

Dept. of public instruction

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State of Iowa  
Department of Public Instruction  
Agnes Samuelson, Superintendent

REPORTS OF SURVEYS AND COMMISSIONS  
With Regard to the Public Schools of Iowa

Being a review of recommendations concerning the  
administration of the public school system of Iowa,  
taken from published reports

Prepared for the  
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To the members of the Conference:

During the past quarter of a century, a series of surveys and commissions have been created to observe and report on various phases of the administration of our public schools. Believing that the conclusions of these studies would be of unusual value to those attending the Citizens' Conference on Education, we have assembled herewith a review of the proposals found in the reports of these projects. It has been impossible to mention more than the most significant findings contained in these valuable summaries. Those interested in more particulars are referred to the complete publications.

A careful reading and consideration of these recommendations should assist greatly in obtaining a broader perspective of the school situation. Whether or not these recommendations meet with current approval, they summarize the deliberations of those who have given much thought in the past to the problems of public education. Certainly their efforts ought to inure to whatever benefit they offer.

It is interesting to note that many of these former proposals provoked legislative action or modified procedures by administrative officers. They are submitted in the hope that, in the midst of your pressing daily duties, the time you are so generously contributing to the objectives of this conference may be most effectively used.

AGNES SAMUELSON  
Superintendent of Public Instruction

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I. EDUCATIONAL COMMISSION

1907 - 1908

This commission was authorized by the thirty-second general assembly for the purpose of revising, amending and codifying the statutes relating to the public schools. Governor Albert B. Cummins appointed Dr. F.E. Bolton of the State University of Iowa, Iowa City, as chairman, also Arthur Springer of Wapello and W.H. Baily of Des Moines as the other members. A report which contained the text of proposed bills was published by the state in 1908. It recommended that

1. The school laws of Iowa should be completely rewritten
2. There should be a state board of education of seven members, which should license teachers, inspect and classify all public schools, also higher institutions which train teachers. The superintendent of public instruction should be president of this board
3. Classifications of schools should be defined by statute
4. The minimum qualifications of teachers should be raised
5. When a teacher is re-elected after one year of service, employment should continue without further election or contract. For cause and following a fair investigation, employment may be terminated at any time
6. Territory within the school township of a county shall become a county school district under the management of a county board of education. The county superintendent should be chosen by the county board of education
7. Boards of directors of adjoining independent districts may contract with each other or the county board of education for union schools under joint management
8. The secretary of the board of education should act as school librarian unless some other person is designated
9. All school officers of the county should attend an annual meeting called by the county board of education
10. The county treasurer should act as treasurer for all school districts of the county
11. The school census should be taken biennially
12. Graduates of the eighth grade in districts which do not maintain high schools should be entitled to attend any high school in the state with tuition paid by the district in which he resides
13. The sale and adoption of textbooks should be more definitely regulated by law
14. Plans for new and remodeled school buildings should be approved by the superintendent of public instruction

## II. BETTER IOWA SCHOOLS COMMISSION

1911 - 1912

A commission of twenty-one members, of which Hon. Warren Garst, former governor of Iowa, was chairman, was appointed in 1911 by A.M. Deyoe, superintendent of public instruction, and presented a report in 1912 to the Iowa State Teachers' Association. The report is included in the proceedings of the fifty-eighth and fifty-ninth annual meetings of the association and the work of the commission, including its personnel, the members of sub-committees and the recommendations, are reviewed in the biennial report of the department of public instruction for 1912-14, pages 87-94. Principal recommendations were:

1. Voluntary consolidation of schools for a minimum area of sixteen sections. State aid to consolidated schools for a period of years: the amount of said aid shall depend on the number of departments, grade of teachers employed, course of study, kind of buildings, and equipment. Some suggested plans for raising the funds to be apportioned to schools are, a small graduated direct tax on inheritances exceeding \$10,000, a millage tax, etc.
2. The encouragement of rural high schools. The course of study should meet the needs of the community, while the quality of work should be equal to the standard of any high school
3. Every high school that meets the requirements for the normal training course shall receive \$500 annually. This method of training teachers for the rural schools should be especially encouraged
4. Four additional normal schools should be established within the next five years. These schools shall be limited to the preparation of teachers for the elementary schools
5. Applicants for teachers' certificates after July 1, 1915, shall have had at least twelve weeks of normal training
6. Present methods of holding normal institutes should be discontinued. Short inspirational teachers' meetings held during the school year and compulsory attendance of teachers without loss of pay are recommended
7. The powers and efficiency of the department of public instruction should be increased; an adequate contingent and traveling expense fund should be provided; the salary of the superintendent of public instruction should be fixed at not less than \$4,000 and the term of office should be four years. The duties of the deputy superintendent are barely less important than those of the head of the department, and his compensation should be fixed commensurate with his responsibilities
8. A rural school inspector, a grade inspector, and a high school inspector, under the department of public instruction, should be employed. States, including nearly all the surrounding states, that are taking the lead in educational matters employ such inspectors

