



## Education in Ras Al Khaimah and the United Arab Emirates

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### Historical Development of Education in the United Arab Emirates<sup>2</sup>

The earliest forms of education in the sheikdoms of the Arabian Gulf<sup>3</sup> were the *katateeb* –extensions of education in mosques, which focused on Islamic teachings and the basics of reading and writing (AlNaqbi, 2009). At this time students, primarily young boys, were taught by the local *mutawa'a*, a religious preacher, or the *fiqi*, a visiting religious teacher (Ridge, 2009). At the end of the nineteenth century, there was a fundamental shift in education as the region experienced greater wealth following a boom in the local pearling industry.

With the new wealth from pearling, demand for education increased. In 1912, the first private schools in the Trucial States opened in Dubai and Sharjah (Davidson, 2008). These schools were independent initiatives started by pearl traders who had been exposed to modern schools during their travels (AlNaqbi, 2009). By the 1920s, many of the Trucial States had opened schools using curricula and teachers from nearby Arab nations, which began the shift towards the more secular and vocational education that exists today (UAE Ministry of Education [MOE], 2013; Davidson, 2008). However, these early developments were stifled when the pearling industry collapsed in the 1940s (Davidson, 2008).

<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank Hanadi Mohammed Ali for her help collecting updated data for this report.

<sup>2</sup> This section on the historical development of the UAE is largely adopted from *Education and the Reverse Gender Divide in the Gulf States: Embracing the Global, Ignoring the Local* (Ridge, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> The sheikdoms of the Arabian Gulf were later known as the Trucial States and eventually as the United Arab Emirates.



By the 1950s, the economic situation had improved and schooling began to expand. This was done with the support of Kuwait's Sheikh Abdullah Salem al Sabah, as he sought to develop the Trucial States' education system through providing curricular support and funding for expatriate teachers (Davidson, 2008). The funding from Sheikh Abdullah Salem al Sabah also led to the opening of the country's first modern public school in Sharjah in 1953 (UAE MOE, 2013; Ridge, 2013).

While some schools were funded by Kuwait, additional schools were established by other nations such as Bahrain, Egypt, India, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar in the 1960s (see Box 1 for an overview of the significant impact Egypt has had on the UAE education system) (Bahgat, 1999; Brooks, Fuller, & Waters, 2012; Davidson, 2008; Suliman, 2000). Typically, the countries that financially backed the schools also staffed them and used their own texts and curricula. Despite the establishment of several schools during this time period, education was still typically only available to children from privileged backgrounds (Ridge, 2009).

After the formation of the UAE in 1971, the Ministry of Education (MOE) was formally established, creating the national education system. That same year, His Excellency Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi was appointed the first Minister of Education (see Table 1 for a list of past ministers). At this time, the newly created MOE began to unify the nation's diverse mix of schools and consolidated 47 schools that had previously been run by Kuwait and other entities (Ridge, 2009; Suliman, 2000). Basic education was also made compulsory for all children (Ridge, 2014). As part of the continued effort to standardize the education system, the MOE launched the country's National Curriculum Project in 1979, and a national curriculum was implemented by 1985 (Ridge, 2009).

Since the UAE's establishment, the continued development of the education system has been a key priority for the government. Considerable investments have been made to address the educational needs of the nation, and many notable transformations have taken place as a result. In 1992, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR) was established to oversee the higher education sector as well

### Box 1. Egypt and the UAE Public Education System

While many different curricula were imported to the UAE in the early days of education, the Egyptian model had the greatest influence on the country's national education system (Findlow, 2001). When the UAE started to modernize its education system in the early 1970s, it did not have an internal model for modern education and needed to bring in external educational advisors to counsel the rulers of the emirates (Findlow, 2001). Egyptians were selected for these advisory roles due to Egypt's more established education sector as well as because their curriculum was perceived to offer a more "localized" education than the Western models (Findlow, 2001).

In addition to advisory roles, many Egyptians migrated to the UAE to become teachers. These teachers brought with them their teacher-centered approaches to teaching and learning (Davidson, 2008). Historically, many Egyptian teachers came to the Gulf region as contract workers hired through the Egyptian Ministry of Education, but that has since changed. Although remnants of the Egyptian curriculum can still be found in the UAE's public education system, it is the enduring presence of Egyptian teachers and their teaching styles that are most influential (Ridge, Shami, & Kippels, 2017).

**Table 1. Ministers of Education in the UAE (1971-Present)**

Year	Minister
1971-1973	Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi
1973-1979	Abdullah Omran Taryam
1979-1983	Saeed Salman
1983-1990	Faraj Fadhel Al Mazrouei
1990-1997	Hamad Abdul Rahman Al Midfa
1997-2004	Ali Abdul Aziz al Sharhan
2004-2006	Sheikh Nehyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan
2006-2009	Hanif Hasan Ali Al Qassim
2009-2014	Humaid Mohammed Obaid Al Qatami
2014-Present	Hussain Ibrahim Al Hammadi

Source: UAE Cabinet, 2016

as scientific research policies (UAE MOE, 2016a). However, in 2016, the structure of the education system was changed and the MOHESR was combined with the Ministry of Education to form one Ministry responsible for all levels of education. His Excellency Hussain bin Ibrahim Al Hammadi, the 10th Minister of Education, described part of the motivation behind the merger as being to encourage greater cooperation through aligning the “thinking and culture” of schools and higher education institutions (Pennington, 2016, p. 1).

## The K-12 School System in the UAE

The education system in the UAE is comprised of both a public (government) and private sector. However, there are also semi-government schools operating in the country (see Appendix A on the Abu Dhabi Centre for Technical & Vocational Education and Training (ACTVET) and Appendix B on Emirates National Schools). The private school sector in the UAE is currently growing at a faster rate than the public sector. In 2010-11, 39% of schools were private and 61% were public (UAE

MOE, 2010). However, by the 2014-15 academic year, the percentage of private schools had increased to 45% while the percentage of public schools had decreased to 55%. This trend is most pronounced in Dubai, where there are more than two private schools for every public school (see Figure 1). Like Dubai, Abu Dhabi also has more private than public schools, which is in contrast to the rest of the UAE where public schools still outnumber private schools.

