The post-Napoleonic Restoration aimed at halting, and reversing wherever possible, recent developments which had turned the European world on its head. Politics in particular, and to a lesser extent the social and economic spheres, were transformed in an attempt to recapture the substance as well as the flavor of the ancien régime. This course was buttressed by an almost pathological fear of "the revolution," which for many translated into bitter opposition to and condemnation of any change. Public education did not escape the spirit of obscurantism which characterized the determination to eradicate all signs of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and Napoleon. The monarchs, nobility, and clergy—allied as Throne and Altar—viewed the concept of public education, as well as the schools and universities themselves, with great suspicion. Metternich, the chief architect of the Restoration, believed that "a whole generation of revolutionaries" was being formed at the universities. This opinion was widely shared. Lamennais condemned the public schools of Napoleonic France as "seminaries of atheism and vestibules to Hell," while an obscure Prussian noble expressed the Restoration's common attitude toward education when he wrote, "Too much learning kills character."

The perceived threat posed by rationalistic and progressive education generated an almost universal response from Restoration authorities. Convinced that the spirit of scientific inquiry promoted the evils of freethinking and skepticism, they moved to crush it through the establishment of an educational regimen based on religious and monarchical principles with a view toward insuring order and social tranquility. The implementation of this policy in the major European states is well-known. However, it also prevailed in many of the smaller European states, and the newly created Polish Congress Kingdom was no exception.

The last part of the eighteenth century brought political disasters of unparalleled magnitude for Poland, climaxing with the partitions of the Polish state. However, at the same time Poland was disappearing from the map, feverish attempts at national regeneration produced some positive results.
This was especially true in the educational field. In 1773 the Poles established a Commission of National Education, the first ministry of education in Europe. Directed by Polish aristocrats who had traveled frequently to Western Europe where they had fallen under the spell of the Enlightenment, the Commission of National Education established a network of schools throughout Poland which were state controlled, secular, and “rationalized.”

Although the final partition of Poland in 1795 retarded this work, the drive to reform education did not stall completely. In the Wilno Educational District, which included most of the Polish lands taken by Russia, Prince Adam Czartoryski not only labored to preserve Polish influence but also supported educational reform. Later, Napoleon’s creation of the Duchy of Warsaw provided a new arena for the school reformers. In short order a Chamber of Education (later Directorate of National Education) was established to oversee education in the Duchy. Guided by reform minded officials, the Directorate followed the pattern originally traced by the Commission of National Education. The school system was secularized once again, and Polish was reinstated as the language of instruction. The number of schools of every kind increased as did the number of pupils.

The Duchy of Warsaw’s collapse and the subsequent establishment of the Russian dominated Polish Congress Kingdom did not halt the growth of public education. In fact, the future appeared bright when Tsar Alexander I named Stanisław Kostka Potocki to head the new Kingdom’s Ministry of Religion and Public Education (KRWRiOP). A descendant of the rich and powerful Potocki family, the new minister was a man of the Enlightenment. An acknowledged Voltairian, he also served as Grand Master of Polish Freemasonry, and promoted the spread of Enlightened ideals through universal public education. In succession, he served as director of education for Poland.