9. The duties and importance of the county superintendency should be increased, the salary fixed as high, at least, as that of any other county official (not less than \$1,800), the standard of qualifications for the office raised, and the facilities for the supervision of the schools increased. The term of office should be four years
10. The office of superintendent of public instruction should be made non-partisan-elective, and that of county superintendent non-partisan-elective or appointive
11. Enforcement of the compulsory attendance law should be placed in the office of the county superintendent
12. Rural independent districts should be abolished and the establishment of the township as the unit of organization in rural districts to be governed by a board elected at large, to consist of not to exceed five members
13. All school officers should be required to attend an annual conference to be called by the county superintendent, at such time as the superintendent of public instruction or his representative, particularly the inspector of rural schools, may attend, and that school officers receive a nominal fee for such attendance. Sections 2780 and 2785 should be amended so that school officers shall receive a fixed compensation for performance of certain duties
14. The county board of education should be changed by the election or appointment of two or four members to serve with the county superintendent
15. The office of school treasurer should be abolished, the county treasurer being authorized to pay all warrants on the school funds. School funds should draw interest the same as other funds
16. All school elections should be held on the same day in March, and all school boards should organize on the same day
17. Industrial education in the schools should be promoted
18. The community center idea should be extended
19. School funds shall consist of a schoolhouse fund and a general fund
20. The school laws should undergo a complete recodification
21. Recommendations of the committee on high schools were adopted as follows (applicable to small high schools especially):
  1. That the department of public instruction define and classify high schools
  2. That the work of the high schools be standardized
    - a. Amount of work a school ought to do and character of work done
    - b. A minimum number of teachers for a definite amount of work
    - c. Minimum requirements as to qualifications for high school teachers
    - d. Requirements as to building and equipment

22. Laws safeguarding all nominations and elections pertaining to school matters should be passed
23. School boards should be empowered to contract with city superintendents for a period not to exceed three years

### III. LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON TAXATION

1921 - 1923

The thirty-ninth general assembly approved the appointment of a committee of members of both houses to study the status of taxation and make recommendations to the following legislature. The membership of the committee included Senators H.S. Van Alstine of Gilmore City, Charles M. Rutherford of Iowa City, Ed M. Smith of Winterset, Milton B. Pitt of Crescent, and Representatives C.E. Narey of Spirit Lake, T.E. Moen of Inwood, Arthur Springer of Wapello, and James Peters of Perry. Its findings were printed as a bulletin by the state of Iowa in 1923. Among its recommendations the following were of particular importance to schools.

1. Establishment of a state board of assessment and review
2. Creation of county assessors
3. Assess property at full value
4. In determining actual value of property for taxation purposes, include its productive or earning capacity
5. Establishment of state budget system
6. Establish local budget committees
7. Impose a tax on admissions to amusements applying proceeds of such tax in reduction of county school taxes
8. Approve the principle of the state income tax in lieu of other taxes on most classes of intangible and personal property and as a replacement tax
9. Effective administration of taxing laws is the first essential
10. The need of more general information as to the problems of taxation

### IV. EDUCATIONAL FINANCE INQUIRY

1923 - 1925

In 1921 the Educational Finance Inquiry was initiated by a group interested in educational research. A committee was appointed to prepare a plan and the work was financed by contributions from four private foundations and administered by The American Council on Education. Iowa was one of several states designated for this inquiry.