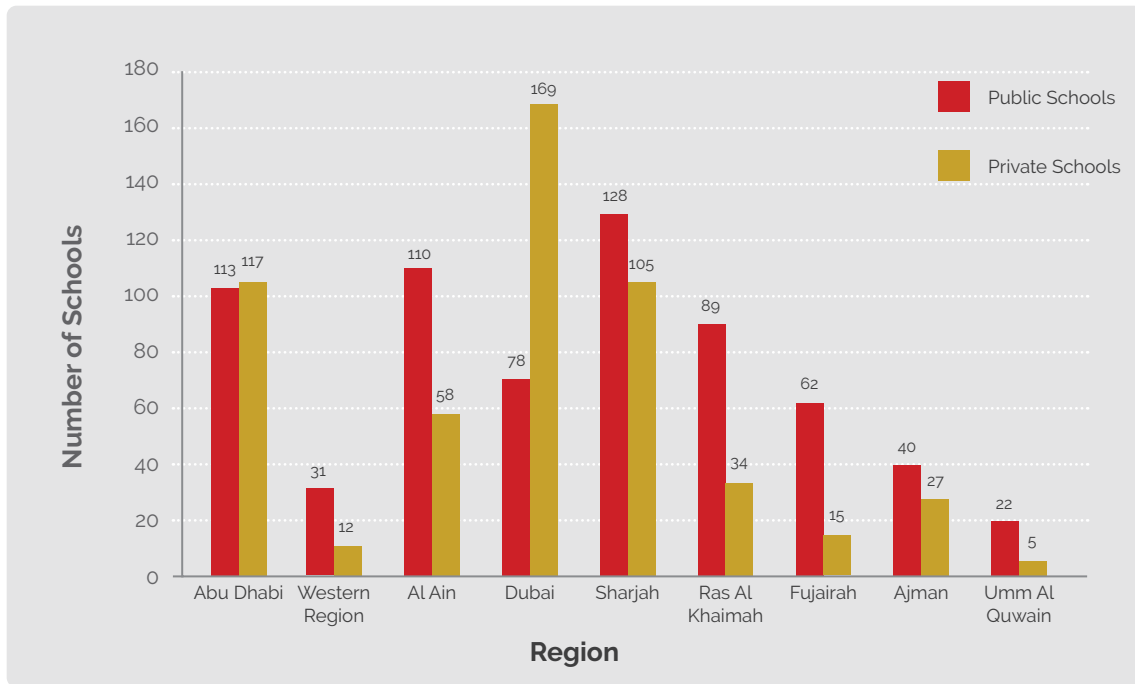
There are substantial differences in the student demographics of public and private schools. During the 2014-15 academic year, 81% (223,000) of all public school students were Emirati, with the majority of the remaining 19% (51,100) being comprised largely of expatriate Arabs (see Figure 2). This is primarily due to Arabic being the medium of instruction in public schools (Abu Dhabi eGovernment, 2016; UAE Government, 2016; UAE MOE, 2015).

Although Emiratis currently comprise the majority of public school students, they are also attending private schools in increasing numbers.

There were approximately 113,000 Emirati students enrolled in the private system during the 2014-15 school year, and they made up approximately 17% of all private school students (see Figure 2). This growth has been particularly pronounced in Dubai,

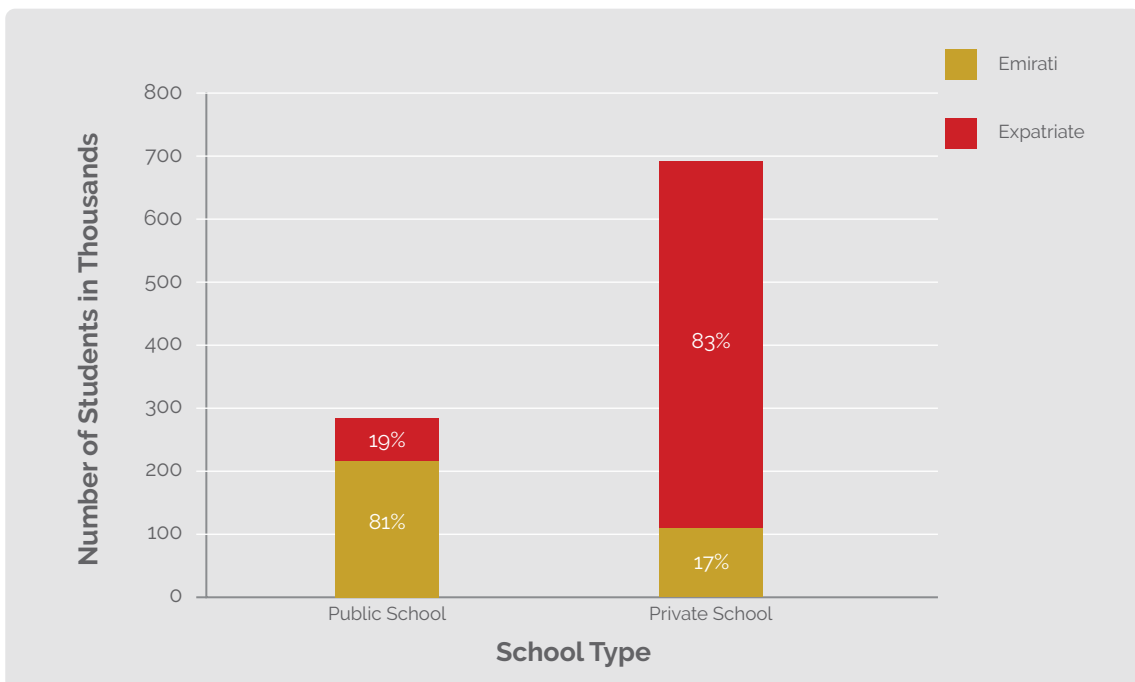
where from 2003 to 2010 there was a 75% increase in the enrollment rate of Emirati students in private schools (Knowledge and Human Development Authority [KHDA], 2011).

**Figure 1. School Types Across the UAE, by Region (2014-15)**



Source: UAE MOE, 2015

**Figure 2. Student Nationalities in Public and Private Schools Across the UAE (2014-15)**



Source: UAE MOE, 2015

## Public Schools in the UAE

Public schools in the UAE are single-sex and the primary language of instruction is Arabic. They are divided into a four-tier system covering 14 years of education: kindergarten (KG1 - KG2), primary (Cycle 1, Grades 1–5), preparatory (Cycle 2, Grades 6–9), and secondary (Cycle 3, Grades 10–12) (UAE Government, 2016).

