Public Schooling in Prussia: Number of Institutions, Teachers, and Pupils (1864–1913)

Abstract

Education fell under the purview of Germany's federal states. Therefore, reliable statistics for the entire nation are hard to come by before the turn of the century. Figures for the Kingdom of Prussia nevertheless allow for some reasonable estimates because about three-fifths of the German population resided there. School attendance rose dramatically in Prussia at the end of the nineteenth century. Industrialization, urbanization, and rising literacy rates were directly tied to educational advances, which depended in part on reducing class sizes. The first table shows that the number of teachers increased almost threefold from 1864 to 1901, whereas the number of pupils only doubled. As a result, the pupil-teacher ratio fell from about 92:1 in 1864 to 63:1 in 1901. The second table reflects the situation in public middle-schools, which were intended mainly for children of the lower middle classes but also included the so-called higher girls' schools. The pupil-teacher ratio in these schools fell from about 41:1 in 1864 to about 30:1 in 1901, with most of the decrease coming in the first fifteen years. The third table cannot adequately account for the many different types of public secondary schools in Prussia and the Reich. In addition to the traditional *Gymnasien*, where pupils studied Latin, Greek, and other subjects for nine years, there were *Realgymnasien* and *Ober-Realschulen*, which offered more modern curricula that focused on the natural sciences and modern languages. Here, we see that the ratio of pupils per teacher did not change dramatically.

Source

I. Public Elementary Schools

Year	Schools	Classes	Teachers	Pupils	Pupils per class	Pupils per teacher	Pupils per 100 inhabitants
1864	25,056	–	30,805[1]	2,825,322	–	(92)	15
1871	33,120	–	48,211[2]	3,900,655	–	(81)	16
1878	32,299	–	59,493	4,272,199	–	72	16
1882	33,040	65,968	59,917	4,339,729	66	72	16
1886	34,016	75,097	64,750	4,838,247	64	75	17
1891	34,742	82,746	71,731	4,916,476	59	69	16
1896	36,138	92,001	79,431	5,236,826	57	66	16
1901	36,756	104,082	90,208	5,670,870	54	63	16
1906	37,761	115,902	102,764	6,164,398	53	60	16
1911	38,684	128,725	117,162	6,572,140	51	56	(16)

The population figures refer to the respective territory; actual counts only took place in 1864 and 1871; the data used here was generated by the Prussian Statistical Bureau by means of "arithmetic interpolation"; no data was available for 1911: the figure used here is for 1910 and was therefore put in brackets.

Source*: Jahrbuch für die Amtliche Statistik des Preußischen Staates* (1883): pp. 540, 550–59 (1864–1882); *Statistisches Jahrbuch für den Preußischen Staat* (1913): pp. 392, 393; (1915): p. 6 (population). Original German data reprinted in Gerd Hohorst, Jürgen Kocka, and Gerhard A. Ritter, *Sozialgeschichtliches*

Arbeitsbuch II, 2nd ed. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1978, p. 157.

II. Public Secondary Schools

An 1882 decree stipulated that, in the future, the successful completion of an institution with nine grade levels (even one not offering Latin) would entitle pupils to enter university and to pursue certain advanced scientific and technical occupations. Nevertheless, this decree did not result in any standardization. Afterwards, there were three types of secondary educational institutions:

I. Full-credit institutions whose school leaving certificates entitled pupils to study at university; these differed in the combination of subjects offered.

1. *Gymnasium* (grammar school), entailing compulsory instruction in Latin and ancient Greek;
2. *Realgymnasium*, a type of grammar school entailing compulsory instruction in Latin (but usually not in ancient Greek) and a stronger emphasis on the natural sciences;
3. *Ober-Realschule* (a senior stage of middle school), without instruction in Latin.

II. Advanced schools that were not full-credit institutions; the successful completion of these schools did not entitle pupils to study at university. These schools had seven grade levels; they were intended to prepare pupils to attend full-credit institutions, and they featured the corresponding subdivisions.

In addition, a separate type of educational qualification (which included a school leaving exam and eligibility for one year of military service) was offered by the advanced schools for the middle classes (*Bürgerschule*) after the completion of a six-grade education (without Latin); by decree of the responsible minister in 1892, these schools were turned into preparatory institutions for the *Ober-Realschulen*. This same decree also caused school types to be differentiated more sharply on the basis of the foreign language combinations and the natural sciences offered in the curricula.

Hence, the secondary educational institutions included: *Gymnasia* and *Progymnasia* (six-grade grammar schools without the senior grades), *Realgymnasia*, from 1859 to 1882 *Realschulen* of the first order (full-credit institutions with nine grades) with instruction in Latin, *Ober-Realschulen*, since 1877 full-credit institutions with nine grade levels but no instruction in Latin, and *Realprogymnasien*, i.e., *Realschulen* that prior to 1882 had been designated as *Realschulen* of the second order or, respectively, advanced *Bürgerschulen*.

In including these schools, the following table covers the entire school system beyond the so-called intermediate school leaving certificate (*mittlere Reife*). Admittedly, it does not cover girls' schools of this same level, but even as late as 1913 these schools did not have more than 3,939 pupils, even when private schools are counted. Preschoolers and preschool teachers were counted as well.

Year[3]	Institution	Teachers[4]	Pupils	Pupils per teacher	Pupils per 100 inhabitants
1864	264	3,810	78,718	20.7	0.41
1871	414	5,941	119,641	20.1	0.49
1875	454	6,669	135,777	20.4	0.53
1880	493	7,502	145,575	19.4	0.53
1885	525	8,724	151,541	17.4	0.54
1890	549	–	156,796[5]	–	0.52
1896	576	8,365	156,472[6]	18.7	0.48
1900	627	8,852	176,268	19.9	0.51
1906	745	11,119	227,349	20.4	0.60

1910	824	12,549	260,019	20.7	0.65
1913	881	13,731	275,165	20.0	–

NOTES

[1] This figure only includes full-time male teachers. The female teachers—2,815 for 1864 and 3,848 for 1871—cannot be divided into full-time and substitute teachers; from 1878 onward, this category includes full-time male and female teachers.
[2] Including part-time substitute teachers, estimated at 2,000.
[3] Throughout, the data for "year" begins with the winter semester of the year listed and continues to the following one.
[4] Until 1885, these figures include full-time employees and assistant teachers together; from 1896 onward, they only include full-time teachers.
[5] In Schwarz, due to an error in addition, the figure 166,796 was provided in this place.
[6] Here, Schwarz (p. 226) lists the number of pupils at 165,060. The source of this figure remains inexplicable, whereas the data provided there for the year 1893 corresponds with our source.

Source: *Jahrbuch für die Amtliche Statistik des Preußischen Staates* (1883): p. 397 (1864–1880); O. Schwarz, *Der Staatshaushalt und die Finanzen Preußens*, vol. 2, *Die Zuschußverwaltung.* Berlin, 1900, p. 228 (for 1885) and p. 226 (for 1890); *Statistisches Jahrbuch für den Preußischen Staat* (1913): p. 416. Original German data reprinted in Gerd Hohorst, Jürgen Kocka and Gerhard A. Ritter, *Sozialgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch II*, 2nd ed. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1978, pp. 159–60.

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