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THE PRESENT STATUS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION
IN KENTUCKY

BY JAMES H. RICHMOND

My term as Superintendent of Public Instruction in the Commonwealth of Kentucky is now fast approaching an end. In the light of the events and achievements of public education during this administration, the obligation and privilege devolves upon me to express my appreciation for the unity of purpose and loyal cooperation of all who have labored with me to advance the cause of public education in Kentucky. Without that cooperation, no appreciable measure of educational progress could have been realized. My final message to you is a plea for the continuance of that spirit of good will, and for the renewed support of those who have thus far contributed so generously and so nobly in behalf of the schools of the Commonwealth.

During my campaign for the office to which I was elected four years ago I stressed particularly two points: first, the great need for a careful and comprehensive study and analysis of the state's public school system in relation to other facts, with a view to planning a better and more efficient school program; and second, the imperative need for a new school code. I stated then that I believed the revision of the school laws should follow the findings and recommendations of the commission, which I hoped to have appointed to make the study mentioned above.

The plight of the public schools of Kentucky at that time is well known to all. The inroads of the depression were threatening the very existence of the state school system. The educational leadership of the state was mindful of the impending crisis. The Kentucky Education Association through its Special Planning Committee focused attention upon the problems confronting public education.

Upon my recommendation, there was created by the General Assembly in January, 1932, the Kentucky Educational Commission. On April 9, 1932, Governor Laffoon appointed the following persons as members of the Commission:

- Mrs. James G. Sheehan, President of the Kentucky Congress for Parents and Teachers, Danville.
- Dr. Frank L. McVey, President of the University of Kentucky, Lexington.
- Dr. H. H. Cherry, President of Western Kentucky State Teachers College, Bowling Green.
- Mr. J. W. Bradner, Superintendent of City Schools, Middlesboro.
- Mr. H. W. Peters, Superintendent of Christian County Schools, Hopkinsville.
- Honorable W. J. Webb, Attorney, Mayfield.
- Mr. Yancey Altscheler, Wholesale Grocer, Louisville.
- Honorable Ben Williamson, former U. S. Senator, Ashland.
- James H. Richmond, Superintendent Public Instruction, ex-Officio Chairman.

Section 2 of the Act creating this Commission explains the purpose for which it was formed. It reads:

"It shall be the duty of this commission to direct a study of public education in Kentucky and report its findings to the Governor and the General Assembly of this Commonwealth at the opening of its next regular session, with recommendations of such measures and such revision of our school code as may be found necessary for increasing the efficiency and equalizing the benefits of public education throughout the Commonwealth."

To carry on the work of the Commission funds totaling \$13,000.00 were donated by three agencies: \$7,500.00 by the Kentucky Education Association, \$5,000.00 by the General Education Board of New York City, and \$500.00 by the Kentucky Negro Association.

The Commission held its first meeting in Frankfort, Kentucky, May 16, 1932. At this meeting James W. Cammack, Jr., then Director of Research, State Department of Education, was selected as Secretary of the Commission.

The usual procedure of employing a group of outside survey experts was not followed. The educational leadership of the state was literally drafted into service. The best authorities and the most talented research workers from the State University, the colleges, and from the ranks of the leaders in the public school systems of the state were given committee positions, and cheerfully accepted important assignments of work. A total of 17 committees composed of 85 Kentuckians gave generously of their time and services in contributing to the work of the Commission.

In the months that followed, as Committee reports were developed and submitted for review by the Commission, the need for interpreting these findings to the people of Kentucky became apparent. Moreover, the serious character of the break-down in educational support was evidenced by the great reductions in school revenue to which school districts were subject. Large sections of the Commonwealth, which in prosperous times, even, had meagre educational programs, were threatened with almost entire loss of the advantages of public education. In a resolution adopted by the Kentucky Educational Commission on February 21, 1933, it was resolved "That it is of paramount importance that relief be brought to many Kentucky Schools and that definite effort be made to supplement means of support now given Kentucky school districts which are unable to maintain the minimum requirements of a standard school after having exhausted their taxing powers".

Under the joint sponsorship of the Kentucky Educational Commission and the State Department of Education the publication of the Educational Bulletin was begun with the issue of March, 1933. In this bulletin, which has been published monthly by the State Department continuously since its inauguration, the cause of public education has been effectively presented to the people of Kentucky.

