

## Rural Schools (August 14, 1675)

### Abstract

---

Toward the end of the late medieval period and the beginning of the early modern period, German speaking communities throughout central Europe increasingly focussed on the importance of establishing schools. Community schools emerged in the Swiss lands as early as the thirteenth century. As the Reformation unfolded in the region, Protestant educators reflected both the priorities of the humanist educational reformers (including the use of the vernacular, moral preparation, and the study of classical language, grammar, and rhetoric) and the priorities of the Reformers (including teaching and reinforcing doctrine, scripture, and morality). For girls, the goal of education was primarily to promote enough literacy to read the Bible. Rural school districts often had mixed gender classes throughout this period, and some boys were able to go to school and learn a trade for part of the day or go Latin schools in urban areas. This seventeenth-century document from Bern established the school calendar, rules about discipline, and accommodations for poor students.

### Source

---

The schools inspector to all pastors, consistory judges, office holders, schoolmasters and teachers, and all who belong to our German lands: since necessity requires that at the present time the school ordinances in the territory be somewhat expanded and improved, as we were made to understand by the abovementioned people, we have given the superiors of the churches and schools in our capital a mandate to set down and bring to us a thorough new ordinance, which we sent to you, our pastors in the territory, in order to learn from you if this same ordinance can be introduced in every place, or if anything should yet be added or removed? After your report on the ordinance reached us, we, according to our aforementioned mandate, established this ordinance for those serving the churches and schools in our city, and thereafter our honored councillors, German treasurer, and military leader,<sup>[1]</sup> together with us herewith approve and confirm it as follows.

3. The beginning of school, as concerns young and small children, shall be on St. Gallus Day [October 16th] and the end on the first of April. But the other children who are stronger and bigger, and therefore are needed and useful for farm labor, shall begin on the first of November and be released somewhat earlier, and in between shall be expected to work more diligently. But since the nature of farm labor varies from place to place, the times for the beginning and end of school can be shortened or lengthened, if the bailiff and overseer of the place consider it necessary. If it can be done, in those places where it is possible or has already been adopted, schooling should continue throughout the whole year.

7. [The teachers] should also have the power, and should not be hindered in this by the parents, to beat the youth with rods when necessary, and this carefully and with humility; but if one deals an excessive punishment, he shall be called before his superior and punished with the right measure.

9. To this end the schoolmaster, in the times and hours when school is in session, should not leave the schoolhouse and go into other stores, as often happens, but rather always remain with the schoolchildren and diligently supervise them.

13. The parents should send their children to school early, as soon as they can do anything, and commit them to the schoolmaster's charge with an account of the child's nature; and if they are found to be slow in this, the superiors shall have the power to hold them to it.

---

14. Poor and needy parents, who are unable to buy books for their children, or to provide sustenance and clothing for them during their school years, shall ask the office holders and overseer for advice and help, which they should provide with all possible diligence, as they can be helped from the communal taxes, only because each church should support its poor, so that the poor are not kept from Christian instruction for want of sustenance.

23. If in addition the churches wish to give the hardworking children a gift in order to encourage them all the more, that is an option, and they may to that end find the means to do this like others, who have already laudably adopted this practice.

## Further reading

“Mädchenerziehung.” Accessed July 20, 2023. <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/articles/048195/2006-11-09/>.

Frieda Hurni, *Von Schulen in den Dörfern: die Entwicklung der bernischen Landschulen von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts: dargestellt am Beispiel der Gemeinde Köniz* (Archiv des Historischen Vereins des Kantons Bern, Bd. 70), Bern: Historischer Verein des Kantons Bern, 1986.

Elke Kleinau / Claudia Opitz, Hrsg., *Geschichte der Mädchen- und Frauenbildung*. Bd. 1. Vom Mittelalter bis zur Aufklärung. Bd. 2.: Vom Vormärz bis zur Gegenwart. Campus-Verlag. Frankfurt 1996.

## NOTES

[1] *unser fûrgeliebte mit-räthe Teutsch seckelmeister und fenner*

Source of original German text: Hermann Rennefahrt, *Die Rechtsquellen des Kantons Bern, Erster Teil: Stadtrechte, Zwölfter Band: Das Stadtrecht von Bern XII, Bildungswesen*. Aarau: Sauerländer, 1979, Band I, pp. 146-150. Available online at: [https://www.ssrq-sds-fds.ch/online/BE\\_I\\_12/BE\\_I\\_12.pdf](https://www.ssrq-sds-fds.ch/online/BE_I_12/BE_I_12.pdf)

Translation: Christina Moss

Recommended Citation: Rural Schools (August 14, 1675), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/from-the-reformations-to-the-thirty-years-war-1500-1648/ghdi:document-5452>> [April 02, 2025].