### Regulatory Framework and Structure

The MOE regulates public education in Dubai and the Northern Emirates (Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras Al Khaimah, Sharjah, and Umm Al Quwain). However, in Abu Dhabi, the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), which was established in 2005, oversees both public and private schools (Abu Dhabi Education Council [ADEC], 2016). All emirates, except Abu Dhabi, have an "Education Zone" that coordinates relations between the federal MOE and local public schools. In the past, these Education Zones were responsible for the supervision and implementation of federal and local policies and for supporting administrative staff. However, their responsibilities have recently

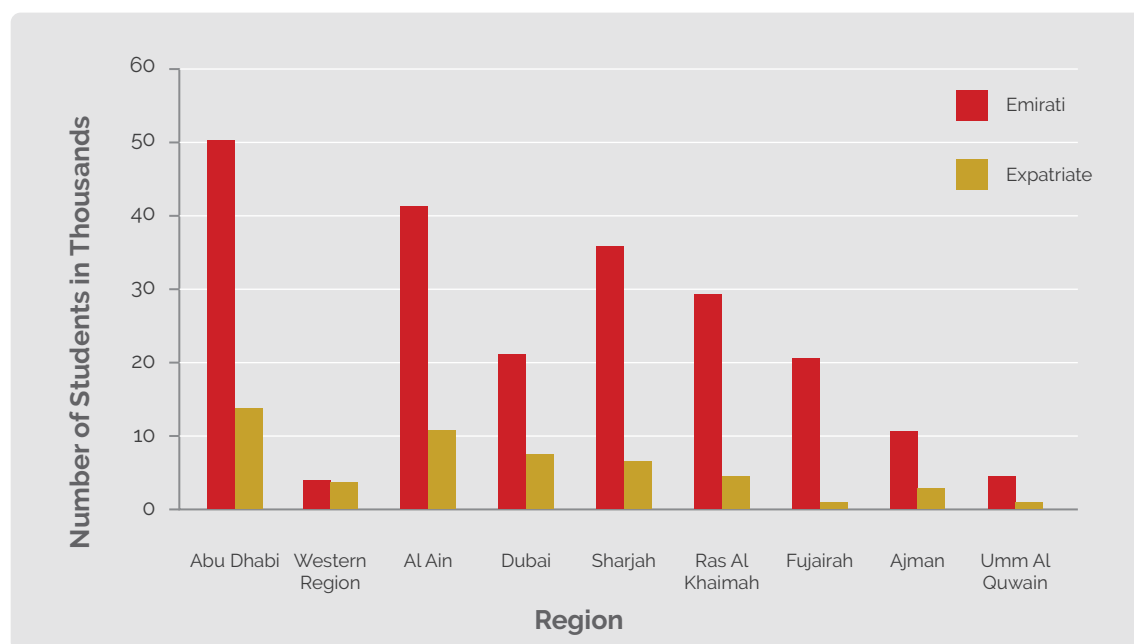
changed, and as of 2016, their role has shifted to focus on the licensing of public and private schools.

### Students and Teachers

Across all regions, Emirati students make up the majority of public school students. Figure 3 shows the breakdown of the number of Emirati versus expatriate students in UAE public schools by region.

During the 2014-15 school year, there were 11,813 Emirati teachers and 11,965 expatriate teachers in public schools in the UAE. While this breakdown is almost an even split between nationals and expatriates, Figure 4 shows that the proportions vary among individual emirates. There is a much larger proportion of expatriate teachers in Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, and the Western Region than in Fujairah and Ras Al Khaimah. Most of these non-national teachers are Arab male expatriates<sup>4</sup> who teach at boys' preparatory and secondary schools (Ridge, 2014).<sup>5</sup> Table 2 shows the nationalities of the UAE's public school teachers by gender and region as of 2017.

**Figure 3. Student Nationalities in Public Education Across the UAE, by Region (2014-15)**

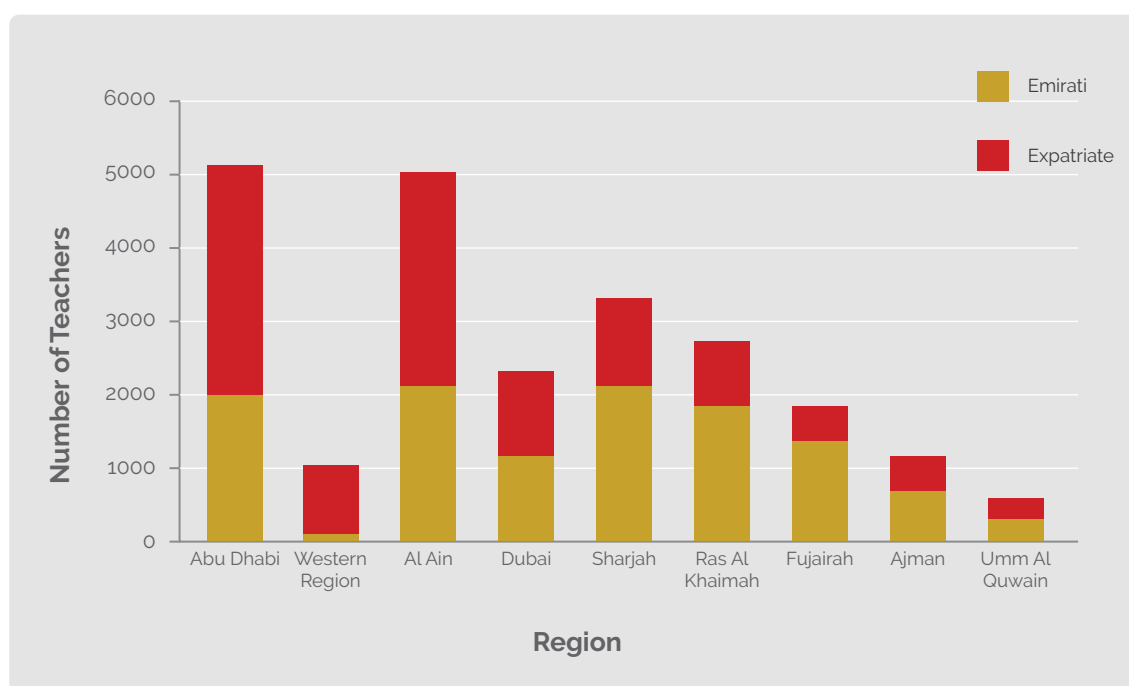


Source: UAE MOE, 2015

<sup>4</sup> To learn more about the case of Arab expatriate teachers see *Expatriate Teachers and Education Quality in the Gulf Cooperation Council* (Ridge, Shami, Kippels, & Farah, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Table 5 on page 12 of the Fact Sheet shows teachers by cycle, nationality, and gender in the emirate of Ras Al Khaimah.

