

Historical Background □ Sacramento County Superintendents of Schools

1849 Article IX of the state constitution mandates, “The legislature shall provide for a system of common schools, by which a school shall be kept up and supported, in each district, for at least three months in every year.” Provides for election of state superintendent of public instruction.

1850 California achieves statehood.

1851 State school law calls for formation of a three-member superintending school committee in each city, town and incorporated village, with power to examine teachers for competency. Law divides schools into primary, intermediate and grammar, specifying the studies in each, and providing for establishment of high schools. Counties are to be apportioned school funding based on the number of children between seven and 18 years, but county treasurers are to distribute monies according to the number actually attending school. Sacramento County population is nearly 16,000, which includes an estimated 400 school-age children. Public schools are not yet established in the county. Eight townships exist in the county.



1852 Office of county superintendent is created by state statute. State board of education is created. State will fund districts based on number of census children between ages of five and 15.

1853 State law allows county tax assess-

sors to assume county school superintendent duties. H.J. Bidleman takes on the role in Sacramento County, working out of the county courthouse.

1854 County’s first common (public) school opens February 20 in an old theater at corner of Fifth and K streets in Sacramento. Others open soon thereafter. County school expenditures total \$22,000 by end of year. City council passes ordinance to provide for election of city schools superintendent; county superintendent relinquishes control of city schools in December.

1855 State legislature creates full-time county superintendent of schools office with an election to be held every two years. Duties: exercise general supervision over schools and visit each school once a year, plus make an annual report to the state superintendent and apportion monies to school districts of the county. State law allows for transfer of school administration authority from county boards of education to municipalities, establishing “city school boards” and “city superintendents.” Sacramento County’s first elected county superintendent—Dr. F.W. Hatch—takes office.

1857–58 State mandates that county superintendents submit an annual census of schoolchildren. State superintendent recommends that a school of industry be established for juvenile delinquents and also calls for the establishment of local Teachers Institutes to “instruct the instructors” for seven to ten days, two or three times a year. He also recommends extending school to six months. California is in initial stages of determining how to meet criteria for federal funding; U.S. Congress had decreed that tax revenues from the 16th and 36th section of every township were to be dedicated solely to education. Each year, from January to April, the county superintendent has been required to conduct a study and describe the character and value of each 16th and 36th section. State superintendent asks U.S.

Congress for an alternative method of funding to enable “in lieu” selections for those 16th and 36th section areas generating little or no tax revenues, such as mountain regions, deserts, and Mexican land grants.



1860 Annual state Teachers Institute is authorized. Legislature transfers power to examine teachers from local district boards to county boards of examination. Sacramento County is operating 35 schools with 2,025 enrolled students and 49 teachers. County school expenditures for the year—\$48,716.90—have more than doubled since 1854. County population is 24,142.

1862 State Normal School (teacher education college) established.

1863 County superintendents required to submit annual reports (“Common School Reports”) to state superintendent.

1864 School districts authorized to levy direct property tax whenever state and county school funding is insufficient.

1865 County now contains 42 public school districts with 54 schools, one of them a high school.

1866 State Common Schools Act authorizes state board of education to adopt rules and regulations for the conduct of schools, to establish a course of study, and to adopt a series of textbooks. Local schools are required, at district expense, to furnish pupils with school supplies such as paper, pen, ink and chalk, and to provide school libraries. It is legal for districts to provide separate schools

for non-white children. Payment of expenses for county Teachers Institutes from county school fund authorized.

1870 County has 66 public schools with 5,406 enrolled students and 100 teachers. County's annual expense for school purposes is \$81,710.38. State law dictates that African and Indian children must attend separate schools. A separate school may be established upon the written request by the parents of ten such children. "A less number may be provided for in separate schools in any other manner."

1874 California enacts compulsory school attendance law for children between 8 and 14 years. Racial segregation of public schools is justified as "separate but equal" in the California Supreme Court legal ruling *Ward v. Flood*. County Superintendent Dr. G.R. Kelly supports a successful attempt to integrate Sacramento City Grammar School.

1875 County public school enrollment reaches 4,785; there are 106 teachers.

1878 State legislature provides relief to schools and districts previously denied full funding due to school closures caused by major floods.

1879 Article IX, Section 3 of the California Constitution establishes position of county superintendent as an elected constitutional office. In the county, 106 public schools are attended eight or more months a year.

1880 Sacramento public schools are desegregated by state statute. Law sets four-year terms for elected county superintendents. County boards of supervisors may appoint a four-member board of education (two of whom are educators) in each county. Sacramento County has 115 schools with 144 teachers and 5,855 students enrolled. Total school expense for the year: \$107,690.62.