The importance of interpreting the schools to the people in view of the crisis in the economic situation was keenly recognized by the Kentucky Education Association. At the annual meeting in Louis-

ville the Board of Directors authorized the appointment of a special committee to carry on the work of educational interpretation. Under this committee the work of interpreting the schools to the people was organized upon a broader and more effective basis than before. Through the activities of the Interpretation Committee the Kentucky Education Association accepted the responsibility of making available to the people of Kentucky the great wealth of educational facts and findings produced by the work of the Educational Commission.

The Report of the Kentucky Educational Commission was published in October, 1933, as No. 8 of Vol. I of the Educational Bulletin. The proposed revision of the school laws based upon the Commission's findings and embodying the major recommendations of that body was published in January, 1934, as No. 11 of Vol. I of the Educational Bulletin.

After the publication of its report and the proposed draft of the new school code, both of which were duly transmitted to Governor Laffoon and the members of the 1934 General Assembly, the Educational Commission joined with the other educational leadership of the state in concentrated effort to secure passage of legislation enacting the code into law, and for an appropriation amounting to a substantial increase in the Common School Fund. By an almost unanimous vote the code was adopted in March, 1934, in practically the form recommended by the Commission. The code became the new law three months later.

During the month of June, 1934, the Special Session of the General Assembly passed the budget bill. By the provisions of this bill there is appropriated to the Common School Fund an amount which, with the income from the Permanent School Fund, totals \$8,369,710.00 for each of the years 1934-35 and 1935-36. The 1934 legislature also appropriated \$500,000.00 annually from the state treasury to provide free textbooks for grades one to eight. When contrasted with funds of \$6,254,739.00 in 1931-32, \$4,972,660.00 in 1932-33, and \$4,319,232.00 in 1933-34, these appropriations for the present biennium constitute a renewed and significant recognition on the part of the law-making bodies of Kentucky of the state's responsibility for public education.

The three great achievements of public education in Kentucky during this administration are the Report of the Kentucky Educational Commission, the enactment of the new school code, and the legislative appropriation of the so-called \$12.00 per capita. As is well known, due to large increases in the school census, the per capita instead of amounting to full \$12.00, as originally planned, amounted to \$11.60 for the school year 1934-35 and \$10.95 for the school year 1935-36. (If the Equalization Fund reverts to the Common School Fund, the per capita will be \$11.95. This question is now before the Court). It should be noted, too, that because of shrinkage in local assessments and consequent decreased income from local revenue, even with the increased per capita of this biennium the schools of the state

are receiving *Less Total Revenue* and at the same time are rendering better service under improved educational conditions than some *Six Years Ago*. *It Bespeaks Great Credit for the People of Kentucky that Her Public School System, Instead of Being all but Destroyed by the Ravages of the Depression, has Actually Risen to Higher Levels than Ever Before.*

Let it not be understood, however, that Kentucky schools are bountifully provided for. Such, indeed, is far from the case. It is still true that thousands of Kentucky school teachers are laboring at meagre salaries of \$60.00 a month for terms of only seven months, and that hundreds of thousands of Kentucky children still attend school in unsatisfactory and inadequately equipped one-room buildings.

Kentuckians have a right to be proud of the new school code. It is recognized all over the United States as the most modern and the best in America. It is my earnest plea that this new code be *Left Unmolested and Untampered With until Ample Time has Passed to Reveal Any Minor Defects.*

The new school code constitutes in effect a rather ideal aggregate of regulations and potential plans looking toward the building up of a vastly improved system of schools within the state. The greatest need at the present time of public education in Kentucky is the increased strengthening of an attitude of mind on the part of the citizens of the Commonwealth, strongly appreciative of the gains that have been made and deeply solicitous that they be conserved. The new school code written by Kentuckians, for the administration of Kentucky schools, incorporates in its provisions the highest and best idealism and at the same time allows for the greatest possible efficiency and economy in the operation of the schools. It recognizes the cardinal American principle of equality of opportunity; it looks beyond the selfish interests of individuals; it puts its stamp of disapproval upon nepotism; it rises above the provincial selfishness; and it embraces the principle that the public school system of Kentucky is primarily concerned with the educational welfare of the 760,000 children of the state. Of course, it will be subject to attack and largely upon the basis of *Special Interest and Privilege* as opposed to the *Best Interests of the Children of the State as a Whole.*

The adoption of the code by the General Assembly was a signal achievement and reflects great credit upon the administration under which it became law. But this achievement is only the first step in the realization of the ideal of a new day in public education in Kentucky. The new code has now been in operation a little more than a year and though many gains have already been made, they are but a beginning of the great advances that are yet to come. An obligation rests squarely upon the shoulders of the educational leadership of Kentucky to continue zealously to cherish and guard the high principles upon which the new law is based, and to support the legal sanctions that give those principles validation and effectiveness.

