

Research articles

The formative pathways of high school: experiences and narratives of administrators and educators from two public state schools in São Paulo

Os itinerários formativos do ensino médio: experiências e relatos de gestores e docentes de duas escolas da rede pública estadual de São Paulo¹

André Randazzo Ortega^{1*} , Joana D'arc Germano Hollerbach¹

¹Universidade Federal de Viçosa (UFV), Viçosa, MG, Brasil

HOW TO CITE: ORTEGA, A. R.; HOLLERBACH, J. D. G. The formative pathways of high school: experiences and narratives of administrators and educators from two public state schools in São Paulo. *Revista Ibero-Americana de Estudos em Educação*, Araraquara, v. 21, e19240, 2026. e-ISSN: 1982-5587. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21723/riaee.v21i00.1924002>

Abstract

The article aims to comprehend the implementation process of the formative pathways proposed by Law No. 13,415/2017 in two public schools in the State of São Paulo, based on the accounts of administrators and educators. This research is anchored in historical-dialectical materialism. The main theoretical framework is based on the studies of contemporary authors, notably in the concept of the business reform of education. The data collection technique involved semi-structured interviews. The investigation revealed that initially, the High School Reform was well-received by the interviewees, but soon administrators and educators expressed concerns about understanding the changes brought about by the law. Additionally, participants assert that the curricular flexibility of formative pathways leads to the fragmentation of students' education. Finally, there was a clear relativization of the effects of the pathways on students' education and the proclaimed freedom of choice regarding what to study.

Keywords: interviews; business reform of education; basic education; educational policy.

Resumo

O artigo objetiva compreender o processo de implementação dos itinerários formativos propostos pela Lei nº 13.415/2017 em duas escolas da rede pública do Estado de São Paulo a partir dos relatos de gestores e docentes. Trata-se de pesquisa ancorada no materialismo histórico-dialético. O referencial teórico principal se pauta nos estudos de autores contemporâneos, notadamente o conceito da reforma empresarial da educação. A técnica de coleta de dados consistiu em entrevistas semiestruturadas. A investigação permitiu constatar que num primeiro momento a Reforma do Ensino Médio foi bem vista pelos entrevistados, mas logo os gestores e docentes externalizaram preocupação quanto ao entendimento das mudanças trazidas pela lei. Além disso, os ouvidos afirmam que a flexibilização curricular dos itinerários formativos acarreta a fragmentação da formação dos estudantes. Por fim, ficou evidente a relativização dos efeitos dos itinerários na formação dos alunos e da propalada liberdade de escolha pelo que estudar.

Palavras-chave: entrevista; reforma empresarial da educação; educação básica; política educacional.

INTRODUCTION

Through Provisional Measure (MP) No. 746 of 2016, Brazilian secondary education became the target of a major educational reform, later sanctioned as Law No. 13,415 in February 2017. Since the beginning, it was possible to foresee that the years following the enactment of the new law would bring many changes to the reality of those involved in education, that is

¹ This article shows the results of a Master's research conducted between 2021 and 2023.

***Corresponding author:**
andreortega10@gmail.com

Submitted: April 20, 2024

Reviewed: December 15, 2025

Approved: December 15, 2025

Financial support: nothing to declare.

Conflicts of interest: There are no conflicts of interest.

Ethics committee approval:
Substantiated Opinion CEP No. 5,544,694.

Data availability: Research data is available upon request only. Study conducted at Federal University of Viçosa (UFV), Viçosa, MG, Brasil.



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administrators, teachers, and students throughout the country, especially in state public school systems, which, according to the most recent Basic Education census, account for more than 84% of the nearly eight million enrollments at this stage of schooling (Brazil, 2023a). As the implementation process of the Secondary Education Reform has progressed in recent years, many researchers have undertaken efforts to reveal how the aforementioned educational stakeholders have felt and reflected on the impacts of the new policy and the new reality for secondary education that is being established. Dissertations such as those developed by Lima (2021) and Andrade (2019), articles such as those written by Silva and Martins (2020) and Reyes and Gonçalves (2020), among other texts, attest to this assertion.

Joining the academic debate from a perspective to contribute to the understanding of the process of implementing the High School Reform in state public system, this article aims to understand the implementation process of the formative itineraries (IF) proposed by Law No. 13,415/2017 in two schools belonging to the public schools of the State of São Paulo based on the accounts of administrators and teachers².