1882 State legislature specifies the powers of county offices of education, including but not limited to: (1) Meet and hold examinations for the granting of teaching' certificates semi-annually; (2) Prescribe and

enforce rules for the examination of teachers; (3) Examine applicants and prescribe a standard of proficiency for examination, and to grant certificates for two grades; (4) Prescribe and enforce the use of a uniform series of textbooks and a course of study in public schools, and to adopt a list of books for district school libraries; (5) Revoke, for immoral or unprofessional conduct, or evident unfitness for teaching, the certificates granted by them; (6) Issue diplomas of graduation from any of the public schools of the county, with county boards of education being required to issue diplomas—signed by the board president and secretary—only to pupils who have passed an examination issued by the county board of education; and



(7) Grant county certificates, and fix the grade of them, to holders of life diplomas, Calif. State education diplomas, Calif. Normal School diplomas, Calif. State University diplomas, when recommended by the faculty of the University, and State Normal School diplomas of other states.

1882 County boards of supervisors required to compensate members of county boards of education for their services payable out of the same fund and in the same manner as county superintendents.

1884 Amendment to the state constitution provides for a board of education in each county.

1889 County superintendents allowed travel expenses to visit schools of the county. County board creates system of examinations for certificates of promotions and diplomas of graduation.

1890 Now there are 69 schools in the county, 16 in the city. State Supreme

Court (*Wysinger v. Crookshank*) declares school segregation unlawful.

1891 County High School Act permits formation of county high schools and requires county superintendents to prepare estimates of necessary expenses.

1893 State law calls for new county boards of education to be appointed by county supervisors. Sacramento County has 178 public schools with 178 teachers and 6,612 student enrollment. Annual school expenditure in county: \$159,920.60.

1896 In *Plessy v. Ferguson*, U.S. Supreme Court upholds right to segregate public schools by race were permissible so long as the instruction in both systems is "equal."

1902 California Supreme Court upholds a law allowing members of county boards of education to be compensated \$5 per day for their services. 1880 state law barring school segregation is repealed.

1906 Sacramentan Minnie O'Neil is elected county superintendent, one of the first women in the state to seek public office. O'Neil's 1910 reelection will establish legal precedent for women, non-voters until 1911, to be considered viable candidates for office.

1907 State Health Development Act passes, adding health and hygiene education to duties of county superintendent.

1908 7,746 students attend public schools in Sacramento County.

1913 The position of county superintendent is made a nonpartisan elective office.

1915 County offices of education are assigned responsibility for child welfare and attendance supervision of school districts.

1917 Due to poor physical condition of World War I draftees, the state introduces compulsory physical education for students.

1918 California Commission of Credentials is established by the state board of education to review applications and issue high school and special education credentials.

1919 County superintendents may appoint attendance officers and issue student work permits.

1920 79 school districts now operate in Sacramento County



1921 School supervision in emergency and rural situations added to the duties of county superintendent. State school law of 1921 is amended to permit school districts to “establish separate schools for Indian children and for children of Chinese, Japanese or Mongolian parentage.” Some school districts in Sacramento County choose to segregate.

1922 Sacramento County has student population of 14,581 elementary school pupils and 3,240 high school pupils. The county has nine high schools and 46 elementary schools. The number of Sacramento County school districts and schools has dropped in the past eight years. Smaller outlying schools have been closed or consolidated. Flood control measures, bridges and school buses have made it possible for more students to attend school regularly.

1927 State establishes criteria for the supervisory credential. The Depression spurs public interest in educational programs, leading to the statewide “Charter for Public Education” formulated with the input of school leaders, fraternal organizations, religious groups and others. Throughout California, migratory school supervision becomes an important function of county offices of education.

1928 County has 40 school districts.

1929 Discriminatory sections of school law repealed; provides that all children, regardless of race, should be admitted to public schools.

1933 State legislature eliminates annual superintendents convention due to the Depression. School Finance Law establishes three funds controlled by county superintendents, providing superintendents funds and power to support expanded duties.

1939 State legislature makes numerous changes in the scope of county superintendent responsibilities, including: (1) The county board of supervisors is permitted to contract with the county superintendent of schools in order to provide health supervision of elementary school buildings and pupils enrolled in any elementary school within the county, carried out by health officers or other employees of the county health department; (2) County superintendents are given discretion to provide for the education of physically handicapped minors who would otherwise be denied proper educational services; (3) County superintendents are permitted, with the approval of the county boards of education, to provide for the preparation and coordination of courses of study, and for conducting and coordinating research and guidance activities for elementary and high schools under their jurisdiction.

