

DHRE is particularly important for learners. While at school, learners will inevitably encounter problems of making mistakes, taking risks and expecting assistance and care. Learners will avoid these unique educational requirements, if they do not feel that school culture is ready

to respect their rights. Therefore, DHRE is not simply a subject to study. It can have a unique impact on the study process.

While attaching importance to DHRE programs carried out so far, we suggest the following conceptual provisions to improve the situation, as well as certain steps that will lead to the desired outcomes:

**1. While designing the major educational programs and in the process of developing state standards to ensure priority of DHRE in all the levels of education- from elementary to higher professional education.**

Experience proves that effectiveness of this step is possible through close cooperation of relevant state structures and major interested parties, including representatives of the civil society, and active participation of the students.

DHRE planning should include a more tangible, practical approach based upon defining the main rights, needs and requirements of the alumni, learners, students of the educational institution and upon determining the priorities of these rights and needs. It is this approach that should serve as means for drawing up the curriculum. Special attention should be paid to the problem of students with special educational needs, a factor that gains more importance in connection with the transition to general inclusive education in RA.

While planning DHRE, it is essential to take into consideration the following provisions:

- 1) The goal of DHRE is support and implementation of such activities that aim at ensuring democratic governance and realization of the rights of all parties involved in and connected with the educational institution (alumni, learners, students, teachers, professors, administrative staff, maintenance staff, parents).
- 2) The DHRE program is the framework and an integral part of each general curriculum and its implementation reinforces the potential of all those individuals and organizations that are responsible for the protection of human rights. The result of realization of this program will be contribution to establishing a civil society and developing a democratic state.
- 3) It is necessary to plan the expected results, which should be measurable.
- 4) In order to ensure the effectiveness of DHRE sufficient human and financial resources should be provided.

**2. To organize activity of the educational institution and to carry out education process based on DHRE:**

- 1) DHRE can and should be implemented from pre-school age through wide cooperation of all the interested parties: state education policy makers, state administration and local government bodies, education experts, self-government bodies of educational institutions, parents, learners and high school students, NGOs, youth organizations and the media, providing a systematic approach.
- 2) In carrying out their activities the educational institutions, regardless of their status, structure, ownership, jurisdiction or any other circumstances, are not only obliged to ensure human rights and democratic principles, but also to make every endeavor to encourage active participation, own merit demonstration, communication, joint work and cooperation of children and students at each level of education.
- 3) In actions aimed at disciplining in educational institutions, insults to learners' and educators' dignity and the neglect of their basic rights should be excluded.

In order to realize the mentioned policy concept provisions it is necessary:

- a) to create such an environment in the educational institutions that will guarantee protection of fundamental rights to life, health, recreation for children, learners, students, teachers and staff. This process implies providing a healthy social environment, creating opportunities for physical activity and recreation organization during breaks and after school, ensuring proper heating conditions, healthy food provision, encouraging behavior solely consistent with a healthy lifestyle. Thus, comprehensive treatment should be demonstrated towards students, giving importance not only to creating the necessary conditions for academic development, but also for healthcare, physical, emotional, social and spiritual development.
- b) to carry out appropriate activities in public education institutions to fully realize a child's rights to education and freedom of expression; to ensure access to public education for all learners; in particular, to ensure all children's attendance to school; to make facilities of school buildings, libraries, electronic resources available to all learners; to ensure cooperative and accountable approach in working with the children's families.
- c) to shape a distinct culture of open thinking and relationship among the administrative bodies, teachers and parents of the educational institutions, where all the participants of the educational process can freely express their views and positions. In order to bring this

provision to life, learners should be viewed as crucial participants of the educational process, ensuring their involvement in administration of the educational institution and educational processes, as well as in community life. In particular, personal responsibility should be cultivated instead of adaptiveness, in everyday relationships learner's interests should be taken into account and in creating public good everyone's participation should be stressed.

d) to evaluate learners comprehensively; not to make judgments based solely on academic results; to discover and develop students' talents, to grant them an opportunity to demonstrate their abilities and to contribute to their professional orientation; to build relationships with children and students based on their strengths, by supporting their overall development potential.

e) to view democracy and human rights education as the basis of the learning process, ensuring its inclusion in all the levels and areas of learning. In particular, DHRE should be started from pre-school age.

f) to respect individual differences in students' learning processes and use them to create a rich, diverse and complementary environment; to ensure a variety of methods which will enable various learning ways.

g) to include DHRE topics in selection of educators and in granting certification and qualification degrees to them, and to evaluate teachers' achievements in DHRE; to include DHRE-related mandatory topics in all the subjects of teachers' professional development courses and in training programs for lecturers, as well as employees of education governance field; to conduct professional development workshops on communication, cooperation, decision-making, for educators and employees of education governance bodies, which would enable cultivating a democratic working method.

h) in various professional contests to take into consideration the factor of applying DHRE-based teaching methods in evaluation of teaching process and work of educators.