To achieve our goals, the text is divided as follows: first, a brief exposition of the methodological path of the investigation; then, a presentation of the theoretical framework, that is, the lenses used to understand the phenomenon of the High School Reform and the bibliography in which this study has been based upon; next, the presentation and interpretation of the data obtained in the investigation; finally, some concluding remarks are offered.

METHODS

This research is grounded on the theoretical-methodological conception of Historical-Dialectical Materialism of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Our theoretical framework includes authors who have focused on the topic of High School Reform since its earliest formulations, such as Saviani (2018), Lombardi and Lima (2018), Krawczyk and Zan (2022), and Kuenzer (2017), in addition to the contributions of Freitas (2012, 2018). As a data collection technique, semi-structured interviews were conducted with administrators and teachers from two public schools belonging to the São Paulo state school system. The validity of using interviews as a working technique in the social sciences is ensured by Lüdke and André (1986) in the following terms: "the great advantage of the interview over other techniques is that it allows the immediate and current capture of the desired information, practically with any type of informant and on the most varied topics" (p. 34). In the case of semi-structured interviews, the interactive nature between researcher and interviewee can allow the topic to be approached in a more authentic and remarkable way, based on the information and perceptions that the latter possesses (Lüdke; André, 1986).

To conduct the interviews, the project was registered on the Plataforma Brasil for the adequate consideration by the Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Viçosa, Minas Gerais, Brazil. The research was authorized by Opinion No. 5,544,694, dated July 26, 2022. Next, the two schools were chosen. Both institutions are located in the urban area of the municipality of Sorocaba, in the interior of São Paulo, and were selected based on two criteria: easiness of access and integration of researchers and the relevance of both to the local context, once they are schools that attend a large number of students. The smaller school, hereinafter referred to as school A, has approximately 1300 total enrollments (500 in high school), and the larger school, hereinafter referred to as school B, has approximately 1800, with 50% of these in high school. In each school, between December 2022 and March 2023, three interviews were conducted with three different interviewees: the principal, the high school coordinator, and a high school teacher, totaling six interviewees, whose profiles are summarized in Chart 1.

The interviews were recorded using a smartphone application. Afterwards, a complete transcription of the content was made in order to facilitate the processing of the collected data. The data was preserved in a digital file and in a printed version of the transcription. For the analysis, we proceeded to read the interviews, seeking to highlight all the answers and extracts from the interviewees that referred to the training pathway, its implementation, and functioning.

² We emphasize that our research covers the period of validity of Law No. 13.415/2017 and, therefore, prior to the changes made by Law No. 14.945/2024.

Chart 1. General profile of interviewees.

Interviewees	Brief Professional Profile
Principal School A	Tenured geography teacher. Has worked in the São Paulo state school system since 1998. Tenured principal of school A since December 2021.
Coordinator School A	Tenured geography teacher. Has worked in the São Paulo state school system since 2001. High school coordinator at school A since the 2010 school year.
Teacher School A	Contracted History teacher. Has worked in the São Paulo state school system since 2020. Member of the Parents and Teachers Association council and supervising teacher for the Student Union.
Director School B	Tenured Portuguese language teacher. Has worked in the São Paulo state school system for over 40 years. Tenured director of school B since 2012.
Coordinator School B	Graduated in psychology and literature. Tenured Portuguese language teacher. Has worked in the São Paulo state school system for over 30 years. High school coordinator at school B since 2010.
Teacher school B	Tenured professor of Physics and Mathematics. Has worked in the São Paulo state school system since 2010.

Source: authors elaboration.

LAW NO. 13.415/2017 AND THE BUSINESS-ORIENTED REFORM OF EDUCATION IN BRAZIL

Law No. 13.415/2017 must be placed within the complex Brazilian social, economic, and political context that led to the parliamentary, legal, and media coup d'état disguised as an impeachment process that removed President Dilma Vana Rousseff and interrupted the more than decade-long hegemony of the Workers' Party (PT) at the head of the Federal Executive branch, consolidated after victories in the majoritarian elections of 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2014. Mascaro (2018) describes the political actors who took the place of the center-left coalition led by the PT as a conservative group of white, wealthy men who set the voting agenda and conducted the approval of several impactful policies in a few months, including the 2017 High School Reform. From Freitas's (2018) perspective, this represents the rise of a new right wing that is steering Brazilian politics toward a period of strong neoliberal tendencies.

