

**Female Leadership, Rural School Constituencies, and the Defeat of Western
Administrative Progressives, 1912-1932**

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Dedication

In honor of my grandparents, Nelson Lehman and Ethel Mary Roulo Muhrlein Grenat. They demonstrated everyday that education was not limited to what happened in school.

Introduction:
**Female Leadership, Rural School Constituencies, and the Defeat of Western
 Administrative Progressives, 1912-1932**

*“There are two forces at work in the United States in the educational field
 diametrically opposed to each other.*

*The first group of educational thinkers advocates that our schools be placed
 under specialized group control.*

*The second group of educational thinkers believe that since the nation is a
 “government of the people, by the people and for the people” that the people are
 entitled to direct control of their public school system and the right to elect their
 chief educational officers.”¹*

Josephine Corliss Preston, Washington’s State Superintendent of Public Instruction, made the above observation in response to the recommendations of the state’s Public School Administrative Code Commission during the fall of 1920. The tension she recognized had been long percolating within the education community for at least a generation. While supporters of the different factions acknowledged their desires to improve public education, the factions chose to focus on often dramatically different methods. Trying to categorize these progressive era reformers can be difficult given that individuals, including Preston, drew their own reform agendas from a variety of sources including leading advocates as diverse as Francis Parker, John Dewey, Ellwood Cubberley and David Snedden.

The desire to categorize and classify these thinkers has led to a variety of terms to define broadly their ideas. Those Preston saw as desiring the power to control the education system in Washington State fit who David Tyack, in *The One Best System*, described as being "administrative progressives" wishing “nothing less than a fundamental change in the structure

¹ Washington (State) Superintendent of Public Instruction [Josephine Corliss Preston], *25th Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Washington*. (Olympia: State Printer, 1921), 15.

and process of decision making” through centralization of control and social efficiency.²

Although Tyack uses the description to describe those involved in school reform in the urban setting, these individuals sought to reform rural schools as well. Rural schools presented additional issues because, in the eyes of the reformers, rural citizens wanted to run their own schools without knowing what was good for either the schools or the rural community. As trained educational professionals, these reformers presumed that they knew what was best for both the urban and the rural schools. Preston, by contrast, was more pragmatic when it came to rural school reform. She knew that through education, rural school patrons were capable of making decisions about their schools by respecting rather than removing the decision making power they held. Rather than the traditional dichotomy of administrative progressives and pedagogical progressives³, the issue in Washington State, and likely most rural schools in the Western United States, was between administrative progressives and rural residents’ ideas and traditions of democracy.

Historians of education, in attempting to explain the roots of contemporary public education, point to the reforms advocated by the administrative progressives as providing the genealogy of today’s public schooling. The Progressive Era (from about 1890 through the 1920s) saw the vision of public education change from common schooling through the eighth grade -- generally achieved in a multiage, multilevel setting with few students going on to high school and even fewer going to higher education -- to one of age-graded classrooms where students moved platoon-like through the school system with graduation from high school gradually becoming more the expectation than the exception. These changes along with broader systematic

² David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 127.

³ See Tyack, *The One Best System*, 126-132; David Labaree, “Progressivism, Schools and Schools of Education: An American Romance,” *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* 41, no. 1-2 (2005), 275-288; for discussion defining these two concepts.

changes relative to school standardization have led both David Labaree and Ellen Lagemann to suggest that the administrative progressives won the debates around the format and focus of public schooling.⁴

While this may be true at the district level in urban schools, an examination of the administrative progressives' advocacy for school centralization and bureaucratization at the county and state level provides a much more complicated story. In the case of Washington State during the early 1920s, it is possible to see that the administrative progressives, in fact, lost the battle to define the administrative organization of the state education system due to the resistance of both female educational leaders and their rural school constituencies.

The scholarly traditions of education historians concentrating on the Progressive Era have been overwhelmingly urban-focused, with the seminal work being David Tyack's *The One Best System*. Scholarship in this tradition aimed at explaining the growth of professionalization, bureaucratization, and centralization in the administration of school systems that educated the largest proportion of the nation's students. William Reese, recognizing the Eastern and large-city focus of much of the historiography, chose to extend his work to smaller cities like Toledo, Ohio and Milwaukee, Wisconsin in his work *Power and the Promise of School Reform*. He also expanded the focus of his study by analyzing the influence of grassroots groups like women's clubs and civic reformers. While his work extended the conversation about schooling in the Progressive Era geographically by region and city size, it continued the urban focus of the published histories. This urban focus provides an incomplete understanding of the outcomes of education reforms advocated by progressive era education reformers and scholars. Similarly,

⁴ David Labaree, "How Dewey Lost: The Victory of David Snedden and Social Efficiency" http://www.stanford.edu/~dlabaree/publications/How_Dewey_Lost.pdf (accessed 10 December 2010). Labaree "Progressivism, Schools and Schools of Education; Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, "The Plural Worlds of Educational Research" *History of Education Quarterly*. 29, no. 2 (2000), 185-214; Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, *An elusive science: the troubling history of education research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

while Reese's study expanded the understanding of who were the significant actors beyond leading educational professionals and politicians, the role and agency of teachers remained largely absent from his account. This failure to consider the real and potential significance of teachers as educational and community leaders is especially problematic for rural school contexts.

