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Published February 1913

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Composed and Printed By
The University of Chicago Press
Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.

II. DISTRICT SUPERVISION

WEST VIRGINIA AND OREGON AS EXAMPLES

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District, or township supervision has for its object the close and effective supervision of the rural elementary schools. When a state, or a community, provides for such rural supervision it but tardily recognizes and adopts those principles of administration that have been found most effective in all forms of successful organized effort. We need only to look about us to see these principles in operation. Note, for examples, the administration of a great railroad system, the organization of a political party, or the handling of large military forces. Everybody is made responsible to and is directed by somebody else higher up. Even the churches are effectively organized and the clergy more or less closely supervised. Every large university has its president, its deans, and its heads of departments. Every city or large town has its superintendent, its district supervisors, its supervisors of special subjects, its principals of buildings, even its head janitors. But as the rural schools have been the last of all the varieties of schools to undertake any kind of improvement, so have they been the last to adopt these well-known principles of administration. That the rural schools have accomplished what they have and continued as an institution can be explained only by the fact that our rural teachers have, for the most part, been men and women of unusual devotion to their work, and that the funds for the support of these schools have come from an inexhaustible public treasury. But the time has come when the deplorable condition of country life in general and of the country schools in particular cannot longer continue so without seriously endangering the whole fabric of our national life. The people are, for the first time, becoming aroused to this fact, and conscious efforts are being made now to build up such a rural civilization as will be in keeping with the growth and prosperity of our nation as a whole.

Once this work of developing a rural civilization was begun seriously and consciously, it was discovered that squarely in front of all progress in rural life betterment stood the neglected rural school. The problem came to be, How to improve this rural institution, and through it to improve country life. For it has been found by experiment that reforms of whatever sort must come through the growing, not the adult, members of the population. The lamented Dr. W. S. Knapp demonstrated the truth of this principle by his experiences in his great work toward improving agricultural conditions in the South.

In our attempts thus far to improve the rural schools, we have tried a great many different plans. Some of these plans have succeeded, others have failed—at least partially so. The success of the best of them has been limited to rather narrow areas and peculiar conditions. To the administrative factor of the problem some very definite contributions have been made, though the adaptation of these contributions has been varied and rather limited.

It was Horace Mann's idea to train individual teachers for the work of the rural schools. For this purpose, he opened the first normal school in this country, at Lexington, Mass. This idea of Mann's spread rapidly, until today we have normal, or teachers' training schools scattered all over the land. No one would discount the excellent work these schools have done and are doing today. And yet it must be admitted that most of the direct benefits derived from these schools have been reaped by the city schools, which, owing to the larger salaries they could offer, could outbid the country schools for these trained teachers.

A little later came the plan of establishing graded schools in the country by means of consolidating small rural schools into central graded schools, transporting the pupils by wagons. This movement has spread through favored sections of a great many states, and with singular success where conditions were favorable to this plan of rural school improvement. But good as the plan is, where feasible, it can never help conditions in the large majority of the rural schools. The extension of the movement is necessarily limited by bad roads, by mountains and rivers, and by sparsity of population. This is particularly true in the mountainous sections of our country. It is safe to say that, for by far the greatest number of our country boys and girls, the one-teacher school will for many years yet continue to be the best.

The question is then, what can be done to reach and thus improve this large number of one-teacher schools?

As a means of reaching effectively *all* the rural schools, and especially the one-teacher schools, district (township) supervision has, within recent years, come more and more into favor with many students of rural school administration. For more than a score of years Massachusetts has had this plan in successful operation. Connecticut and some of the other New England states have adopted plans similar in character to that of Massachusetts. West Virginia has had optional supervision since July 1, 1908. New York inaugurated a system of compulsory supervision of all her rural schools May, 1910, and Oregon in May, 1911. Kentucky and Alabama have adopted district supervision within the last twelve months.

This departure in rural school administration has been made in recognition of keenly felt needs. In some of the states the ineffectiveness of the office of county superintendent has emphasized the need of some more effective plan of supervising the rural schools. This statement is made not as a reflection upon the holders of this office, for most of our county superintendents have labored faithfully to meet the heavy demands upon them. The increased number of schools, the ever-growing clerical demands, and the enlarged conception of the professional nature of the work of school superintendent, all have contributed toward making the office bigger than any one man. Those who advocate district supervision recognize this changed situation and merely seek to give the county superintendent relief from some of this vast amount of work by employing, as his assistants, as many expert supervisors as are necessary to insure thorough and systematic supervision of all the schools in his county.

