

Minister for Education and Research Edelgard Bulmahn Recommends All-Day Schooling (February 13, 2003)

Abstract

In response to the PISA results, Minister of Education and Research Edelgard Bulmahn (SPD) proposed a 4 billion Euro federal program to facilitate the expansion of all-day schooling.

Source

Minister for Education and Research Edelgard Bulmahn Describes the Proposed Education and Care Program for All-Day Schooling to Members of the German Bundestag

The poor performance of German students on the PISA [Programme for International Student Assessment] test has revealed the great shortcomings of our school system. Last July, after the PISA international rankings were published, I stood right here and made it clear that the deficits were grave enough to warrant a national response. Therefore, we acted quickly. The draft version of an administrative agreement that we submitted to the state [*Land*] governments on Monday is one of the necessary responses. And we will continue with our systematic reform process.

I have invited my colleagues from the [governments of the] federal states to a concluding discussion on the administrative agreement in early March. Let us all make a concerted effort, so that the agreement can be signed quickly and implemented expeditiously, because this is what millions of parents and many teachers want. They want to finally provide our children and adolescents with the educational opportunities they need. These educational opportunities are urgently needed in our country, too.

Through the “Future, Education, and Care” [*Zukunft, Bildung und Betreuung*] investment program, the federal government will give the federal states roughly four billion Euros in the coming years to help establish all-day schools.* This year, 300 million Euros have already been allocated. One billion Euros will be budgeted annually in the coming years [i.e. 2004, 2005, and 2006]. And seven million Euros will be budgeted in 2007.

These funds have been made available because the federal government knows where it needs to set its priorities. According to the Basic Law, the federal states have been responsible for school education since the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany. It is unprecedented for the federal government to be allocating four billion Euros to help the states fulfill their responsibility [in the area of education]. The federal government’s support program also benefits local communities, since additional bids can be awarded to small and medium-sized businesses, particularly local tradespeople.

We have deliberately designed the program to be unbureaucratic and transparent. The administrative agreement ensures that the federal states can decide for themselves which projects to support. Therefore, we are not questioning the competence of the federal states and local school authorities.

The expansion of all-day schooling is an important step in returning the German education system to the top of the world rankings within the next ten years. Other important steps, in addition to developing educational standards – this month, together with the chairs of the Standing Conference of the Ministers

of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Federal States [*Kultursministerkonferenz*], I will be presenting an expert report on this very subject – include the regular assessment of school performance, the appointment of a national advisory council for education, the creation of a national system for reporting on education, as was decided upon in the Bundestag, and the joint development of better instructional concepts and methods, as we agreed upon last July in the Federal and State Commission (BLK) for Educational Planning and Research Promotion.

A look beyond our borders shows that this sort of strategy contributes significantly to improving the quality of school education. [But] such a strategy will only result in fundamental changes and substantial improvements to our education system if it is supported jointly by the federal government and the federal states, as well as by teachers, students, and parents. To that end, it is necessary for every one of us to assume responsibility. No one can opt out or stand on the sidelines.

What we need – and I must say this in no uncertain terms – is a rethinking of our education policy. It can no longer revolve around the issue of clarifying responsibilities. Let me say this very clearly: it is a scandal that social background determines educational opportunities in Germany. That is not the case in any other country in the world. Thirty-two countries participated in the PISA test, but Germany is the only country where social background is the determining factor in the utilization of educational opportunities, the attainment of educational success, and thus the attainment of success in life. That is a scandal, and it must stop.

* Most German students still attend half-day schools – eds.

We want every child – with his or her talents and weaknesses – to be given a chance. Our ongoing goal is to guarantee equal opportunity, and that requires good all-day schools. We already have many of them in Germany; one only has to take a look at them. Good all-day schools are a necessary prerequisite for children and young people to receive intensive, individual attention from an early stage.

This is precisely the Achilles heel of our school system. We don't give children enough individual attention and support early on. Therefore, this is precisely where we will begin our work. We need to start with elementary schools. That is why the all-day school program is not only for the final years of high school [*Sekundarstufe II*]. We have to start with kindergarten to ensure better cooperation between kindergartens and elementary schools. Because the deficits that emerge early on are usually very difficult to correct at a later stage. Here, we must be guided by the motto of the Finnish education system: "Every child can succeed, provided that we succeed in giving him or her appropriate support."

I would like to state one thing very clearly: all-day schools are not soup kitchens, as some people – foolishly, as I see it – continue to claim. Also, the point isn't to offer students a little help with homework; rather, we aim to establish all-day schools where the main pedagogical focus and primary responsibility really will be this: to give children individual attention from an early stage. Obviously, there is no such thing as a single educational strategy for all schools. Every school must develop its own strategy, its own profile, which will be geared toward local conditions. This is why we firmly support greater autonomy for schools. An all-day school in a poor urban neighborhood will be different from an all-day school in a rural area. Anyone who doesn't understand this hasn't done his homework.

The main thing is for the federal government to recognize the different strengths and talents of our children early on and to offer them optimal individual attention through a diverse educational strategy – and diverse is the key word here. We can do this. The best schools in Germany prove this, as do the numerous examples in other countries. We can achieve this, for example, by linking instruction with

extracurricular offerings, by dividing the morning and afternoon into periods of recreational (or self-directed) activity and periods of more rigorous instruction. This can be accomplished by abandoning the rigid schedule of 45-minute periods (which would create more room for free instruction and project-oriented lessons); by incorporating programs offered by the *Jugendhilfe*,* music schools, and athletic clubs; by organizing partnerships between local schools and social and cultural institutions and companies; by encouraging ongoing, intensive engagement on the part of parents, students, and external partners in school development; and by – and we should not fail to mention this – giving far better training to our teachers, both future teachers and those already employed, since they need to see themselves more as team members and not solely as mere subject-matter experts.

By giving the green light to all-day schooling in Germany, we are initiating a vigorous education reform. Reactions on the ground show that this initiative is a step in the right direction. We have already received numerous requests from local authorities. I am expressly stating this to silence false rumors that our school administrators and teachers are not making active and creative use of this opportunity. They are doing this, and we have to give them the chance to do so.

Let me issue a brief remark to the opposition: in view of the great task ahead of us, we need a new culture of cooperation – a culture of cooperation like the one we had in the Education Forum. I hope the opposition has not forgotten what we decided on jointly – together with three CDU state ministers, Annette Schavan, Hans Joachim Meyer, and Hans Zehetmair – in the Education Forum almost a year ago: that all-day schools are a major and important prerequisite for giving our children better and more individualized attention. In my mind, education also involves recognizing and considering the work and insights of others.

* An organization that offers support services for young people – trans.

Source: Minister for Education and Research Edelgard Bulmahn Describes the “Future, Education, and Care Program” for All-Day Schooling to Members of the German Bundestag, *Bulletin* (Press and Information Office of the Federal Government), no. 14, February 13, 2003.

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