The report was prepared for the national commission by Dr. Wm. F. Russell, Dean of the College of Education, Dr. T.C. Holy, Dr. R.W. Stone, and a number of other individuals. This report, which was an extensive analysis of the school finance situation, was published in 1925 under the title "The Financing of Education in Iowa." Some of the major conclusions of this report were:

1. It will be difficult, if not impossible, to finance the educational program in Iowa unless measures are instituted to improve the functioning of the present taxing system and more adequately make it reach the sources of revenue
2. The present financial problems result from the unjust and inefficient operation of the present archaic revenue system rather than from lack of adequate economic resources. Ability to finance the educational program desired by the people of the state depends primarily upon a thorough-going reform of the system of taxation
3. One great obstacle to the proper development of the educational program in Iowa is the great proportion of the burden of school support borne by the locality. There are great variations in wealth per pupil, expenditures per pupil, and the effort needed to support schools. These difficulties can only be solved by an increase in the size of a district, by a more rational system of state aid, or by a combination of the two
4. The accounting system in Iowa school districts fails to accomplish all that a good accounting system should. The state department of public instruction could yield no greater service than to recommend to the authorities a complete reorganization of the system of accounting and to provide ready and convenient data for budget making

## V. SCHOOL FINANCE SURVEY

1930

The forty-third general assembly authorized Miss Agnes Samuelson, superintendent of public instruction, to make a fact finding survey which should include the "Administration, supervision, and instruction of the public school system and the costs thereof, with data to show the financial ability of the various districts to meet such costs." Mr. R.C. Williams, who is at present director of research for the department of public instruction, was secured to make this survey, the report of which was published in 1930 as a bulletin of the department. Because of limited resources the study was confined to certain phases of school finance. Some of the facts brought out in his report were as follows:

1. Since 1910 the average daily attendance in the public schools has increased by 25% and the number of high school graduates by 600%
2. There are 4,870 school corporations in Iowa, three-fourths of which maintain one-teacher schools in the open country. The typical one-teacher rural school has an enrollment of fifteen pupils



3. More than 90% of all the high schools in Iowa offer work through the twelfth grade
4. Nearly ninety-five per cent of the funds spent for public elementary and secondary schools comes from direct taxation, and ninety-two per cent is raised by local district taxation. The contribution of the semi-annual apportionment and state aid have increased in amount, but the ratio of such sums to the income of districts has steadily decreased, so that now they provide less than one-half as much of the needs of the districts as they did in 1900. To make up for this decline local property taxes have been called upon to bear a greater part of the total
5. As a measure of revenue producing ability, the taxable property back of each child who attends school is about four times as large for the rural districts as for those containing cities. While these rural districts possess about one-half the assessed property of the state they have but one-sixth of the monies and credits
6. The highest millage levies for school purposes are found in the larger cities. The millage levies for consolidated districts is between that of the cities and the rural districts. The tax levy in mills should not be used to report the cost of the school since it is determined by the total valuation of property as well as the amount of money levied
7. District school taxes are 45% of all direct property taxes in Iowa
8. Eighty-five per cent of school expenditures are for operating costs and one-half of all expenditures are for teachers' salaries. Nearly one-fourth of the expenditures of school townships and rural independent districts goes to other school districts in payment of tuition charges and more than one-fifth of the operating cost of consolidated schools goes for transportation of pupils
9. Iowa has a slightly higher per capita cost for operating its schools than the average for the United States and about the average of surrounding states. A smaller per cent of our current expenditures goes for instructional purposes and the average annual salaries of teachers in Iowa is lower than that of the United States or any of our neighboring states

#### VI. JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON TAXATION

1929 - 1931

Another committee of legislators, who were instructed to co-operate with the state board of assessment and review and prepare desirable tax legislation, was authorized by the forty-third general assembly. The members of this committee, who were appointed by the lieutenant governor and the speaker of the house of representatives, were Senators C.F. Clark, Cedar Rapids, chairman, C.L. Rigby, Stanwood, and George W. Patterson, Burt, and Representatives Harry M. Greene, Avoca, J.H. Johnson, Knoxville, and M.R. McCaulley, Lake City. The observations of the committee and its proposals were summarized in a

bulletin printed by the state in 1930. The recommendations of major interest to schools include the following matters:

1. Appoint full-time county assessors
2. Give the state board of assessment and review more definite authority over subordinate assessing officials
3. Raise a portion of the state general revenue by an individual income tax
4. Establish a mortgage registration tax on Iowa real estate mortgages
5. Tax the sale of all forms of tobacco with an increase in the present cigarette tax
6. Levy a tax on billboards
7. Levy an inspection fee and excise tax on all butter substitutes sold within the state
8. Establish a tax upon admissions to public amusements; the revenue from such a tax to be apportioned among the school districts of the state
9. Appointment of a committee to continue the study of the tax problem in Iowa and especially to investigate and report upon methods of limiting and controlling governmental expenditures providing for greater efficiency and economy in public administration and for the recommendation of expenditure of public funds to the actual needs of the community. There should be a careful investigation of our present school system in its relation to efficiency of financial operation and tax expenditures