The aim of district supervision is in general outline fourfold:

1. *To improve the administration of the business affairs of the rural school.*—The average board of education is composed of men who know very little about schools. They do not grasp the school situation well enough to know how most economically and effectively to spend the school funds at their disposal. They are men busy with their own affairs and could scarcely be expected to spend as much time with school affairs as would be necessary to supervise the construction of buildings, the making of repairs, the buying of supplies, the furnishing of fuel, and a large number of other things. A general manager, the district

supervisor, is needed to look after all these matters, always under the direction of the board. It is safe to say, if observation is worth much, that without expert supervision of the business affairs of these boards, twenty-five per cent of the building and supply funds is wasted.

2. *To help the teacher in her work.*—If we can picture to ourselves a girl yet in her teens, with no experience, with but little more than an elementary education, with no professional training, going out into an isolated rural district to teach a school of from twenty to fifty boys and girls, many of them larger and some older than herself, having against her the prejudices of the community and bad conditions generally, this girl doomed to stay in this community from the beginning of the term to its close, with little social life, with no one to give a word of encouragement or advice, such a picture will be fairly representative of the situation in a very large number of rural schools at this time. This teacher needs, even craves, sympathy and help. In very many such cases the supervisor turns the tide from failure to success.

3. *To train the teachers while they teach.*—The number of rural teachers who have had normal training is relatively very small. It would be folly to ask these teachers to quit teaching and go to a normal school. They must be trained while they teach in their schools. District supervision proposes to train *one* man for each group and send him out into the district to train these teachers for more effective work. This plan provides a training school in each district as it were, taking this training to the teachers instead of sending the teachers away to the training. The plan has at least the advantage of associating the practice with the theory of teaching.

4. *To provide for effective community leadership.*—Leadership in the rural districts is sadly lacking. There is no logical leader of the whole community. The minister is the leader only of his own church. The country doctor seldom assumes the leadership which his superior training and experience fit him for. The farmer does not have sufficient motive to cause him to assume community leadership. But the district superintendent of schools, by virtue of his office, is a logical leader of all the people of his district. He comes in contact in one way or another with every family. He knows neither class nor creed. He assumes leadership in all efforts for the betterment of his people. Without such leadership it is a difficult matter to carry through any project looking toward social, educational, or moral uplift.

WEST VIRGINIA AND OREGON AS EXAMPLES

It may be worth while to note very briefly how each of these states came to provide for district supervision. In West Virginia the board of education in one district felt so keenly the need of someone to look after the interests of the rural schools that they appointed, in 1901, an experienced teacher for this work. There was no law for such action at the time, and to avoid complications, this teacher was appointed as a truant officer, which office the law provided for. This experiment led to the passage of a law in 1908 making the appointment of district superintendents optional with boards. The law went into effect July 1, 1908.

In Oregon it was observed that many farmers were moving to town to educate their children, while others were sending their children to the towns to be educated. A committee was appointed in 1910 to investigate this situation and discover, if possible, the causes. The committee reported that the rural schools were really inferior to the town and city schools and that it was their opinion that this inferiority was due to the fact that the city schools were well supervised, while the country schools had almost no supervision. The state superintendent submitted this report to the legislature in 1911, with his recommendation that a law be passed establishing district supervision. The law was accordingly passed and became effective May, 1911.

LAWS GOVERNING DISTRICT SUPERVISION IN WEST VIRGINIA AND OREGON

The West Virginia law makes district supervision optional with boards of education, except that a petition in writing of a majority of the taxpayers may compel a board to appoint a superintendent. When it has been decided that any district shall have supervision, it becomes the duty of the board to appoint a superintendent, fix his salary, and issue such rules and regulations as seem necessary. The only qualification specified by law is that the appointee shall hold a first-grade state teacher's certificate. The powers and duties of the superintendent are defined by law as those which "are usually conferred upon city superintendents." These superintendents are required "to make such reports as may be required by the state superintendent of free schools." It is further provided that a board of education may employ the principal of any graded school in the district as superintendent "*provided* he shall devote at least half his time to supervision." Furthermore, by decision of the

state superintendent two or more small districts may unite to employ a superintendent.