1940 County superintendents assume additional powers and duties, including services in support of small school districts.

1942 Sacramento region students of Japanese descent are forced to leave school due to federal Executive Order 9066, enacted at onset of World War II’s Pacific campaign. For the duration of the war, students receive instruction in improvised classrooms at 10 relocation centers throughout the western U.S.

1945 Duties of supervising small districts, providing assistance with redistricting, and providing business

services are given to the county superintendent.

1946 California voters approve two constitutional amendments relating to county boards of education and superintendents: (1) Election of county boards of education is permissive in counties governed by county charters; and (2) Legislature is authorized to classify counties and to fix the qualifications and salaries of county superintendents.

1947 *Mendez v. Westminster* decision leads to repeal by governor of 1921 statute authorizing separate schools for Native Americans and students of Asian descent. The County School Services Fund is established, which expands the power and duties of county offices of education. State legislature establishes professional qualifications for county superintendents and provides salary increases to them.

1949 County committees on school district organization are established with county superintendent serving as secretary. County superintendent and office of education move from courthouse to 600 I Street, Room 301, in downtown Sacramento.

1950 State legislature declares “coordination in order to improve educational services and ensure equity of opportunity” as the most important function of county offices of education. The Sacramento County Charter is revised to deem the position of county superintendent an appointive, rather than elective, office subject to the approval of the Sacramento County Civil Service Board and the state board of education. T.R. Smedberg becomes county’s first appointed county superintendent.



1950s-60s Post-World War II baby boom causes Sacramento County, with its proximity to several military bases, to double its student population within just a few years. Enrollment in Sacramento County public elementary, high school and community colleges reaches about 45,000 in 1950. Sacramento County superintendent responds to rapid growth by providing additional assistance to districts in areas of school auditing, accounting, purchasing services and teacher credentialing.

1954 U.S. Supreme Court declares intentionally segregated schools “inherently unequal” (*Brown v. Board of Education*).

1955 State legislature enacts law providing: (1) An elected county board of education, consisting of seven members to be elected at large, and at least one residing in each of the designated trustee areas determined by the county committee on school district reorganization; (2) In chartered counties, the county charter prescribes the manner of selection of the county board of education by the county board of supervisors; (3) In a county unified school district or in a unified school district that includes all of the territory over which a county



superintendent has jurisdiction, the governing board of the district serves as the county board of education; (4) Chartered counties that provide for an elected county board of education may (a) adopt rules and regulations governing the office of the county superintendent; and (b) review the county superintendent’s annual itemized estimate of anticipated revenues and expenditures before it is approved by the county board of supervisors and filed with the county auditor.

1956 First elected county boards of education take office.

1957 State legislature revises the qualifications and compensation of county superintendents based on the ADA (average daily attendance) of the county. State Education Code emphasizes county office of education’s increasing “services to schools.” Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) staff expands from 32 to 151 people.



1959 County committees required to prepare master plan on district organization.

1960s Dozens of schools are constructed in the county to accommodate population growth. Superintendent T.R. Smedberg comments, “I was dedicating a new school every other Sunday afternoon.” Local schools enter the era of technology with computers and television assisting in the educational process.

1960 County superintendent and staff move from downtown offices to east Sacramento, 4351 Power Inn Road. The office relocates in 1962 to 6011 Folsom Boulevard in Sacramento.

1962 California now the largest-populated state in U.S.

1967 County superintendent now a position appointed by county board of education.

1963 Transfer of some functions from county boards of supervisors to county boards of education. Establishment of child care centers and vocational high schools authorized. Districts under

8,000 ADA required to establish classes for students with severe disabilities.

1968 Sacramento County’s enrollment in public elementary, high school and community colleges rises to over 200,000.

1973 County boards of supervisors transfer remaining education responsibilities to county board of education.

1974 California Master Plan for Special Education is passed to provide free education to children with exceptional needs.

1976 State legislature authorizes voters in each county to decide whether to continue to elect the county superintendent or fill the office as an appointment of the county board of education. Sacramento County’s superintendent becomes an appointive position. Constitutional amendment gives county boards of education the power to fix the salary of the county superintendent. County superintendent and SCOE move to 9738 Lincoln Village Drive.

1992 State legislature dramatically redefines county superintendent’s fiscal oversight responsibilities.

1993 Sacramento County public school enrollment totals 188,098.



2000 Enrollment in Sacramento County public schools reaches 221,969.

2003 Sacramento County Office of Education moves to new David P. Meaney Education Center at Mather Field. Total Sacramento County student enrollment is 232,612, served by SCOE and 16 public school districts.