Neoliberalism is a political-ideological current that advocates the recovery of the classical liberal ideal, which collapsed after the First World War (1914-1918) and the 1929 Crisis, focusing on the reduction of state intervention in the economy and social life, market freedom, the internationalization of the economy in the form of globalization, among other pillars. It had figures such as Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek as some of its main theorists and has occupied a hegemonic position in the dynamics of world capitalism since the 1980s, notably through the actions of President Ronald Reagan (United States) and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (United Kingdom) (Freitas, 2018).

In the words of Lombardi and Lima, the shift towards neoliberalism after the 2016 coup d'état can be described as a set of actions against the working class, "a counter-revolution that maintains its historical characteristics: it is anti-national, anti-popular, anti-democratic and pro-imperialist" (Lombardi; Lima, 2018, p. 52). In this scenario, control of the Ministry of Education (MEC) was once again seized by members of the former center-right coalition that governed Brazil between 1995 and 2002 and which was led by Fernando Henrique Cardoso as the president of the Republic (Freitas, 2018).

Analyzing this process, Ortega and Hollerbach (2023) argue that a reform of secondary education such as the one proposed is nothing more than an extension of the effects of the 2016 coup d'etat into education. Nora Krawczyk and Dirce Zan, in a book published in 2022, claim that the actions taken to implement the new policy are based on dominant thinking and interests of the big capital in its current stage of development (Krawczyk; Zan, 2022). This stage referred by the authors corresponds to the Toyota production model, which emerged

in Japan in the context of the so-called productive restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s. The Toyota paradigm demands from the worker the ability to solve various types of problems, handle high-tech devices, and constantly adapt to changes in the productive sector. According to Kuenzer (2017), Toyotism involves the pedagogy of flexible learning, which emerges with the proposal to replace the old rigidity with flexibility through the development of skills that allow the worker to learn throughout life.

Having understood these initial issues, which are part of the scene in which Law No. 13,415/2017 emerged, this analysis can be deepened, bringing in the concept of the business-oriented reform of education to understand it more thoroughly.

According to Freitas (2018), the concept of the business-oriented reform of education emerged through studies conducted in the United States by researcher Diane Ravitch, from which the author unveils the central issues involving the set of politics for education that took place amidst the advance of neoliberalism in that country in the 1980s and 1990s.

Complementing what has been discussed, it is worth highlighting that neoliberalism focuses on defending market freedom as the primary freedom, based on individualism and the promotion of entrepreneurship. In this sense, the business organization model becomes synonymous with successful, efficient, and profitable management, which ends up overflowing into other spheres of society, such as the administration of public systems, headed by the State (Freitas, 2018). The latter, in the view of neoliberal ideologues, is characterized as a flawed and inefficient administrator that must be reduced to the condition of provider of resources that will be allocated to systems whose administration needs to be handed over to private business initiative, proclaimed, in turn, as the administrator par excellence. Moreover, there is a need, through the business-oriented reform of education, to create and control mechanisms to keep pedagogical and school matters away from the "contamination" of contestatory or revolutionary ideals, such as communism and scientific socialism. Therefore, based on this observation, Freitas (2018) argues that there is a convergence between the ideological and economic objectives that support the business-oriented reform of education, thus justifying the interests of those responsible for it (the corporate reformers) in becoming firmly involved with educational policies:

From the point of view of the purposes of education, although not always explicit, reformers aim to implement educational reforms to, on the one hand, guarantee the mastery of basic skills and abilities necessary for economic activity revolutionized by new technologies and work processes and, on the other hand, ensure that such an initiative is contained within a worldview that translates into a modernized status quo. (Freitas, 2018, pp. 41-42).

The new right wing to which Freitas (2018) refers to, and was briefly mentioned earlier, has strived to occupy the center of discussions and the formulation of relevant and comprehensive public policies, such as the 2017 High School Reform, following the consummation of the 2016 coup d'état. However, this is not the origin of the business-oriented reform of education in Brazil, since we find its roots in the 1990s, with the first wave of neoliberal adjustment promoted by the governments of Fernando Collor de Mello (1990-1992), Itamar Franco (1992-1994), and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002). During the PT's time in power, it is important to highlight, that business reformers continued to play an important role in educational matters and decisions, such as in the administration of the Ministry of Education, but, as Freitas points out, "[...] it can be said, reasonably, that the PT coalition was neither a straight line nor a swift one towards business reform" (2018, p. 10).