In order to picture more concretely the progress that has been

made so far under the operation of the new code, a few illustrations may be given indicative of the advancements taking place.

In the interest of greater economy and efficiency in the administration of local units it is desirable that small units in many instances be consolidated with larger ones. Such mergers tend to iron out inequalities of educational opportunity, to promote better community understanding, and to work to provide enrichment of school programs.

At the beginning of my administration four years ago there were 380 different local school systems inclusive of the 120 county districts. By May, 1932, according to the Commission Report, this number had been slightly reduced to a total of 371. However, largely due to the effectiveness of the code, this total has since been reduced (September, 1935) to 301. The administrative organization of county school systems has been further improved by the abolishment of subdistricts in more than twenty counties of the Commonwealth.

A significant new provision of the school law is the creation of the new school official, the attendance officer. The code requires that every school district have an attendance officer and specifies definitely his duties and responsibilities. The value of the work of the attendance officer is indicated by the large increases during their first year of service in the school census, the school enrollment and in the average daily attendance. The school census of 1935 shows an increase of 41,460. This increase may appear out of line when compared with increases of former years; but when consideration is given to the fact that for the first time in the history of Kentucky a complete school census for a single year has been made by trained school people, it is evident that the 1935 census is more accurate than any such census heretofore taken.

The Kentucky public school enrollment increased from a total of 609,684, for the year 1933-34 to a total of 625,776 for the year 1934-35, a net gain of 16,092. In this connection it should be pointed out that the percentage increase in the high school enrollment greatly exceeded the percentage increase in the elementary school enrollment. This interesting result reflects the effectiveness of the new school code in not exempting from attendance those pupils who have completed the eighth grade. The new law requires that children attend school until they have reached their sixteenth birthday. The average daily attendance of public school pupils in 1934-35 was 18,012 greater than for the year preceding. The children of Kentucky are being more accurately accounted for than ever before; more of them are enrolled in school; and their attendance is markedly improved.

Under the new school code provision is made for raising the qualification standards of Kentucky teachers. The law provides for better trained teachers and teachers trained for specific tasks. Under the certification requirements, which became effective Sept. 1, 1935, no elementary teacher may be certificated at a level below two years of college, and no high school teacher may be certificated at a level below four years of college; all teachers must be trained for the school

level at which they are to teach; and no teacher will be certificated who has not had laboratory school training. Studies carried out by the division of Teacher Training point to striking recent advances in the training and qualifications of teachers in service in the public schools of the state.

Not only is provision made for the certification of teachers upon the basis of training and other qualifications, but the new school code also recognizes that remuneration for the services of teachers also should be based upon such factors. Under the code every school district must pay its teachers according to a salary schedule which shall include training, quality of service, experience, and other approved factors. Such a provision tends to insure recognition of those qualifications which make for better teaching, and it provides incentive for the advancement of teachers in their profession. Moreover, it tends to eliminate unethical, personal, and group discriminations, the barter procedure in the securing of jobs, and tends to destroy operation of the pernicious spoils system in the employment of teachers. The net result is to raise the professional standards of the teacher, and in the end to provide better educational service for the children of the state.

Reference has been made to the fact that the 1934 legislature appropriated \$500,000 for each of the years of the present biennium for the purchase of free textbooks. On account of legal complications, the purchase of books was not started until late in August, 1934, by which time a number of the one-teacher schools had already opened. For the school year 1934-35 \$472,000 worth of textbooks were purchased, which amount supplied the children of the first four grades with practically all the needed texts. The unexpended balance remaining after these purchases, was carried over into the year 1935-36.

For 1935-36 the State Board of Education authorized the purchase of free textbooks for children of the fifth grade and for additional subjects and replacements in the lower four grades. Practically all of the money appropriated for free textbooks has been spent. Moreover, on account of the increased enrollment in the schools, and the widespread desire of parents and children to take advantage of this free textbook program, the amount of money available has not been entirely adequate for the grades supplied.