**Figure 4. Nationalities of Public School Teachers in the UAE, by Region (2014-15)**



Source: UAE MOE, 2015

**Table 2. Nationalities of Public School Teachers in the UAE, by Gender and Region (2017)**

Region	Male			Female		
	Emirati	Expatriate	Total	Emirati	Expatriate	Total
Abu Dhabi	242	1,295	1,537	1,822	1,917	3,739
Al Ain	192	1,275	1,467	1,979	1,576	3,555
Western region	5	362	367	114	620	734
Dubai	20	516	536	920	455	1,375
Sharjah	79	731	810	1,632	547	2,179
Ajman	11	283	294	548	271	819
Umm Al Quwain	2	95	97	249	119	368
Fujairah	34	323	357	1,130	170	1,300
Ras Al Khaimah	52	587	639	1,425	228	1,653
<b>Total</b>	<b>637</b>	<b>5467</b>	<b>639</b>	<b>9,819</b>	<b>5,903</b>	<b>15,722</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>21,826</b>					

Source: UAE MOE, 2017

Note: Data from March 2017

## Curriculum<sup>6</sup>

The Ministry of Education is responsible for implementing the national curriculum in Dubai and the Northern Emirates, while Abu Dhabi public schools have an independent curriculum developed by the ADEC. This means that the MOE is responsible for producing subject syllabi and for the preparation and oversight of assessments across six emirates (see Box 2 to learn more about international assessments in the UAE).

Since the UAE was founded, there have been several reforms<sup>7</sup> that have altered the public school curriculum. For example, the Madar Al Ghad (Schools of Tomorrow) program was started in select public schools in 2007 to emphasize using English to teach mathematics and science. However, the program was discontinued in 2015 (Jonny, 2015). More recently, in 2016, the government introduced new subjects, such as innovative design, health sciences, career guidance, life skills, and business management to the curriculum in public schools to expand the breadth of educational offerings (WAM, 2016).

## Box 2. Participation in International Assessments<sup>8</sup>

The UAE participates in international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Trends in International Mathematics Science Study (TIMSS), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS). Table A shows that over the past decade the emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, and the UAE as whole, have been participating in an increasing number of international assessments.

**Table A. UAE's Participation in International Assessments**

PISA assessment year	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015
UAE participation	-	-	-	Dubai	UAE	UAE
TIMSS assessment year	1995	2003	2007	2011	2015	
UAE participation	-	-	Dubai	UAE	UAE	
PIRLS assessment year	2001	2006	2011	2016		
UAE participation	-	-	UAE	UAE		
TALIS assessment year	2008	2013	2018			
UAE participation	-	Abu Dhabi	UAE (Scheduled)			

Note: UAE = Assessments conducted in all emirates

The UAE's participation in these international assessments allows for cross-national and longitudinal comparisons of academic achievement in the country. In addition to collecting data on core subject achievement (e.g., in mathematics, science, and reading), international assessments also include supplementary survey data that provide insight into additional areas such as parental involvement, student resources, teachers, types of schools, and student learning styles. Academics and policymakers are able to use this information to identify strengths and challenges to better support education in the country.

<sup>6</sup> For more detailed information about the UAE public school curriculum, see *Curriculum Development in the United Arab Emirates* (Ridge, Kippels, & Farah, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Both the MOE and the ADEC have relied heavily on foreign expertise to spearhead curriculum development initiatives (Ahmed, 2013; Sahoo, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Launched in 2000, PISA is administered every three years and measures achievement levels of 15-year-old students in mathematics, reading, and science. TIMSS was first conducted in 1995 and every four years it administered to measure mathematics and science knowledge and skills of Grade 4 and Grade 8 students. PIRLS started in 2001 to measure reading proficiency of Grade 4 students, and is conducted every five years. TALIS surveys teachers and was first conducted in 2008 and takes place every five years.

## **Financing**

Public schools in the UAE are funded by the federal government. The federal government funds the building of schools, teachers' salaries, textbooks, the transportation of students, and, in theory, all other capital and recurrent expenditures on education (Abu Dhabi eGovernment, 2016). From kindergarten through university, Emirati citizens can attend government schools, colleges, and universities free of charge (Abu Dhabi eGovernment, 2016).

In terms of overall spending on education, at times the UAE's spending has been relatively high when compared to the world average expenditure on education as a percent of total government spending, which fluctuated between 13.5% and 14.7% from 2000 to 2012 (World Bank, 2016). In 2014, approximately 20% of the UAE's national budget, almost 9.7 billion dirhams (USD 2.64 billion), was allocated to education (Abu Dhabi eGovernment, 2016; Reuters, 2013). However, in 2016, the amount allocated to the MOE decreased to 6 billion dirhams (USD 1.6 billion), or 13% of the national budget (Ministry of Finance, 2016).

## **Private Schools in the UAE**

In response to the needs of the expatriate population, private schools in the UAE have a wide range of curriculum offerings with various languages of instruction.

### **Regulatory Framework and Structure**

There are three education authorities overseeing private education in the UAE (Nolan, 2012). In Abu Dhabi, the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) oversees private schools. In the emirate of Dubai, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) regulates private schools, while in the Northern Emirates the MOE, through its Education Zones, is responsible for private schools. Each of these regulatory bodies has their own school licensing requirements, inspection criteria, ranking systems, and tuition fee criteria. Across all private schools in the UAE, it is mandatory that Arabic language and Islamic Studies classes be provided for Muslim students (Ridge, Kippels, & Shami, 2015). According to Nolan (2012), the complex combination of regulatory bodies for private schools sometimes results in competition for resources and control between federal and emirate-level authorities.

## **Students and Teachers**

The UAE's private education sector has grown rapidly in response to the needs of the expatriate population. According to MOE figures, the private sector now caters to approximately 71% of the country's student population, which includes both Emirati and expatriate students (see Figure 5) (UAE MOE, 2015). In Dubai, that percentage is even higher, with 90% of all students in the emirate educated in private schools during the 2015-16 academic year (KHDA, 2016).