At this point, we must ask ourselves: who, then, are the agents of business-oriented reform in education, that is, the business reformers? In effect, it is a group formed by a "coalition between politicians, media, businesspeople, educational companies, private institutes and foundations, and researchers" (Freitas, 2012, p. 380). In Brazil, we can cite Todos Pela Educação, the Lemann Foundation, the Unibanco Institute, and the Ayrton Senna Institute as some examples of organizations that act as business reformers and are financed by representatives of big capital. These agents, broadly speaking, seek to carry out the reform in two ways: "a) standardization of and in education"; b) emphasis on teaching "basic knowledge and skills of

students in Reading, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, taken as the main goal and indicators of educational reforms [...]” (Freitas, 2018, pp. 38-39).

Based on the reflections mentioned, we seek to clarify our interpretation of Law No. 13.415/2017, positioning it as a legal instrument that integrates the movement of business-oriented reform of Brazilian education, spearheaded by the new right that assumed power after the 2016 coup d'état. Ultimately, it is an educational policy that updates the hegemony of the dominant classes to the times of flexible accumulation, maintaining education under the aegis of their interests.

THE EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS OF THE HIGH SCHOOL REFORM: THE EXPERIENCES OF ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS FROM TWO SCHOOLS IN THE SÃO PAULO STATE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

In this section, we aim to understand the implementation process of the educational pathways proposed by the High School Reform in two schools belonging to the São Paulo State public school system, based on reports from administrators and teachers. To this end, we begin by situating the educational pathways within the context of the political directives.

The IF occupy a central place in Law No. 13.415/2017, being addressed in Article 4 of the legal text, which establishes them as the diversified part of the high school curriculum (Brasil, 2017).

In the Statement of Reasons (EM) No. 84, a document that accompanied Provisional Measure No. 746/2016, the arguments of the Ministry of Education (MEC) to justify the reform revolve around the need to turn high school education more interesting for young people, reduce school dropout rates, and allow state education systems to offer a more attractive curriculum (Brasil, 2016). In late 2016 and throughout 2017, the federal government invested in a broad marketing campaign to promote its new educational policy. Numerous advertisements were transmitted on broadcast television and on the internet via the YouTube video-sharing platform. Ortega and Hollerbach (2022), in an analysis of these advertisements, argue that the construction of the official and advertising discourse on the reform comprised two distinct and complementary axes: “the proposition of a new and revitalized High School [first axis], which, in turn, brings as its main advance the possibility for the student to choose what to study [second axis]” (Ortega; Hollerbach, 2022, p. 18). Therefore, the New High School, as Law No. 13.415/2017 was called in these advertisements, promises to bring to young people, through the IF, the freedom to choose what to study, with a more stimulating education compatible with their realities (Ortega; Hollerbach, 2022).

Discussing the problem of dropout rates or the lack of interest among young people in pursuing secondary education is beyond the scope of this article and falls outside its limits. Indeed, our final remarks seek to outline how the educational pathways were treated and publicized by the State when promoting Law No. 13.415/2017. Saviani (2018) highlights that the advertisements were disseminated in a context of strong mobilization of students, teachers, and researchers against the Secondary Education Reform.

Based on the initial information obtained through the interviews conducted for this research, it is understood that the initial impressions of administrators and teachers regarding the reform were consistent with the discourse conveyed by the advertisements, once the reports suggest a similar view: *“In this matter, I think it makes it easier for the student regarding the subject that they already have an affinity for. So, I think that for the student it is a way to reduce school dropout, to have that bunch of subjects that they don't like. **This makes it more attractive**”* (School Principal A, emphasis added).

The teacher from school A states: *“Looking at the proposal for the New High School curriculum, and I have been following it since 2018, **it seemed very good in itself [...]. It's a way to make the student more assiduous, to like school more**”* (Teacher from school A, emphasis added). At school B, both administrators also had a positive view of the reform, particularly at the beginning of the implementation process:

[...]We had a completely different idea; it wasn't clear what that would be. At the time, it was said that, for example, an individual would choose the itinerary related to the humanities area.