The free textbook program has been the most popular undertaking inaugurated by the State Board of Education. By supplying much needed books where there has been widespread lack of such materials of instruction heretofore, it has contributed much toward the upbuilding of a real educational program in the state. There is of late particularly a rapidly growing conception on the part of the people of Kentucky that it is the state's obligation to provide books for the school children, just as it is clearly recognized that it is the state's obligation to furnish teachers, buildings, and equipment, at public expense.

It is already very apparent that the free textbook program has increased attendance, that it has improved the efficiency of the teaching program, that it has stimulated and increased the interest of the

teacher, and that it has reduced considerably the large degree of pupil retardation characteristic of the many inadequately provided-for schools of the state.

The free textbook program should be continued as a fundamental part of the educational program of the Commonwealth. Moreover, books should be provided for children of all the grades. The minimum appropriation for textbooks for children enrolled in the first eight grades should not be less than \$750,000 a year.

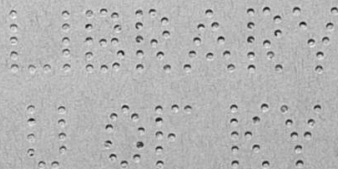
In the field of the financial administration of the public school systems of the state great progress has been made. During the administration of my esteemed predecessor, the late Mr. W. C. Bell, provision was made for the safeguarding of school funds by strict observance of requirements for the bonding of school officials intrusted with the handling of funds. As a result of this wise policy the public school moneys of Kentucky were adequately protected during the period of insecurity in banking conditions that reached its climax in the nation in March, 1933.

Numerous studies have been made of Kentucky public school finance problems during the past four years. These include exhaustive investigation of the indebtedness of the public schools, the effectiveness of school budgeting procedure, studies of teachers' salaries, extensive research of financial accounting procedures, and comprehensive investigation of the bonding of school officials. These studies have served as the basis for significant and far-reaching improvements.

Probably the most outstanding advance in the field of the financial administration of the public schools of the state is represented by the inauguration of a comprehensive financial accounting and recording system, starting with the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1933.

Research carried out within the State Department the past year shows that the public school indebtedness of Kentucky, exclusive of the city of Louisville, was reduced from \$10,969,000 as of June 30, 1932, to \$9,542,000 as of June 30, 1934, a net decrease of \$1,427,000. This represents a decrease of 13 per cent and becomes the more impressive when it is noted that between the same two dates the decrease in the public school indebtedness of the United States as a whole was less than one per cent.

The administration of schools in Kentucky owes a debt of sincere appreciation to the General Education Board, a purely philanthropic foundation established by John D. Rockefeller. This board began cooperation with the state soon after its organization more than a quarter of a century ago. It has been its policy to help this department initiate from time to time types of service desirable to be given but for which public funds may not have been made available. It was through its aid that the divisions of Supervision and Inspection of schools was provided for in the State Department of Education. The same is true of the division of Negro Education, the divisions of School Buildings and Grounds, of Research and Statistics, of School Library Service, and that of Teacher Training. This help generally



takes the form of an appropriation adequate to provide the services of a highly trained director, to the end that efficient organization and operation may be assured.

The aid thus given is continued for the operation of the service for a limited number of years, during which it should demonstrate its value and establish itself as an essential public service. This philanthropy prudently refrains from interfering in any way with the administration of the services to which it makes appropriations, and after a time it withdraws from any given type of service so it may conserve its resources to be devoted to other purposes of constructive nature.

The work of the division of School Buildings and Grounds has been financed by the General Education Board for the past five years. This appropriation expired on June 30, 1935, and the work must now be financed by the State if it is to be carried on.

The report of the division of School Buildings and Grounds for the biennium ending June 30, 1935, conveys an idea of the tremendous amount of work imposed upon this Division of the Department of Education. During the period covered by the report services were rendered to local boards of education on a total of 639 school building projects. Of this number 284 were small school buildings ranging from one to four teachers in size, or extensions and alterations for which plans and specifications were furnished by the Division. The estimated cost of school buildings and improvements upon which assistance was given by this division amounted to \$2,168,654 for the biennium. More demands were made by local boards of education than could possibly be accommodated because of the limited personnel of the office.

The construction of school buildings was greatly stimulated due to the operation of the Public Works Administration and Works Progress Administration programs of the federal government. Applications totaling approximately \$12,000,000 have been submitted to the P. W. A. and additional applications totaling several million dollars have been filed with the W. P. A. Regardless of whether these applications are approved or not, the next few years should witness the greatest program of schoolhouse construction in the history of the state, due to the fact that local boards of education have had guidance in the study of their school building problems and have developed definite housing programs.