### **3. In defining the content of DHRE to take into consideration the need to develop core competencies for each age group**

While developing competences it should be taken into account that:

- 1) A part of competence components are relevant to every age group and even adult.
- 2) Developed competences can be mastered not only in the period of study in an academic institution, but also in an informal environment outside the educational institution.
- 3) In DHRE sector, the main competences must be developed in accordance with educational content with the emphasis on:
  - knowledge and understanding (a learner has been informed, knows and can explain, for example, *Human rights principles and the child's rights*);
  - attitude and values (a learner's actions and behavior demonstrate, for example, a lively interest in issues on justice in human rights and society)
  - abilities and skills (a learner is able to, for example, cooperate with other people (children and learners) in the matters of protecting human rights and democratic values)
- 4) The most core competencies are interconnected and none of them has priority over other competences.

**4. To ensure implementation of topics related to democracy and human rights not only in the content of Social Studies, but also in the general education, in order to achieve expected outcomes of the mentioned competences and education content.**

In particular, it is necessary:

- a. first of all to provide standard level of topics (classes) related to human rights, tolerance and civic education in academic curriculum and subjects in public education institutions; to include DHRE-related issues in subject standards and curriculum; to ensure appropriate level of DHRE in Social Studies and other Humanity subjects taught in elementary, middle and high school.
- b. to teach competence skills required in the modern world, to ensure graduates' full civic and professional participation in social life. It is important to build the learning content on the concepts of interconnection, interdependence and coexistence values and students' being and important participator of the process of creating the social good.
- c. to afford opportunities not only for theoretic understanding of democratic values and human rights, but also for development of practical skills that will contribute to sustaining DHRE through participation in community-life-related social projects.

**5. To improve and enhance DHRE evaluation both from the perspective of learners' performance and of activity of educational institutions”:**

- a. in terms of DHRE to create mechanisms of mastering subject standards and curriculum and of monitoring and continuous improvement of outcomes.
- b. to implement up-to-date multifactorial forms of evaluating learners' knowledge, skills, abilities and performance, using various assessment tools, including tests, essays, group work, project development and realization, interviewing, self-assessment and evaluation of the work of others, etc., which will enable a versatile demonstration of the child's, learner's, student's skills and abilities.
- c. to involve learners and their self-government bodies in preparation and realization of evaluating DHRE process by providing analysis of their own work and transparency of evaluation.
- d. in terms of DHRE to provide external evaluation and monitoring of secondary school education by involving NGOs and mass media.
- e. to determine an annual DHRE Week which will include competitions and reviews.

**6. To carry out legislative initiatives in order to ensure democratic governance of the educational institutions and to improve democracy- and human- rights-based education.**

In particular, it is necessary to ensure:

- a. designing of each educational institution development program according to the introduced DHRE policy concept;
- b. accountability of the educational institution executing administrative bodies in terms of fulfillment of annual work plan of the institution;
- c. improving the effectiveness of the activity of the educational institution collegial body, the board, and reviewing the order of its formation to raise its accountability, through legislative changes;
- d. publicity of the council sessions of the educational institution and of the taken decisions;
- e. full accomplishing of the statutory requirements related to the current activity of the educational institution;
- f. inclusion of democratic government index in the system of internal and external assessment of the educational institution;
- g. regulation of parents' participation in the process of lesson hearings and education-disciplining activities.

## **7. Expected outcomes:**

As a result of the implementation of this policy concept we will have educational institutions, where:

### **1. The fundamental human rights are respected.**

The relations of governing bodies, teachers, lecturers and learners of the educational institution are based on respecting human rights.

### **2. There are involved and participating learners.**

The learners are involved in the life of the educational institution, their voices are heard, and they have an impact on the decisions related to their educational environment.

### **3. Learners have revealed their potential and are ready to use it for the public good.**

With the assistance of their teachers, fellow-learners and self-government body, the learners have revealed their strengths (both academic and non-academic) and are ready to use them for the public.

### **4. The teachers, lecturers and headmasters effectively communicate and collaborate with learners.**

Educators are able to listen to the learners, to consider issues from the perspective of the learners and to contribute to their comprehensive growth.

### **5. The decisions of the educational institution are reached by the participatory principle.**

The environment in the educational institution is the one where teachers and learners express their views and positions. Their voices are heard.

### **6. There is an effective partnership platform.**

The participants and interested parties of the educational process of the educational institution-learners, teachers, school government bodies, parents, public and state structures in cooperation promote strengthening of democracy and human rights in the institution and community.

## **VI. Final provisions**

In order to realize the provisions of this policy concept the RA Ministry of Education and Science shall draw up projects and programs that would find their place in the next RA state program of education development and be implemented in the coming five years.

The above projects should be realized in the following directions:

- 1) To ensure government-sponsored policy and support in democracy and human rights field, expecting to make apparent the humanitarian nature of education, national and universal values, the priorities of human life and health, freedom and comprehensive development of an individual, giving importance to civic consciousness, respect for the individual and his rights and freedoms, dignity, patriotism, diligence, responsibility, tolerance, formation of ecological outlook.
- 2) To improve the content of DHRE and training, balancing autonomy and self-governance of the institutions, taking into account the existing challenges.
- 3) To involve various social groups and organizations, creating an atmosphere of cooperation and ensuring overall participation in the process of DHRE.