So, look how interesting, he will have greater specificity in relation to the humanities subjects (Coordinator of school B, our emphasis).

Still on this topic, we have: *"in theory it was something very beautiful, and the way it was talked and explained seemed like something out of a dream [...]* (School B Director, our emphasis). It is observed, therefore, from the highlighted quotes and excerpts, an optimistic view regarding the changes that the High School Reform promised to bring, notably, the possibility of choice for students. The proposal, when received by administrators and teachers, was therefore well received. However, the data indicate that the interviewees, *pari passu*, felt difficulties at the beginning of the implementation process of the formative itineraries: *"So, the issue of the itineraries was like this, last year [2021] was the first choice, but everything was new, so it was a little difficult even for the people who were here at the school to learn"* (School A Coordinator).

The teacher from school A, in the same sense, reports the challenges of adapting classes and planning and mentions the mobilization of the school team around the attempt to understand the proposal (School A Teacher). In agreement, the director of school B states: *"We knew that the so-called High School Reform was going to happen, and I believe it was supposed to have happened in that first year of the pandemic. Then it came in 2021. It was a shock"* (School B Principal)

After the initial contact, it was in the 2022 school year, the second in the reform implementation process, that the São Paulo State Department of Education (SEDUC-SP) organized the offering of curricular arrangements in the form of formative itineraries, with up to 8 options linked to areas of knowledge (Natural Sciences, Mathematics, Human Sciences or Languages) and 1 intended for technical-professional training. In the case of school A, students had the option of choosing between the first two, while in school B, in addition to these, there was a professionalizing itinerary, the technical course in administration, which was offered in partnership with the Indaiatubana Foundation for Education and Culture (FIEC), a public institution of the city hall of Indaiatuba, in the interior of São Paulo, which jointly offers technical and professional training courses with private companies. It should be noted that the administrators of school B stated that they did not participate in the definition of the partnership, which was established beforehand.

In this context, it wasn't long before the interviewees noticed the first problems regarding the provision and implementation of the educational pathways in reality. One aspect reported by administrators and teachers, but especially by the latter, concerns the fragmentation of student education. According to the teacher from school A, what begins in the 1st year with the inclusion of subjects such as life project, which is nothing more than a kind of preparation for the student's future choice of pathway, evolves in the 2nd year into a division between 50% of the workload based on mandatory content (officially called basic general education) and 50% on the educational pathways, culminating, in the 3rd year, with the maintenance of only Portuguese, mathematics and English classes as mandatory (Teacher from school A). Hence, all other subjects will be taken at the student's choice, which leads to what the teacher classifies as a fragmentation of student education, an issue about which he expresses great concern. In his words:

In my field of human sciences, we have six 3rd-year classes, and only two have history classes. So, with the New High School curriculum, especially from the students' perspective, education has become very fragmented, as they get in a bubble of both knowledge and integration, because everyone there is taking the same track, with the same interests, and they can't have a global view of reality. [...] this proposal of formative pathways is very fragmented. So, if you choose to do the humanities track, that's what you'll study in high school. You'll have only a notion of the other components, even if there's a mix. We have, for instance, a track that mixes humanities with mathematics, but the natural sciences will be left out, the languages will be left out. That's why I say that the New High School curriculum fragments the student's knowledge too much [...] (Teacher, school A).

The emphasis placed on the issue by the teacher at school B demonstrates the same understanding:

So, the big difficulty I see is that, thinking about some areas, in the last year, there's only basic general training in mathematics and languages, and with a reduced number of classes,

two per subject. There isn't Physics, chemistry, humanities, only if the student opted for it. So, if the person opted for it, they will have it, but if they didn't opt for it, they won't. So, our big problem, and this has to be worked on with the other teachers, is: how do we structure everything in high school in less time? Because I have to give all the basic content about physics in the 1st and 2nd year so that they have a foundation, but how do I do that? [...] And then the student goes to the 3rd year and won't have physics classes, they won't have anything about electricity, for example (Teacher, school B).