In 1930 Kentucky ranked forty-sixth among the forty-eight states in the average value of school property per pupil enrolled. The average at that time was \$82.00 in Kentucky, while the average for the United States as a whole was \$242.00. In 1932, Kentucky had climbed to forty-second, with an average value of \$101.00 per pupil enrolled as against an average of \$250.00 per pupil enrolled for the United States as a whole. Much of this progress may be attributed to the work of the division of School Buildings and Grounds.

The work of the division of Research also has been financed by the General Education Board for the five years ending June 30, 1935.

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Notwithstanding the great importance of continuous activity in the intelligent understanding and planning of educational progress, funds have not yet become available for the carrying on of this work since the expiration of the appropriation generously granted by the General Education Board. The former director of the division served in the very important capacity as Secretary of the Kentucky Educational Commission and in this position rendered outstanding service to the advancement of research in public education in Kentucky.

During 1934 and 1935 when the Superintendent of Public Instruction of Kentucky was called upon to assume the leadership of the Federal Emergency Aid for Education program as chairman of the national committee, the Director of Research was drafted as secretary of the committee. The fact should not be overlooked that as a direct result of the activities of this committee, a total of more than seventeen million dollars was made available to some thirty states by the Federal Government in 1934. Kentucky shared in this amount, and along with other states received lasting gains in the way of proper recognition by the Federal Government of the public educational program of the nation.

If the great gains that have been made in public education in Kentucky during the last few years are to be conserved, and if the program so well begun is to go on and further progress is to be made, then it is of the highest importance that adequate provision be made to finance a continuous research program under the direction of a competent director in the State Department of Education. Such a program should be undertaken at once and pushed forward with zeal and tireless activity. We must continue to measure our steps as we proceed onward, for the ways of progress must needs be charted by the instrumentality of the services of scientific investigators. Educational research has already proven itself as actually indispensable to the advancement of public education in Kentucky. It must be provided for.

The literally unprecedented development of public education in Kentucky during the past four years has been attended by vastly increased demands upon the services of the staff of the State Department. Not one division of the Department, but actually all of them, have done tremendous amounts of work. Due to the increased demands for services and responsibilities which have come about as a result of the adoption of the new code, and to the additional tasks brought about as a result of taking over the state work in the emergency education program of the federal government, large assignments of new work have been assumed by the different divisions, particularly the division of Special Education, which has done a tremendous amount of extra work, and done it well.

Incidentally, it may be mentioned that the total cost of the emergency education program sponsored by the division of Special Education for the year 1934-35 was over \$546,000. This program gave employment to more than fifteen hundred teachers and enrolled more than fifty thousand students and trainees in all sections of the

state. It is easy to understand that a great deal of added work was taken over by the staff of the Division in the services required for the administration of this program.

Without exception the staff members have accepted these extra assignments cheerfully and have applied themselves assiduously to the added responsibilities. Considering the volume of work needed to be done and the services to be supplied to the system of public education in Kentucky, the Departmental staff is somewhat undermanned as at present constituted. It is quite remarkable that such a limited force has been able to render so large a measure of educational service. Moreover, the present cost of operating the State Department of Education is almost insignificant in comparison with the total cost of the public education program of the Commonwealth. There is needed right now a substantial increase in the appropriation for the work of the State Department of Education. This added financial support would constitute an investment which under wise direction would yield magnificent returns of lasting benefit to the childhood of Kentucky.

In closing, again permit me to express my sincere appreciation for the fine cooperation of school men and laymen, alike, in making possible the advancement of public education in Kentucky during these last four years. Without your faith and your work little could have been accomplished; and it is my earnest hope that, in the years that are ahead, the unity of purpose and breadth of vision, which have characterized your efforts during this administration, will continue to be in evidence, to the end that Kentucky may offer to her children a program of education second to none in America. This cannot be accomplished by selfishness, lack of vision, "chiseling", and the like. It can only be brought about by adhering to that time-honored principle of American Democracy—"the greatest good for the greatest number". I leave the office of Superintendent of Public Instruction with a heart full of gratitude to all the friends of education who have stood with me for a "square deal" for the children of Kentucky; and, as I go into a new field of educational endeavor, I shall continue with all the energy and ability at my command to serve their interests and protect their rights.