### **Curriculum**

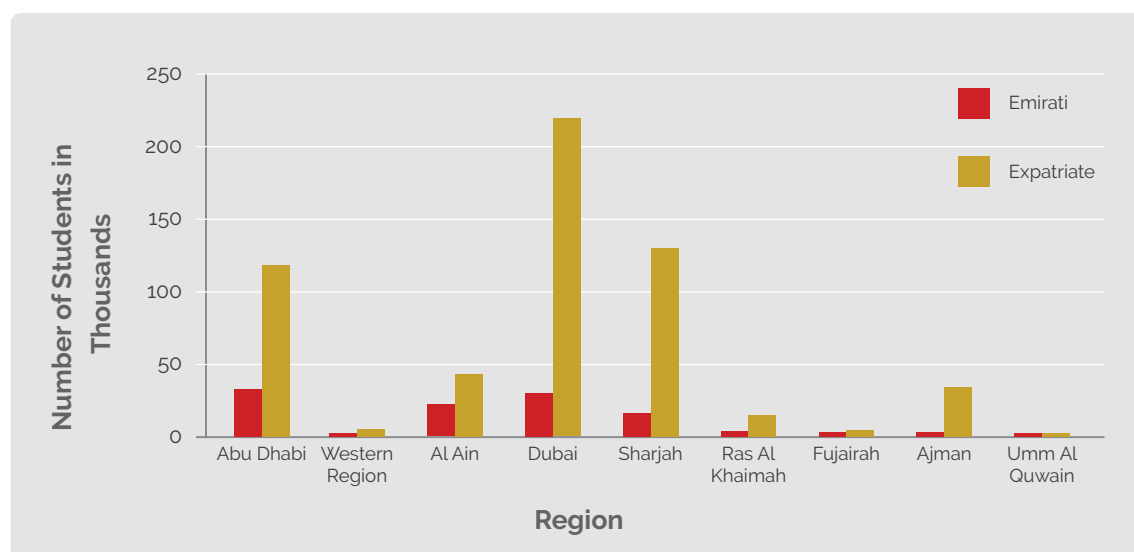
Private schools in the UAE offer a wide range of curricula. In the 2015-16 academic year, in Dubai alone there were 17 curriculum options offered in its network of private schools (KHDA, 2016). In Dubai, the largest number of private schools offer curriculum from the United Kingdom (UK) (65 schools), United States (31 schools), and India (32 schools) (KHDA, 2016). In Abu Dhabi, there are 14 different types of curricula available, and the United States and UK curricula are also amongst the most popular there (ADEC, 2015). Additional curricula offered at private schools in the UAE, amongst others, include those from France, the Philippines, Germany, and Pakistan (KHDA, 2016).

### **Financing**

In the UAE, the majority of private schools are for-profit. These schools typically have owners/investors who have an expectation that there will be a financial return. Non-profit schools currently comprise less than 25% of all private schools. However, these schools have been found to hire more qualified teachers and provide better benefits to their stakeholders, which include teachers and students' families (Ridge et al., 2015).

One study in the UAE found that a greater percentage of teachers in non-profit schools were qualified in terms of official teaching certificates or licenses when compared to teachers in for-profit schools (94% versus 85%) (Ridge et al., 2015). The same study also found that teachers at non-profit schools had salaries 1.5 to 2 times higher than for-profit school teachers, while also receiving better benefits and having a smaller number of students per class (Ridge et al., 2015). In addition to the better conditions reported by teachers, parents also saw benefits to having their children enrolled

**Figure 5. Student Nationalities in Private Education Across the UAE, by Region (2014-15)**



Source: UAE MOE, 2015

in non-profit schools. Parents said they were happier about the value-for-money of their child's education than those parents who had a child in a for-profit institution (Ridge et al., 2015).

## Higher Education in the UAE

Higher education in the UAE is comprised of public, semi-public, and private sectors. The institutions in each of these sectors offer various degrees at the bachelor's, master's, and doctorate levels. Higher education falls under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, which is responsible for setting policies and accrediting universities through the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA). The Ministry of Education is responsible for regulating tertiary education and scientific research policies across the emirates, including the licensing of higher education institutions (UAE MOE, 2016). In addition to accreditation from the MOE, the Ras Al Khaimah and Dubai Free Zones (geographical areas specifically designated for international collaborations) also license universities (Rensimer, 2015).

There has been a rapid increase in the number of accredited higher education institutions over the last 20 years, growing from 5 in 1990 to 71 in 2013 (UAE MOHESR, 2014). However, the exact number of higher education institutions in the UAE is frequently

changing as new institutions open, others close, and some merge (Center for Higher Education Data and Statistics [CHEDS], 2012). In 2012, a report by the Center for Higher Education Data and Statistics (CHEDS) found that there were 102 active higher education institutions in the UAE, with only 69 of them being accredited by the CAA (CHEDS, 2012). In 2016, the CAA had recognized 76 of the UAE's active higher education institutions (CAA, 2016).

### Public

Public universities are open to Emirati students at the undergraduate level and some, like UAE University, also enroll expatriates students (Swan, 2016; UAE University, 2016b). The three federal higher education institutions in the UAE for Emirati students are noted in Table 3. At these institutions, the official language of instruction is English.

In addition to federal universities, there are also other public, emirate-level, higher education institutions. Three examples in the emirate of Abu Dhabi include Khalifa University, Masdar Institute, and the Petroleum Institute. In late 2016, it was announced that these three Abu Dhabi universities would be merged to form one higher education entity, in an effort to combine resources and strengthen institutional achievements (The National, 2016). However, to date, there has not been more information regarding this.

**Table 3. Federal UAE Higher Education Institutions**

Name	Year Established	Approximate Number of Students (2016)	About
<b>UAE University (UAEU)</b>	1976	14,000	UAEU is the country's oldest higher education institution. Located in Al Ain (in the emirate of Abu Dhabi), it consists of nine colleges. In 2009, UAEU was the first federal university in the UAE to institute a Ph.D. program (NAPO, 2013).
<b>Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT)</b>	1988	23,000	HCT's 17 campuses are spread across the country, making it especially popular among female students who often live at home while undertaking their studies (Higher Colleges of Technology [HCT], 2016b). HCT offers applied diplomas, bachelor's degrees, and master's programs.
<b>Zayed University (ZU)</b>	1998	9,000	ZU has two campuses in Dubai and Abu Dhabi that offer both undergraduate and master's degrees (Zayed University, 2016a). Originally open only to women, the university opened admission to men in 2009 (Zayed University, 2016b).

Sources: HCT, 2016a; UAE University, 2016b; Zayed University, 2016c

### **Semi-Public**

The second type of university in the UAE is the semi-public institution. Owned by private and/or state shareholders—typically, but not always, for profit—these universities operate within specific emirates. Most of their students are expatriates. Institutions in this category include Abu Dhabi University, New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD), the American University of Dubai (AUD), the American University of Sharjah (AUS) and the American University of Ras Al Khaimah (AURAK). Semi-public universities may receive partial or full financial backing from the federal or local emirate governments. Such financial arrangements vary considerably, as do levels of government involvement and oversight.

### **Private**

The UAE private sector includes a broad range of higher education institutions and these include international branch campuses as well as independent institutes, many of which operate in economic free zones. While private universities primarily serve expatriates, several institutions have relatively high percentages of Emirati students in relation to their total enrollments (Swan, 2014). Some of the more well known private universities include: The University of Wollongong in Dubai; University of Bolton Ras Al Khaimah; Middlesex University Dubai; and Murdoch University Dubai.