Based on these remarks, what is clear from the teachers' perspective is the concern about the reduction in teaching hours and the loss of space for some subjects due to curricular flexibility through the pathways. As noted in the quotes, both sides believe there are drawbacks to student education when considering the distribution of content across the three years of high school, a situation that seems to worsen in the third year, when the pathways fill the majority of class hours. Given this context, a question arises: what would be a plausible explanation for this situation? Our answer again refers to the debate about the characteristics of the business-oriented reform of education. The reconfiguration of the curriculum in the High School Reform is explained by the central aspects of the aforementioned business oriented reforms in education: "a) standardization of and in education"; [and] b) emphasis on teaching "basic knowledge and skills of students in Reading, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, taken as the main goals and indicators of educational reforms"; [...] (Freitas, 2018, p. 38). In reformulating the high school curriculum, Law No. 13.415/2017 establishes, alongside the Federal Institutes, that the basic content for each grade will be stipulated by the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC), a normative document for all Brazilian schools. In this context, Portuguese, mathematics, and English were the only components that remained mandatory in all three years of high school. The BNCC, therefore, plays a dual role: standardization of teaching and establishment of basic knowledge and skills. Concerns about performance indicators are also present, once mathematics and Portuguese end up gaining prominence at the expense of other subjects, which are not mandatory in all years. As Freitas (2012, 2018) tells us, business reformers of education understand the need for teaching basic skills and knowledge as a study that guides the training of students by the minimum. The basics, in the conception of business reforms, is the minimum that the student needs in order to become a piece of cheap labor for the productive sector. At the same time, the need for curricular flexibility, which becomes an expression of order in the pedagogical project of the flexible accumulation regime (Kuenzer, 2017), is guaranteed by the offer of formative itineraries. Therefore, we can conclude that the fragmentation of student training and the reduction and loss of space for subjects reported by teachers is nothing more than the expression, in practice, of one of the objectives of the High School Reform.

Having considered these points, we will now turn to a final, highly relevant aspect of the experience of administrators and teachers regarding learning pathways, namely, the relativization of their effects on students' daily lives and freedom of choice.

As we saw in previous quotes, the accounts of the administrators and teachers interviewed showed an initial optimistic view regarding Law No. 13.415/2017. There was, among them, an understanding that the possibility of choosing what to study could increase the attractiveness of High School and students attendance. However, four of our interviewees (teacher from school A, principal of school B, coordinator of school B, and teacher from school B) indicated that, in practice, the promises of the "New High School" were not fulfilled.

According to the principal of school B, the gap between what was said during the first meetings with SEDUC-SP and the Directorate of Education (DE) and the practice became evident in a short time:

I don't know if these learning pathways really meet the students' needs, because some things have nice names, for example, as you think of a name, for example, "Get Connected to the Media," which is one of the pathways we have, it gives the impression that it's something groundbreaking, that it will use the internet a lot, with media, with everything, but when you go to develop the pathway, it's not very practical [...]. You know that saying: "Beautiful on the outside, but rotten on the inside"? Sometimes I kind of feel like that. I think the learning pathways have to change (School Principal B).

Upon further investigation into the reasons for her perception, the principal of school B states that the learning pathways are theoretical and tedious, disconnected from the students' reality. In her opinion: [...] in these learning pathways, I don't know if I didn't understand correctly, but I can't see the children enthusiastic about doing them (Principal of school B). The coordinator of school B, in turn, states that, according to the information released by SEDUC-SP and DE, a scenario was anticipated in which students would choose subjects that they wished to delve deeper into (history, geography, or physics, for example), but that, in reality, what occurs is the selection of pathways that address specific pre-established themes over which nothing can be altered.

*"What we noticed was a reduction in the number of classes in all subjects [...]. **What you do is work on some skills in a thematic section; there is a central theme that cannot be changed. It is defined by the administration**"* (Coordinator of school B, emphasis added).

The document that stipulates the skills to be worked on in each learning pathway mentioned by the coordinator is the Support Material for Planning and In-Depth Practices (MAPPA). MAPPA's are sent to schools in printed format and distributed to teachers, who also have the option of consulting them virtually through the SEDUC-SP website. Regarding these documents, the teacher from school B gives us the following statement: *"[...] if we look at the state material, which they call MAPPA, which is the pathway curriculum, there is a defined structure, but sometimes for our students it is very poor to follow it to the letter"* (Teacher from school B).