The Oregon law makes district supervision compulsory in counties having over sixty school districts. A "school district" is defined as a community having fewer than one thousand children of school age. In such counties it becomes the duty of the county superintendent to appoint four persons who, with himself as chairman, constitute a county education board. It is the duty of this board to divide the county into supervisory districts, having not fewer than twenty, nor more than fifty, school districts; to employ and contract with a supervisor (the county superintendent must be the supervisor of one of these districts); to provide him with all necessary supplies (including stationery and postage); to make rules and regulations governing the work; and to serve as an advisory board to the county superintendent. The appointee shall hold a teacher's certificate valid in Oregon and shall have taught school for at least nine months in the state of Oregon. His salary shall be not less than \$1,000 or more than \$1,200 per year of ten months. It is the duty of a supervisor to work under the direction of the county superintendent; to devote his entire time to the supervision of the schools; to enforce the state course of study; and to make monthly written reports to the county superintendent.

THE WORK OF THE SUPERVISORS

The work of the district supervisors varies greatly with local conditions. No two supervisors will attack the problems in the same way, or get the same results. But there are certain large principles of school administration that must be followed by all alike, if the best results are to be obtained.

The work of a supervisor in any district consists in meeting local needs by adaptation of these principles of administration to conditions as he finds them. Individual initiative and physical energy determine largely how well the supervisor will meet and become master of a local situation.

It should be borne in mind that supervision of rural schools is a comparatively new profession in the educational field, just as sixty years ago supervision of city schools was a new profession. It is true that we have had county supervision for many years. And the county superintendents' work is essentially rural. But owing to the working of politics,

the increased amount of clerical work, and the large number of schools in most counties, county superintendents have never been able to raise their work to the dignity of a profession. So that when the rural supervisors began their work, they found themselves in a new field. But the experiences of the past few years have laid some foundations which will serve as a basis for developing rural school supervision into an attractive, because of its being a remunerative and interesting, field of work. In some states students in normal schools and in departments of education of colleges and universities are consciously preparing themselves for just this work. This new work opens up a fine field of work for ambitious young men and young women. Even today it is drawing into its field many principals of city ward schools and superintendents of small city schools.

Briefly stated the work of the supervisor of rural schools is the same as that of the superintendent of a city-school system, only that it is a means of solving rural-school problems instead of city-school problems. In each case it is but a matter of providing the best schools that can possibly be had for the given community. Local conditions are the guiding factor in every case.

As a concrete example of what some of these supervisors *are* doing, let me submit the following outline of the work of one supervisor in Oregon the year 1911-12.

1. Installed individual drinking cups in several schools.
2. Had sanitary water jar, or cooler, placed in several schools.
3. Secured the analysis of the drinking water in a large number of schools, with the result that in four cases out of five the water was condemned.
4. In all but one school had window boards installed for ventilating purposes.
5. Had the stoves jacketed in most of the schools.
6. Secured medical inspection of the pupils.
7. Readjusted the seating of the pupils with reference to health and comfort.
8. Emphasized the importance of better hygienic conditions and placed a copy of Dr. Allen's Health Rules in every school.
9. Distributed among the schools four-hundred ninety-nine supplementary readers for the individual grades.
10. Enforced the state course of study.
11. Helped the teachers in their efforts to use modern methods and devices of teaching.

12. Encouraged picture study in all the schools.
13. Secured the exchange of pupils' compositions with other school children in Oregon and in other states.
14. Assisted boards of education in securing and *retaining* capable teachers.
15. Persuaded boards to supply better school equipment.
16. Directed the work of the Teachers' Reading Circle and encouraged many teachers to attend summer schools.
17. Supplied teachers with lists of helpful state and government publications.
18. Held twenty-five public meetings and at ten of these gave stereopticon lectures.
19. Held a district school exhibit or fair.
20. Helped the pupils plan for vocational work during the summer vacation.

In West Virginia the State Department of Schools has taken a directive part in the work of the district supervisors, though in co-operation with the county superintendent. With the exception of "making such reports as the state superintendent may require," this feature of the work is voluntary on the part of the supervisors, but as a matter of fact they are always glad to get such suggestions and help from the state department as the time and energy of the members of the department will allow.

In September, 1912, a circular letter was sent from the state department to all the district supervisors and to the county superintendents as well. This letter, which follows, was intended as a sort of yearly outline of endeavor for all the rural schools in the state.

I. *Better attendance*.—Secure the co-operation of truant officers and parents.

II. *Better sanitation*.—Make sure of pure drinking water. Secure individual drinking cups and closed water jar or cooler.

III. *Improvement of grounds* and of wall decorations.

IV. *Libraries*.—Better to secure supplementary readers for the individual grades than to buy miscellaneous books.

V. *Try to secure equipment*—globes, charts, wall-maps, etc. Many schools are very poorly equipped. The teacher cannot work without tools.