## **Education in Ras Al Khaimah**

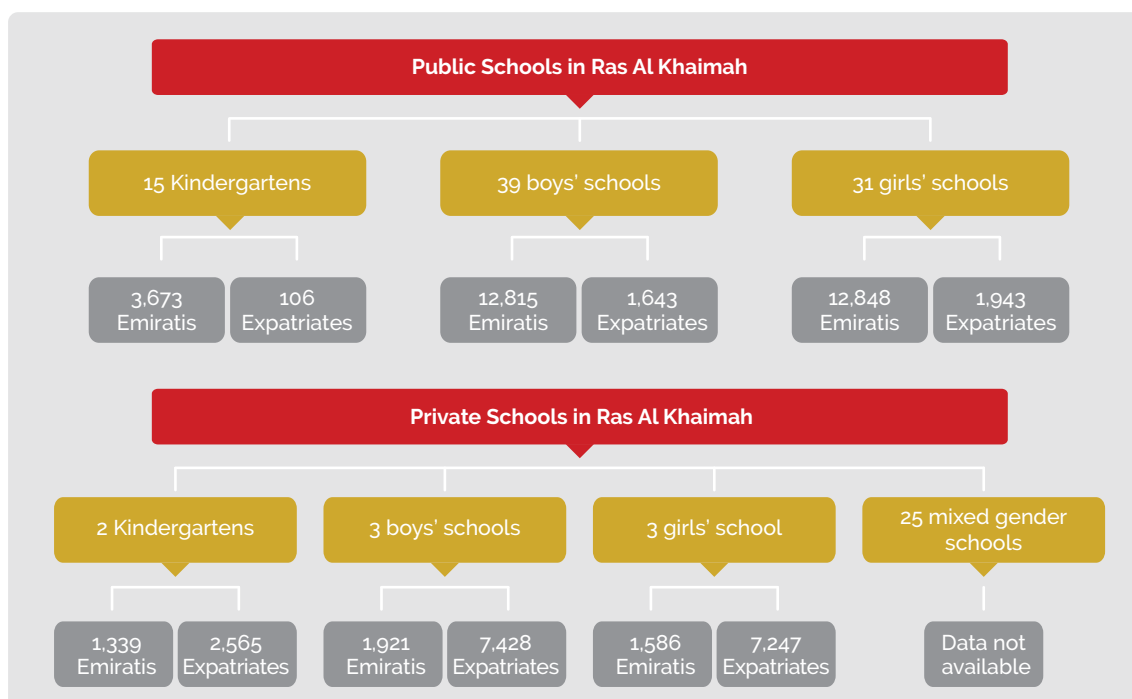
As in other emirates, Ras Al Khaimah has a mix of public and private schools. However, public schools are more common in Ras Al Khaimah than in other emirates. Excluding vocational and adult education, Ras Al Khaimah is home to 85 public and 33 private schools (see Figure 6 for an overview of the types of school as well as the demographics of their student body).

The majority of Emirati children in Ras Al Khaimah attend public schools. In 2014-15, they made up 89% of total public school enrollment, including in technical institutes (see Table 4). During the same year, 22% of the students enrolled in the emirate's private schools were Emirati (Ras Al Khaimah Education Zone, 2015).

There are 1,841 Emirati teachers (68%) and 853 expatriate teachers (32%) in the Ras Al Khaimah public school teacher workforce. As shown in Table 5, the majority of expatriate teachers work in Cycle 2 and Cycle 3 boys' schools, which is similar to in other emirates. The majority of these expatriate teachers have been working in the UAE for over 10 years (Ridge, Kippels, & Shami, 2017).

As in the wider UAE, private schools in Ras Al Khaimah offer a large variety of curricula, with eight different types available (Ras Al Khaimah Education Zone, 2015). The curricula options at 33

**Figure 6. Public and Private Schools in Ras Al Khaimah (2014-15)**



Source: Ras Al Khaimah Education Zone, 2015

**Table 4. Students in Public Schools of Ras Al Khaimah by Cycle and Nationality (2014-15)**

Stage	Nationality	Number of Students
Kindergarten	Emirati	3,637
	Expatriate	106
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3,743</b>
Cycle 1 (Primary)	Emirati	11,449
	Expatriate	1,030
	<b>Total</b>	<b>12,479</b>
Cycle 2 (Preparatory)	Emirati	8,661
	Expatriate	1,331
	<b>Total</b>	<b>9,992</b>
Cycle 3 (Secondary)	Emirati	5,553
	Expatriate	1,225
	<b>Total</b>	<b>6,778</b>
Technical/Vocational Institutes (Secondary)	Emirati	716
	Expatriate	14
	<b>Total</b>	<b>730</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>33,722</b>

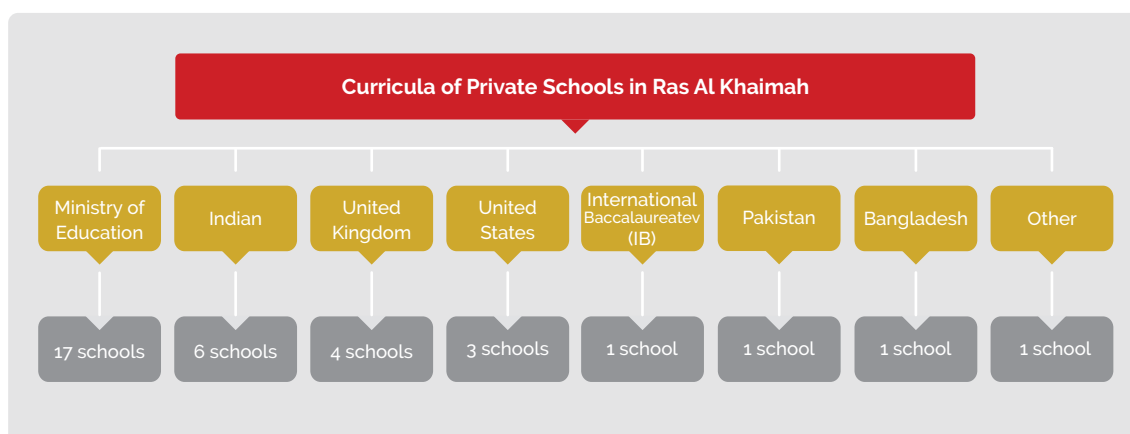
Source: Ras Al Khaimah Education Zone, 2015

**Table 5. Teachers in Public Schools in Ras Al Khaimah by Cycle, Nationality, and Gender (2014-15)**

Educational Stage	Nationality	Male	Female	Total
Kindergarten	Emirati	0	226	226
	Expatriate	0	9	9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>235</b>
Cycle 1 (Primary)	Emirati	9	799	808
	Expatriate	15	117	132
	<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>916</b>	<b>940</b>
Cycle 2 & 3 (Preparatory & Secondary)	Emirati	80	727	807
	Expatriate	638	74	712
	<b>Total</b>	<b>718</b>	<b>801</b>	<b>1519</b>
Grand Total		<b>742</b>	<b>1,952</b>	<b>2,694</b>
Percent of Grand Total (by Gender)		<b>27.5%</b>	<b>72.5%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Ras Al Khaimah Education Zone, 2015

**Figure 7. Curricula Followed by Private Schools in Ras Al Khaimah (2015-16)<sup>11</sup>**



Source: Ras Al Khaimah Education Zone, 2015; ADEC, 2016

private schools are shown in Figure 7, with the most common being the MOE curriculum (17 schools) and those from India<sup>9</sup> (6 schools), the United Kingdom (4 schools), and the United States<sup>10</sup> (3 schools).