The excerpt allows us to make two points: firstly, it reinforces the previous observation that the High School Reform is structured around the minimum skills required for students to be absorbed as labor by the productive sector. Secondly, it highlights the teacher's concern about the rigidity imposed by the MAPPA (National Curriculum Framework for Pedagogical Activities), which, according to her, motivated teachers at the school to go beyond the document's limits (Teacher from school B). This initiative by teachers was also reported by the teacher from school A. According to him, given the limitations of the pathways, collective teacher work was paramount in attempting to mitigate the effects of curricular fragmentation (Teacher from school A). It is clear, therefore, that teachers, as active subjects, are not mere repeaters or followers of an imposed set of guidelines; they modify and resist changes that, in their judgment, are not in line with the students' interests or that may harm their education. However, as unquestionable as this finding may seem, one must not ignore the weight of the State in defining the *modus operandi* of the educational pathways. It is precisely in this aspect that we can discuss the relativization of the effects of these pathways on student education and the possibility for students to choose what to study. On this point, this investigation made clear the reservations of administrators and teachers regarding the implementation of the High School Reform. One piece of evidence found is that the freedom of choice, so widely proclaimed by official discourse, is limited by the "menu" of educational pathways provided by SEDUC-SP (São Paulo State Department of Education), which, in turn, are limited by the MAPPA's (Municipal Learning Pathways). We can see a summary of this issue in the following passage:

*"[...] I only disagree with the state government's idea that all schools need to have the same basic pathways. For example, humanities and natural sciences offer a lot of possibilities, but they mandated studying soil. However, soil might be significant in a rural area, but not necessarily here. **This makes it too limited, preventing us from broadening our scope. They said that they would provide this flexibility, but so far they haven't. I just think they could give us a little more freedom to think about how to structure our school and what it needs.**"* (Teacher from school B, our emphasis).

The reports, however, do not stop there. There is another objective aspect that reduces the real possibilities of offering curricular arrangements: the physical and material structure of the schools. Definitely, the remarks made by the interviewees regarding the capacity of the schools' physical structure to handle the implementation of Law No. 13.415/2017 are a substantial part of the data obtained in our research. In general terms, we can say that there is an understanding on the part of administrators and teachers that schools offer reasonable resources for educational work, but that the situation is far from ideal. Furthermore, it was also noted that the changes brought about by the reform have strained the structure of the

institutions, a fact that creates a contradiction between the propositions of the new policy and the material conditions of the schools. As the teacher from school A affirms: *"But there's a problem: schools don't have the infrastructure to offer all the pathways students have chosen. So, often the student ends up having to take a pathway they didn't choose."* According to the teacher from school B: *"The school is overcrowded, so the Secretary's idea was that since the teenagers haven't graduated yet, they have the right to change areas. But this runs into the problem of space. A student might want to go to the math class, and math is full, so you won't be able to change."*

Similarly, the coordinator of school B reports that in certain cases, SEDUC-SP and DE can forcibly mandate the opening of a pathway. According to him, two technical-professional pathways began to be offered in 2023: foreign trade and administration. When questioned about the organization of these pathways, he states that the opening of the classroom was mandatory and that the 37 students initially enrolled did not choose this pathway, and that of these, only 18 remained.

Continuing, the administrator also points to the school's structural problems: *"Just so you have an idea, we only had 19 classes for 16 spaces. It's complicated, isn't it? Where did we have to teach classes? In the courtyard, in kiosks. This wasn't a month or two, it was a whole year."* (Coordinator of school B).

Based on the citations, it can be concluded that, in the experience of administrators and teachers, the High School Reform embodied in Law No. 13.415/2017, in practice, is far from making high school more attractive to young people and guaranteeing real freedom of choice. Based on the empirical evidence analyzed, the official and publicized discourse made by the State and the Ministry of Education is unsustainable. This finding, as well as the others already explained, is supported by recent research that dealt with the same object of study, both in the São Paulo school system and in those of other states.

Andrade (2019) conducted research with teachers and students from the public school system in the State of São Paulo. According to the results, teachers expressed concern about the organization of the New High School curriculum, particularly regarding the school's physical space for offering formative pathways and the reduction in subjects previously taught in high school. Complementarily, Silva and Martins (2020), when studying the situation of three schools in the interior of São Paulo, point to the conclusion that teachers did not find ways to participate in the changes implemented. The process was, therefore, marked by authoritarianism.

