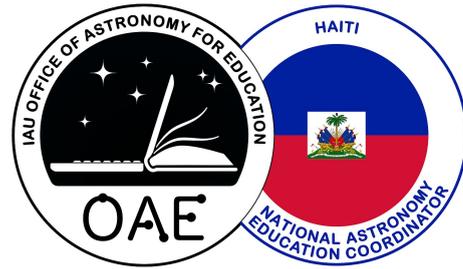


Astronomy Education in Haiti



This overview is part of the project "Astronomy Education Worldwide" of the International Astronomical Union's Office of Astronomy for Education.

More information: <https://astro4edu.org/worldwide>

Structure of education: The current Haitian educational system stems from the "Bernard Reformation", active practically since 2000. Officially, the school system, from kindergarten to NS4 & lasts 19 years consisting of:

1. Pre-school (schoolchildren from 3 to 5 years old),
2. Fundamental (schoolchildren aged 6 to 15)
 - a. Cycle 1 (first to fourth Fundamental Year)
 - b. Cycle 2 (fifth to sixth Fundamental Years) [First official state examination]
3. Secondary
 - a. NS1 (New Secondary 1)
 - b. NS2 (New Secondary 2)
 - c. NS3 (New Secondary 3)
 - d. NS4 (New Secondary 4) [Second official state exam in an elective section]
 - i. Section LLA (Letters, Languages & Arts)
 - ii. Section SES (Sciences Economy & Sociales)
 - iii. SMP Section (Science, Mathematics & Physics)
 - iv. SVT Section (Life & Earth Science)

By assuming an entry at the age of 3, one should finish at 22 and enter university; but this remains attainable for only the socially and economically privileged. Some children start at 10 or even 15 years-old. This remarkable shift in the Haitian education system started in 1979; it's called "Bernard Reform". The plan presented above is the final structure of this reform. This reform was stopped by ministerial decision in 1982. December 1987 marked the start of the official resumption of this educational reform under the leadership of the newly restructured National Pedagogical Institute, (IPN). December 1993, there was the development of a National Education and Training Plan (PNEF) which is still current. The consultations led to the establishment of the 2004 PNEF Executive Board thanks to the cooperation of UNESCO, UNICEF and USAID. In fact, it was from 2000 that this reform began to progress, causing a double speed in the system. Nowadays, this educational system is fully in force, but its application is not uniform according to the capacities of certain educational institutions, public or private.

But success in official exams remains very low. According to an article published by Haiti Press Network, on August 18, 2016, written by Alix Laroche, the success rate for the single baccalaureate (philosophy) was 27.58%.

In recent years, the academic year has been completely destroyed: violent political unrest, aggression against schoolchildren, the economic situation for families etc. (even before the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic).

The Haitian population is almost entirely of African descent with few ethnic differences. However the small mixed-race population holds disproportionate political and economic power. The Haitian educational system is partially in French with Haitian Creole having been recently introduced. Creole is spoken and understood by all Haitians, without exception; the same cannot really be said for the French, although it is dominant in the upper education and social echelons. Officially Haitians are said to be Christians, but the reality is quite different. The great majority practice voodoo at the same time, some even in secret so as not to be banished from their Christian community as some Christian communities (Catholic or not) have the best schools in the private sector and some families have to make arrangements for their children to be admitted.

Education facilities: In the vast majority of public and private schools in most of the country, classrooms are small in relation to the number of pupils. A classroom typically has a chalkboard but no projection screen or Internet access. As in most of the country, there is no electricity. Running water is sometimes available. These dysfunctions are not equally distributed in these institutions; with some private and even public establishments, having better facilities. This situation is the same, whether in rural or metropolitan areas.

Governance and organisation: In Haiti, the education system is managed by the Ministry of National Education and Professional Training.

Teacher Training: Officially, in Haiti, a teacher is supposed to graduate from the Ecole Normale Supérieure. But the reality is different. The capacity of this institution of the State University of Haiti is limited. In addition, those who finish their diploma are not supervised and do not easily find an official appointment to a job, and are forced to self-study or find courses in the private sector. However, despite these difficulties, they show great determination to achieve their qualifications. Functionally, with the New Secondary (NS1 to NS4), trained teachers seem limited in their task, most often relying on the pedagogy to teach and not, in addition, on certain necessary specialties such as physics, astronomy or geology.

Astronomy in the curriculum: There is no dedicated course in astronomy in the Haitian educational system. However, there are physics and chemistry programs for high school students (NS1-NS4, or SMP & SVT sections in NS4) where students see basic concepts for the official state exam in NS4. No laboratories are available, just theory and math exercises. The practical layer of astronomy is missing. Older primary school children encounter astronomy topics in Geography where the Earth is presented as one of the 8 planets of the solar system; the solar system is globally presented in this same chapter of less than 5 pages on average. There is no audio-visual material and no lab for children. One of the biggest problems in the primary section is the "word-by-word oral or written exam" pedagogy employed by teachers, many of whom are not college-educated professors and obtained their jobs through contacts and intelligence. Either way, college-educated professors are scarce or unable to move for positions outside the metropolitan area.

Astronomy education outside the classroom: Activities outside of classrooms are rare and are most often carried out in the private sector; in these rare cases, it is a question of visiting the country's tourist and historical sites, no visit for astronomical purposes, although we have a dark sky devoid of light pollution due to lack of electricity. There is neither a planetarium nor an observatory. However, there are isolated, rare groups who would like to do astronomical activities.

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