## Higher Education in Ras Al Khaimah

There are at least 16 higher education institutions located in Ras Al Khaimah, including the CAA accredited HCT men's and women's campuses, Ras Al Khaimah Medical and Health Sciences University, and the American University of Ras Al Khaimah (AURAK) (Rensimer, 2015). The HCT is the only federal college in the emirate. Between 2009

<sup>9</sup> These include the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) system and the Indian School Certificate Examinations (ISCE) syllabus.

<sup>10</sup> Two of the American curriculum schools in Ras Al Khaimah list the Common Core State Standards, while one of the American schools in Ras Al Khaimah specifies the Pennsylvania State Academic Standards and Benchmarks in addition to the Common Core State Standards.

<sup>11</sup> For the complete list of curricula followed by private schools in Ras Al Khaimah, see Appendix C.

and 2013, the number of students enrolled in higher education in Ras Al Khaimah increased from 2,778 to 3,846 students, (approximately 38%), which was the second highest growth rate in the country over that period of time (Rensimer, 2015; UAE MOHESR, 2014).

Ras Al Khaimah's university population reflects the wider gender disparity in higher education across the UAE, in which female university students considerably outnumber their male counterparts. During the 2015-16 academic year there were

1,975 females enrolled at the HCT Ras Al Khaimah Women's College while there were only 670 men at the HCT Ras Al Khaimah Men's College, representing approximately a 3:1 ratio of women to men (HCT, 2016b) (See Box 3 for more information about the gender gap).

### Box 3. Gender Disparity in Educational Achievement in the UAE<sup>12</sup>

A notable characteristic of the UAE's education system is its gender gap in favor of girls. While girls in the UAE not only surpass boys in terms of school enrollment, they also outperform them in terms of achievement (Ridge, 2014). On national assessments, girls consistently outperform boys across the country. For example, on the 2014 Common Educational Proficiency Assessment (CEPA) girls scored an average of 168 points while boys scored an average of 163 points (Ministry of Higher Education & Scientific Research [MOHESR], 2015). However, the differences in favor of girls were more pronounced in certain geographical areas, such as in the Western Region, where girls scored an average of 160 points, while boys only scored an average of 135 points (MOHESR, 2015).

This gender gap in favor of girls also shows up in international assessments. Table B shows that girls in the UAE performed better than boys in all three PISA 2015 domains, with a seven-point difference in mathematics, 25-point difference in science, and 50-point difference in reading (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and [OECD], 2015). The gender gap is even more pronounced for UAE nationals, as Emirati girls outperform Emirati boys by much wider margins compared to the aggregated national data, with a 70-point gap on reading scores. Within the larger context of PISA 2015, the UAE has some of the most significant gender differences observed in any PISA-participating country (OECD, 2016).

**Table B. PISA 2015 Gender Comparison of Average Performance Between the OECD and the UAE**

Subject	OECD Average		All UAE		UAE National	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Mathematics	494	486	424	431	374	397
Science	495	491	424	449	371	412
Reading	479	506	408	458	354	424

Source: OECD, 2015

<sup>12</sup> For even more information about the reverse gender divide in the UAE and wider Gulf region, see *Education and the Reverse Gender Divide in the Gulf States: Embracing the Global, Ignoring the Local* (Ridge, 2014).

## Challenges and Opportunities

Education in the UAE, including in Ras Al Khaimah, has made great progress in many areas since the introduction of formal education. Over the last several decades, the education system has undergone numerous reforms that have improved the quality of the education system and focused on supporting innovation and student success. Moving forward there are still some areas that could benefit from continued focus, particularly in the public education sector, which include:

1. Evaluating and improving the public school curriculum to better meet the needs of society and the workplace;
2. Improving English language proficiency of Emirati secondary school graduates, given that English is the language of instruction at all public universities;
3. Improving the academic performance of male Emirati students;
4. Recruiting and retaining male Emirati teachers;
5. Advancing and promoting research at the higher education level and incorporating its contributions into government decisions and policies;
6. Encouraging the entry of more non-profit schools into the private sector;
7. Improving inclusive education and early childhood policies and practices.

It is clear that the UAE has a range of education options available for both male and female students from the primary to university level, with public education provided for nationals free of charge at all levels. While much has been achieved, there are still areas that can continue to be strengthened to better serve students and their families. With continued research and the piloting of more education initiatives, it is anticipated that the quality

of education available to both citizens and residents of the UAE will continue to rise. A deeper focus on certain areas, such as on curriculum evaluations, as well as a support for struggling Emirati boys, could help ensure that all students reach their potential.

## Appendix A. Technical education in the UAE: Abu Dhabi Centre for Technical & Vocational Education and Training (ACTVET)<sup>13</sup>

The Abu Dhabi Centre for Technical & Vocational Education and Training (ACTVET) was established in 2010 under the directorate of His Highness General Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (ACTVET, 2015). ACTVET presently manages a number of secondary and tertiary level educational and vocational training programs, and it is accredited by the Vocational Education and Training Awards Council (ACTVET, 2015). The aim of ACTVET is to "increase the number of skilled Emirati youth in rewarding career paths and foster life-long learning and personal development" (ACTVET, 2015, p. 8).