Rural schools, including one-teacher buildings, continued to constitute the majority of the schools long into the middle of the 20th century. Scholarly research focused on rural schools during the early 20th century has often been case studies of rural schoolteachers or particular communities. David Reynolds has examined the push for school consolidation including local rural communities' response to the imposition of school consolidation.⁵ His work built on Tyack's own work examining community control in rural education.⁶ Although both Reynolds and Tyack provide evidence of rural resistance to educational reform in the early 20th century, no published research has been located addressing how this resistance shaped the development of statewide systems of education.

The growth of governmental institutions responsible for providing services related to public education has always been a balancing act between various constituencies. Thomas Timar argues that the "institutional role of state education bureaucracies was fairly well established in most states by the late 1920s,"⁷ yet there has been little published scholarly research into the impetus behind the creation of those bureaucracies. Timar, in his examination of the institutional role of state departments of education, makes the case that tension between the plans of

⁵ David Reynolds, *There Goes the Neighborhood: Rural School Consolidation at the Grass Roots in Early Twentieth-Century Iowa* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1999).

⁶ David B. Tyack, "The Tribe and the Common School: Community Control in Rural Education," *American Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (1972), 3-19.

⁷ Thomas B. Timar, "The Institutional Role of State Education Departments: A Historical Perspective," *American Journal of Education* 105, no. 3 (1997), 242.

educational elites and those exercising local control moderated the elites' agenda as they shaped state departments of education. The educational elites were those individuals related to the "education trust"⁸ as well as professional education organizations such as the National Education Association and related state or regional organizations.⁹

Tracy Steffes extends the discussion about the development of state control of education to include a broad range of individuals including voluntary associations like women's clubs, philanthropic organizations, the courts and other regulatory agencies as well as other actors. She looks at how states came to adopt similar policies despite the lack of a single actor like the federal government. Using state policies and court rulings, she brings the state back into the conversation about school reform providing evidence that education reform was not one of the many reforms instituted by progressive era reformers, it was the central reform of the era shaping social reforms well beyond it. While other historians recognize the tension between administrative desires, such of those of the state, and local citizenry wanting to maintain control, Steffes goes as far as to claim that "[l]ocal control was not an obstacle to overcome for rural school reform, but a powerful site of energy and innovation that helped to drive it."¹⁰ Because rural schoolteachers, rural supervisors and rural superintendents did not have coercive authority, they were forced to find other ways to mobilize and support local reform efforts in order to

⁸The term "Education Trust" comes from David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1982). In an early work, Tyack referred to this same group of individuals as "administrative progressives." Tyack, *The One Best System*. William Eaton, in examining the educational administration books of the period, recognized that there was a difference relative to the level of influence between those individuals from the nationally recognized universities and those who wrote for a regional market. See William Eaton, "From Ideology to Conventional Wisdom: School-Administration Texts, 1915-1933," *The History of Educational Administration Viewed Through Its Textbooks*, ed. Thomas Glass (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Education, 2004). 32.

⁹Timar, "Institutional Role of State Education Departments," 242.

¹⁰ Tracy L. Steffes, *School, Society, & State: A New Education to Govern Modern America, 1890-1940* (Chicago, The Chicago University Press: 2012), 49.

improve the rural schools.¹¹ The way Washington's women educational leaders and rural school constituencies responded to the administrative progressives' call for centralization and bureaucratization provides a good case study of the balancing act between the state's desire to direct education reform and local communities' desire to control their own schools.

Intertwined with this story is one related to the increasingly visible and significant roles women played as school administrators and school related office holders during the progressive era as established in work by Jackie Blount, Kathleen Weiler and Michael Pisapia.¹² This was particularly true for the schools in much of the Western United States where post Civil War statehood and relatively rural conditions allowed for alternatives to more traditional education hierarchies. Women served as members of boards of education at local, county and state levels as well as being increasingly elected as county and state school superintendents. By 1920 in some states, including Washington, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming, over half of the elected county school superintendents were women. In these same states, women were also elected as state school superintendents, often serving multiple terms.

