

Opening Speech by the President of the Conference of the German Ministers of Education
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Minister of Education of Schleswig-Holstein

ESHA-Convention

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Principals are very important partners of every minister of education. Not only “top down” by implementing reforms responsibly but also “bottom-up” by informing their ministers about problems, difficulties, achievements and ideas – directly or indirectly through school inspection or organizations like the Confederation of Principals.

Mr. Rossow, whom you’ve just heard speak and his organization are important partners for us in Schleswig-Holstein.

Thus, it is pleasure for me to be here today. I am glad to see that you are willing to think out of the box at this international conference to generate new ideas. This willingness reflects what we expect from our schools: that they openly deal with their environment and that they think and act on a European level.

The most urgent questions we have to ask concerning education should be quite similar all across Europe:

What does a good school look like?

How do we measure the quality of educational achievement and student results?

How do we qualify teachers for their educational and pedagogical tasks they have to perform every day?

How does school management influence student results?

How do we have to organize and structure school management?

How do we ensure we have enough teachers and principals in the future?

How much transparency, cooperation and partnership are necessary?

It’s not necessary to reinvent the wheel to answer these questions. Moreover, we have to ask: how do our neighbours deal with these challenges? What can and what must we learn from others – especially from our European neighbours who share – considering all differences – a common cultural and historical tradition with us.

These questions are on top of the agenda of every political debate about education – whether experts or the public are concerned. Every country has to deal with them because everyone knows how important education is for the future of each one of us and for the future of our democratic societies in Europe.

To find the right answers for these questions we have to look about. Thus, I am glad to see – as the president of the Conference of the German Ministers of Education and as the minister of education of the northernmost German state – that the national principal organizations keep up this international and European exchange and thus develop the self-conception of principals.

We in Germany have a special obligation to deal with the quality of our education and student's results because on the one hand, we did not compete as well as we had hoped in the international PISA test. On the other hand, we deal differently with educational questions than other European countries because of our federal structure

The Conference of the German Ministers of Education, KMK, for which I stand here today organizes the cooperation of the states in educational matters. This special system in Germany is sometimes difficult to explain - even on the European level - because our partners' educational systems are rather centralized. But this educational federalism is part of our post-war history and our tradition and it is the system we are confronted with today. The government and the states are discussing a reorganization of the federal structures via the "federalism reform". It will grant the states more competencies and responsibility – quantitatively and qualitatively - in education, science and research:

- The planning of the educational structures as a shared task between government and states will no longer exist.
- Instead, the new joint task will be the "assessment of the performance and effectivity of the education system in international comparison" which deals with the future-oriented common evaluation and educational coverage.
- The Conference has accepted the new competencies because they give more political power to the states and allow them to act innovatively. The new regulations have also enhanced the greater responsibility towards the government that comes with the additional competencies of the states.
- The objective is that the Conference will coordinate the educational development and project work.
- A coordinating group with members from the Conference and the national ministry of education is supposed to be responsible for the coverage of educational topics in the media. The group will also deal with the participation in international competitions like PISA.
- The government and the states shall agree on research programmes in the educational sector and they shall be implemented by the German research community.
- Further steps will be coordinated by the head officials and in the respective working groups.

In conclusion we can say that the content of the educational questions will not change through the reform of the federal system. The problems rather lie in the field of teacher salaries and in the work regulations. In the future, the states will make their own decision in these fields and this can indirectly effect the schools.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A lot of things will change in the educational sector, but the goals stay the same: more education, more success and higher graduation levels. Therefore, we will follow the road that the states within the Conference of the German Ministers of Education have paved after the Pisa-shock. What I am talking about is the paradigm shift towards a more empiric pedagogical concept, towards quality assurance and quality development. A paradigm shift that has already happened in many European countries – of which many have scored better than Germany on the PISA test.

Right after the PISA results had been published in December 2001 the Conference of the German Ministers of Education put seven fields of action on the agenda that were supposed to be implemented as soon as possible:

- the improvement of the speaking abilities in preschool
- the cooperation of preschool and elementary school to make early school enrollment possible
- the improvement of education in elementary schools, the improvement of literacy and the basic understanding of mathematic and scientific contexts
- the effective enhancement of underprivileged children, especially children and youngsters from a migrant background
- the development and assurance of quality in class and in the schools on the basis of binding standards and a result-oriented evaluation
- the improvement of the professionalism of teaching, especially in terms of diagnostic and methodological competencies as part of systematic school development
- the extension of academic and non-academic all-day offers to further educate and enhance students, especially those with deficits and the intellectually gifted.

These are the fields and the goals that have been retained unchanged. They direct us in our everyday work:

- The ministers of education have agreed on challenging and ambitious educational goals and standards. Since December 2003/October 2004 we have new standards in German, Math and the first foreign language for students graduating after ninth or tenth grade. Since December 2004 the standards for elementary school (fourth grade) in German and Math as well as in Biology, Chemistry and Physics for students graduating after tenth grade are set.

These educational standards have been accepted and implemented by all German states. For the first time in our history the quality of schools will be evaluated on the basis of common standards.

- In addition, the ministers of education have established measures that allow the systematic and constant control of the efficiency of our school system. Standards and evaluation inevitably belong together.
- The government and the states have founded an institute for quality development in education at the Humboldt-University. It helps to control and substantiate the educational standards that are to be met nationwide. Thus, the institute enhances the comparability and transparency in the educational system. This supports the development of a culture of transparency, reporting and result-orientation.
- We all agree that education needs sufficient resources and funds and that these funds have to be used efficiently.
- We all know that the educational opportunities of all children have to be guaranteed in a more consequent way, i.e. by offering a more efficient individual enhancement.
- An independent school makes this possible and it has to actively take on responsibility. This includes personnel management, budgeting, participation and counselling, the structuring of the lessons and quality management.

Automatically, this leads to the definition of school management and to the question which role a principal plays in an independent school. At the moment, there is no clear definition in Europe: some schools work without a principal like elementary schools in France and Luxembourg and other schools have strong school managements like the large

schools in Great Britain - with principals who supervise their schools like managers and can be dismissed by school inspection when they don't work successfully.

There is a lot of variety in between both systems - also here in Germany where especially the large states tend to have very small and verly large schools.

We are definitely developing towards a new role of school management because the image and the self-image of school is changing. Thus, I urge you to keep up this debate within your organizations and with all groups that are involved to find out about the ideas concerning qualification and training. We all know we only have certain capacities. But I assure you that I am always willing to work out pragmatic solutions to reach a compromise. We all know: the job as a principal must stay an attractive position because the quality, the success and the acceptance of a school strongly depend on these leaders. We need men and women who take on this responsibility, men and women who want to and are able to lead a team.

There is a lot of support – also from the European Union. It supports mobility and language skills not only with the Comenius- and Leonardo-Programme, but also with the Arion-Programme for principals and vice principals as part of the Sokrates-Programme which is relatively unknown in Germany. Also, the EU supports so-called peer-learning activities in which states and the government take part together with other member states – it deals with topics like “teacher and trainer”.

I am very optimistic that this ESHA-Conference will be used as an opportunity by all of you to socialise, to establish partnerships and networks and to take these ideas home with you to implement them in your schools. Good Luck with your work!

Translated by Jahel Mielke