#### VII. COMMITTEE ON REDUCTION OF GOVERNMENTAL EXPENDITURES

1931 - 1933

Authorized by the forty-fourth general assembly, this committee was composed of W.S. Gilman, Sioux City, chairman, Senators Ed. R. Hicklin, Wapello, and Roy E. Stevens, Ottumwa, Representatives Ed. R. Brown, Des Moines, and Otto J. Reimers, Rock Rapids, and C.W. Huntley, Chariton. In its study of the public schools the committee was advised by Dr. F.P. Bachman of George Peabody College, Nashville, Tenn. The report of the committee, which was published in a bulletin in 1933 and contained specific legislative measures and other proposals concerning schools, contained the following:

1. Make expenditures for school libraries by county boards of education optional instead of mandatory
2. Provide for a uniform system of financial accounting for school districts
3. Abolish school treasurers and transfer their duties to county treasurers

4. Authorize centralized purchasing of supplies and equipment for the schools of a county
5. Allow greater flexibility in the law governing pupil transportation in consolidated districts
6. Eliminate all mandatory subjects in high schools except American government and citizenship
7. Make the establishment of kindergartens optional with boards of education
8. Discontinue all high schools with an average daily attendance of less than thirty-five pupils, or with less than a two year course and employing two teachers
9. Reduce the minimum salary of teachers and direct schoolboards to give preference to teachers with higher qualifications
10. Provide greater facility in securing an audit of the financial records of school districts
11. Authorize boards of education to contract with each other for school privileges and clarify the law regarding care of pupils when a school is closed for lack of pupils
12. Reduce the maximum monthly rate of high school tuition collectible from home districts, from twelve dollars to ten dollars
13. Provide for biennial school elections in all except rural districts
14. Reimburse school districts for the loss of revenue from tax-free lands
15. Close any school whose average daily attendance is less than ten pupils
16. Place rural districts under the operation of the local budget law
17. Reduce the number of teachers employed
18. Reorganize rural school administration
19. Strengthen the state department of public instruction
20. Reorganize present methods of financial support with an increased contribution by the state to eliminate inequalities in educational opportunities and financial sacrifices of citizens for public education
21. Retain the mandatory county-wide property tax levy for schools
22. A commission should be authorized by the next legislature to make a comprehensive school survey

VIII. COMMITTEE ON REDUCTION OF GOVERNMENTAL EXPENDITURES

1933 -

In 1933 the forty-fifth general assembly provided for a second legislative committee on reduction of governmental expenditures. The members of the committee were W.F. Riley, Senators John K. Valentine and D.W. Kimberly, and Representatives John Speidel and Earl Dean. This committee employed the Brookings Institution to make a survey of government in Iowa. The survey was made and a report presented to the committee and the extra session of the forty-fifth general assembly in the fall of 1933. This report included a series of recommendations concerning the public school system:

1. The budgetary system of the public schools should be integrated with the budgetary system of the county
2. The state legislature should refrain from enacting statutes governing the public school system except such as concern the organization of the school system itself, touch the civil rights and obligations of the citizens, or control the taxing power
3. The public school system should be placed under the supervision of the state board of education, which should have full power to make regulations not repugnant to laws governing the public school system, and which should be authorized to appoint the superintendent of public instruction. The board of educational examiners, the board for vocational education and vocational rehabilitation should be abolished and their duties transferred to the state board of education when the latter assumes supervision of the public school system
4. A county should be adopted as a unit of local school administration. When the county has been adopted as a public school administrative unit, the needs of the public school system demand that counties should be consolidated into larger units. Existing school districts should be abolished and the public schools should be locally supervised by county boards of education. Each county board of education should choose a county superintendent whose qualifications would be prescribed by the state board of education. Each county school budget should be reviewed by the state department of public instruction
5. If and when the county is adopted as the local unit for public school administration and if and when new state revenues are provided in lieu of the general property tax, a state aid or equalizing fund should be established to be administered by the state department of public instruction on the basis of a minimum millage rate for county school support, the minimum standards established by the state
6. Teachers and other employees should be appointed by the county boards of education. Teachers should be appointed on probation to the teaching service of the state and assigned to teaching positions as need and fitness dictate

7. The minimum certificate requirements of elementary teachers should be raised to at least one year of college preparation at the earliest possible date. The state program of teacher training should be co-ordinated, pre-planned, and controlled
8. The proceeds from new business and sales taxes should be used, after the expense of the offices of sheriffs and county attorneys have been met, to provide a school equalization fund

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