VI. *Grading of one-room schools* according to the new course of study.

VII. *Better teaching*.—Secured by close supervision of work in the school-room, by teachers' meetings, and by personal study of methods and devices.

VIII. *Exchange of compositions*, one school with another in same district or in other districts, or even in other counties.

IX. *Encourage the pupils* to do their best work in composition, drawing, paper cutting, etc., by allowing them to exhibit their work on the walls.

X. *Parents' meetings*.—Nine-tenths of all school troubles come from misunderstandings of one kind or another. These meetings will bring about a better understanding between the teacher and the parents.

XI. *Free publications*.—Write to West Virginia College of Agriculture, Morgantown, and the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., for their very valuable publications on the teaching of agriculture.

This same outline of work for the year 1912-13 was printed on one page of the pupils' monthly and term report cards which are in the hands of all the teachers and pupils in the rural schools of the state and through the pupils thus reach the parents also.

The major part of the work of the supervisors in West Virginia is along the following general lines:

1. To assist boards of education in the business administration of the schools. One supervisor was able to save his district the whole amount of his salary for the entire year by employing business methods in buying fuel alone. Until that year the furnishing of fuel had been "farmed out" to patrons of the individual schools by a process called "selling out the fuel." Instead of auctioning off the contracts for furnishing fuel in each school district, the supervisor under the direction of the board advertised for bids to furnish fuel for the entire district. The cost was much less, and the service much better.

Another supervisor aided his board in saving between \$7,000 and \$8,000 by working out a practical scheme of readjusting the schools to the population. In this district 101 teachers were employed during the year 1911-12. Many of the schoolhouses had been built from ten to fifteen years. Meanwhile the population had so shifted that some of these schools had not over ten pupils, all in walking distance of other small schools. This year the number of teachers was reduced to eighty-six, and yet not a single new schoolhouse was built, and no pupil had to walk over two miles. And strange to say the school population had increased by seven hundred. This state of affairs had existed for four or five years but the board did not know it until the supervisor called their attention to it.

2. District supervision improves the school attendance. By directing the efforts of the truant officer, and by gaining the co-operation of parents and teachers, the thirty-six district supervisors for the year 1911-12 were able to increase the average daily attendance by 14 per cent

above the average for the whole state. A similar increase for the whole state would have resulted in bringing into the schools at least 25,000 boys and girls that were out of school for lack of proper attention. Aside from our duty to these irresponsible boys and girls, we must remember that the good taxpayers of West Virginia paid for the education of all these children.

3. The supervision of the teacher's work in the schoolroom has very greatly improved the quality and effectiveness of the teaching. From one-fourth to one-third of the rural teachers in West Virginia at any time are teaching their first school. Many of these new teachers are young, in addition to being inexperienced. One must see them trying to teach to understand how helpless they are and how greatly they need assistance. District supervision makes for them just the difference between "keeping" school and teaching school.

4. The district supervisors of West Virginia are doing fine service by holding regular bi-monthly or monthly teachers' meetings. At these meetings formalities are laid aside and the teachers engage in discussions of the problems that have been confronting them in their schools. One of the more skilful of the teachers is assigned to teach a class of real live boys and girls in order to give the less experienced teachers the benefit of observing good teaching. The work of the Teacher's Reading Circle is reviewed. One of the most helpful features of these meetings is the bringing together of work in written composition, drawing, and manual training for an exhibit of what has been done since the last meeting.

The district supervisors are doing many things that cannot be enumerated. Their work is nothing less than that of bringing order and system out of conditions that are more or less chaotic in the rural districts.

A study of these two state systems indicates strongly that supervision is working a revolution in the schools affected. The Oregon law affects fourteen counties, and twenty-five supervisors are employed besides the county superintendents. West Virginia has, for 1912-13, fifty-eight supervisors, who have under supervision about one-third of the rural teachers in the state.

In constructing a scheme for rural supervision it is recommended that in addition to an academic and professional requirement the supervisor be required to pass an examination, under the state superintendent, on agriculture and the supervision of the teaching of agriculture; that the supervisor be employed for twelve months in the year; that he

devote his time between sessions in the summer as supervisor of school gardens and practical agriculture on the farms in his district, and that his salary be supplemented by state funds so that the state may have more authority in directing his work, somewhat as is the plan in New York, except that the office of county superintendent be not abolished. The legal recognition of the county superintendent in the Oregon law is superior to the West Virginia law, but as a matter of actual practice the county superintendent in West Virginia not only directs the supervisor's work, he also virtually appoints the supervisor in most cases.

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