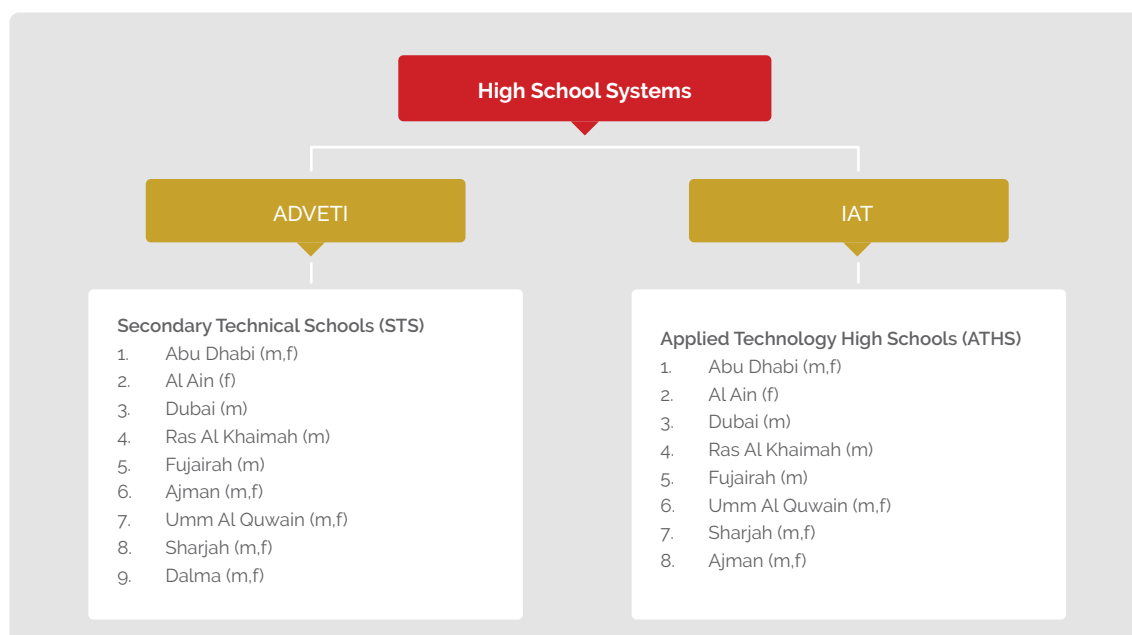
Two key organizations that fall under ACTVET are the Abu Dhabi Vocational Education and Training Institute (ADVETI) and the Institutes of Applied Technology (IAT). The main secondary school operations of these two entities are Secondary Technical Schools (STS) and Applied Technology High Schools (ATHS) and can be seen in Figure A1.

*Secondary Technical Schools (STS).* ADVETI was created in 2007 as an initiative of the Abu Dhabi Government, and it has seven primary entities<sup>14</sup> under it, including the Secondary Technical Schools (STS). The first STS school was piloted by ADVETI in 2010-11 in Abu Dhabi for male students, and it has since been expanded across the emirates, and there are now STS programs for both girls and boys, depending on the location (see Figure A1) (ACTVET, 2015). STS run a three-year program, which begins

<sup>13</sup> This appendix is not comprehensive. For a more detailed overview of the wide-range of work led and overseen by ACTVET, see (ACTVET, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> These seven entities are "Al Jazirah Institute of Science and Technology in Abu Dhabi, Al Jaheli Institute of Science and Technology in Al Ain, Baynounah Institute of Science and Technology in Western Region, Al Reef Institute of Logistics and Applied Technology in Al Shahama, Sharjah Institute of Science & Technology in Sharjah, Secondary Technical School (STS) and Vocational Education Development Center (VEDC)" (ACTVET, 2015, p. 15).

**Figure A1. Secondary Education Programs Overseen by ACTVET**



Source: ACTVET, 2015

Note: m=male, f=female

at Grade 10, designed to provide Emirati youth with a secondary school education centered on technical and technological education. Admission to STS is open to UAE nationals aged 14-16 who pass the STS entrance exams and meet other admission criteria (ACTVET, 2015; STS, 2016).

*Applied Technology High Schools (ATHS).* Founded in 2005 by the royal decree of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the IAT operates as a "corporate body with full financial and administrative independence" (IAT, 2016, p1). The current Minister of Education, His Excellency Hussain Ibrahim Al Hammadi, has been Chairman of the Board of Trustees at IAT since its inception (IAT, 2016). As part of its secondary education program, IAT runs Applied Technology High Schools (ATHS). Admission to ATHS requires an application and is open to UAE and GCC nationals who are 13-16 year olds and meet specific requirements (Applied Technology High School [ATHS], 2016).

## Appendix B. Emirates National Schools

The Emirates National Schools (ENS) are a network of private schools that was started in 2002 under the auspices of the Ministry of Presidential Affairs. Currently, there are over 9,000 students enrolled

across five ENS campuses in the UAE, three in Abu Dhabi, one in Sharjah, and one in Ras Al Khaimah (ENS, 2016a). At the secondary level, classes are gender-segregated (ENS, 2016c).

English is the language of instruction for classes, except for Arabic and Islamic Studies, which are taught in Arabic (ENS, 2016a). For courses in Arabic, Islamic, and UAE Studies, ENS follows the educational requirements prescribed by the UAE Ministry of Education. However, for other courses, ENS follows the Common Core Standards and uses American curriculum content. Also, depending on the school, the ENS is also authorized, or a candidate to become authorized, as an International Baccalaureate (IB) provider (ENS, 2016a). Grade 11 and 12 students can therefore sit for either the IB Diploma Programme (DP) or the College Board Advanced Placement Program (AP) (ENS, 2016c).

Admittance to ENS is open to students from any nationality (personal communication with ENS, 2016). The 2015-16 academic year fees in Abu Dhabi ranged from approximately 23,000 AED (USD 6,300) at the kindergarten level to 55,900 AED (USD 15,200) for Grade 12 (ENS, 2016b).

## Appendix C. Curricula Followed by Private Schools in Ras Al Khaimah

Curriculum	School Name
Ministry of Education	Al Manar School
	Islamic Education School
	Al Arabia School
	Al Salaf Al Saleh School
	Ras Al Khaimah Modern School
	Dar Al Alam School
	Al Nasr School
	Nidaa Al Islam School
	Sheikha Hissa bint Saqr School
	Al Mamoorah Boys School
	Al Mamoorah Girls School
	Al Mareidh Girls Schools
	Al Baraa bin Azeb Boys School
	Al Kharan Evening School
	Al Nakheel School
	Masafi Nursery
Indian	Indian Scholars School
	English Ideal School
	Alpha School
	Indian Public School
	Indian Modern School
	Indian Private School
British	Ramsis English School
	Al Rashad School
	GEMS Westminster School
	Ras Al Khaimah Academy (British)
American	Ras Al Khaimah American Academy for girls
	Emirates National School
	Wellspring School
International Baccalaureate	Ras Al Khaimah Private Academy (IB)
Pakistani	Pakistan Secondary School
Bangladeshi	Bangladesh Islamic School
Own Curriculum	The International School of Choueifat

Source: Ras Al Khaimah Education Zone, 2015

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# THE SHEIKH SAUD BIN SAQR AL QASIMI FOUNDATION FOR POLICY RESEARCH

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## *Developing Research, Supporting Minds*

Based in the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah, the Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research is a non-profit foundation that was established in 2009 under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Ras Al Khaimah. The Foundation has three broad functions:

- Inform policy making by conducting and commissioning high quality research,
- Enrich the local public sector, especially education, by providing educators and civil servants in Ras Al Khaimah with tools to make a positive impact on their own society, and
- Build a spirit of community, collaboration, and shared vision through purposeful engagement that fosters relationships among individuals and organizations.

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