In an article published in 2020, Lurvin Reyes and Suzane Gonçalves present the conclusions of a study with high school students from the public school system in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. In their results, the researchers state that students do not see the curricular changes as positive, demonstrating an understanding that they will be at a disadvantage compared to students from private schools (Reyes; Gonçalves, 2020).

Finally, in a general synthesis on the subject, Gawryszewski et al. (2023) discuss the falsity of the idea that public school students can choose their educational pathways and that these can be integrated into the perspective of a general education for students. In addition, in the authors' point of view, these are, first and foremost, empty pathways offered to the detriment of a broader scientific and cultural education.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article aimed to understand the implementation process of the formative itineraries (FI) proposed by Law No. 13.415/2017 in two schools belonging to the public education system of the State of São Paulo, based on the accounts of administrators and teachers. In light of what has been presented so far, the following points can be made: a) Initially, the High School Reform was well received by the interviewees, who reported perceptions consistent with the advertisements disseminated by the State when promoting the new policy. Indeed, there was an expectation that the New High School would make education more attractive to young people, promoting freedom of choice through formative itineraries, a central point of the law. However, simultaneously, teachers and administrators expressed apprehension and difficulty in understanding the changes and sought, through collective effort and work, to organize the implementation of the itineraries; b) In the understanding of the interviewees,

particularly the teachers, curricular flexibility in the form of structured learning pathways leads to the fragmentation of student education, which, in their view, is detrimental to student development. In the São Paulo state public school system, the mandatory content of the BNCC (National Common Core Curriculum) gradually loses ground from the 1st to the 3rd year, with only Portuguese, mathematics, and English remaining in all three years. The explanation for this situation, however, is revealed through the characteristics of the business-oriented reform of education, a movement of which Law No. 13.415/2017 is a part. Thus, the flexible curricular organization of the reform guides the education of young people through the acquisition of basic knowledge that is, in truth, nothing more than minimum skills so that the student can be absorbed as cheap labor by the productive sector. In this context, the close relationship between this observation and the opinion expressed by the coordinator of school B is notable: "What I like to emphasize, and this is a personal opinion, is that this New High School system came to public schools with the objective of continuing to produce cheap labor. For me, that's it, it came to further stimulate [the production of cheap labor]" (Coordinator of school B); c) Finally, something that is clear in the interviews conducted is the relativization of the effects of the pathways on student development. According to the director and coordinator of school B, the implementation of the formative pathways does not necessarily contemplate the students' interests. Even more symptomatic are the accounts that relativize the students' freedom in choosing what to study. The pathways are offered through a "menu" pre-established by SEDUC-SP, and the themes and skills worked on are defined by the MAPPAs. Furthermore, certain pathways were imposed by the state bureaucracy, such as the class for the vocational technical course in administration at school B. Finally, it is not secondary to consider the relevance given by the interviewees to the lack of physical capacity of the schools when addressing all the changes brought about by the High School Reform.

The aforementioned assertions serve as a conclusion to the study that led to the writing of this article. However, they do not conclude the topic, nor do they intend to, since we are aware that Law No. 13.415/2017 is a living phenomenon in constant change in the current scenario of education and High School in Brazil. More recently, in a scenario of strong pressure from sectors of civil society linked to the defense of public education, MEC opened a public consultation that led to the institution of Bill No. 5230, of October 26, 2023, which intended to reduce the workload dedicated to formative itineraries and replace them with in-depth courses (Brazil, 2023b). On July 31, 2024, Law No. 14,945/2024 was enacted, which partially repealed Law No. 13.415/2017 and increased the teaching hours dedicated to basic education as defined by the BNCC (National Common Core Curriculum), to the detriment of elective pathways. It then raises relevant questions: what will happen to elective pathways? What will be the impacts on access to higher education in light of the changes brought about by the High School Reform? Does the new law represent a break or a continuation of the previous one? Undoubtedly, seeking answers to these and other questions is an urgent task for all researchers interested in understanding high school education in Brazil.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the education professionals who contributed to our research by giving us their time and their accounts.

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Authors contribution

ARO: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Management, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Writing.

JDGH: Project Administration, Validation, Review.

Editor: Prof. Dr. José Luís Bizelli

Executive Editor: Prof. Dr. Flavia Maria Uehara