Taking the case of Washington State as its focus, this study shows that female leaders and their constituencies significantly limited the impact of administrative progressives like Ellwood P. Cubberley, Dean of the Stanford University's School of Education and leading expert on educational administration and school finance, and his followers on state education policy during this era. In fact, in Washington State, women in their role as educational leaders, along with their

¹¹ Steffes, *School, Society & State*, 66.

¹² Jackie M. Blount, *Destined to Rule the Schools: Women and the Superintendency, 1873-1995* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Jackie M. Blount, "Manliness and the gendered construction of school administration in the USA," *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 2, no. 1(1999), 55-68; Kathleen Weiler, *Country schoolwomen: teaching in rural California, 1850-1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Kathleen Weiler, "Women and Rural School Reform: California, 1900-1940," *History of Education Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (1994), 25-47; Michael Callaghan Pisapia "Women Educators Transforming the Public Sphere, 1860-1920" <http://users.polisci.wisc.edu/apw/Archives/pisapia.pdf> (assessed 7 January 1911); Michael Callaghan Pisapia, *Public education and the role of women in American political development, 1852-1979* (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin - Madison, 2010).

rural school constituencies, played decisive roles in defeating statewide school centralization and consolidation plans aimed at solving the state's "rural school problem."

The organization of this case study begins with an examination of women as educational leaders including the election of Preston in Chapter One. Chapter Two looks at rural constituencies' desire for local control along with Preston's initiatives to improve rural schools while recognizing that desire. Chapter Three focuses on the dual financing crisis resulting in issues of teacher pay and teacher shortages. The fourth chapter looks at the appointment of the School Code Commission in 1920, its recommendations, and how those recommendations were received by Preston and the rural school constituencies. It also provides evidence that the administrative progressives' ideas on which the commission based their proposals were based more on theory than reality. The final chapter looks at how those closely related to the School Code Commission attempted to pass similar reforms for at least the following decade only to continue to face opposition. Ultimately, the administrative progressives of the progressive era would be defeated in their attempts to shape Washington's state educational bureaucracy. However, in the process, they would prevent their most vocal opponent, Josephine Corliss Preston, from gaining a place in the state's educational history.

Chapter One: Women as Educational Leaders

“[A] shoemaker may be an expert in the making of shoes, but the wearer is the only [one] who can tell whether the shoe pinches.”¹³

Educational leadership occurs when individuals are able to help students, teachers, parents and communities work toward shared educational goals. Even prior to Washington’s statehood in 1889, women had a long history of holding such positions in the state. During the first forty years of statehood, which coincided with the progressive era, women served as educational leaders in a variety of positions. Although these numbers were never proportionate to the number of women who served as teachers, those serving in paid administrative positions in Washington served in higher numbers than elsewhere in the western United States and significantly higher than in many states.¹⁴ This section investigates how women as educational leaders helped shape the development of Washington’s educational bureaucracy in its first 40 years. For the purposes of this study, the focus on women’s educational leadership will be on those women elected to the county and state superintendencies.

Jackie Blount, in her groundbreaking book *Destined to Rule the Schools*, explained her decision to look at the number of women who served as school superintendents: “[f]eminists considered attainment of the superintendency as a particular important goal for women because it was a position from which they could wield considerable educational influence.”¹⁵ She was able to prove that women had served in such positions at much higher rates than had been previously thought prior to World War II. Men, particularly those who worked as professors of education, saw this as a threat to the ability of men to carve out a niche

¹³ Washington (State) Superintendent of Public Instruction [Josephine Corliss Preston], *25th Biennial Report*, 28.

¹⁴ Very limited information exists relative to the number of women who served as unpaid volunteers on boards of education, either local, county or state boards, during this era despite the fact those boards were often charged, at in the state of Washington, with developing and enforcing educational policy.

¹⁵ Blount, *Destined to Rule the Schools*, 1.

in education that gave them power and prestige. It is Blount's contention that, beginning in the 1910s, men were able to redefine and restructure the role of superintendent in a way that prohibited women from qualifying for the position because they not only lacked the appropriate educational training, but because, more importantly, they lacked the social and political connections to do so.¹⁶ While Blount makes an argument as to why the number of women holding superintendent positions drop dramatically post World War II, her work does not examine how these women influenced the educational establishment in those states where they did have that authority. She also does not differentiate between women elected to the superintendency and those appointed to the position. In states like Washington, elected female leaders had a significant impact on shaping the state's educational system playing important roles in promoting, motivating and mobilizing school improvement particularly in rural communities.

Washington State, like other western states, had a long history of accepting women as educational leaders. A woman was appointed to the first Board of Education, established while the state was a territory in 1878 and the existing records, although incomplete, indicate women served as County Superintendents of Schools beginning in 1874 with nearly half of the county superintendents being women at the time of statehood in 1889. Even though women served in elected positions prior to gaining suffrage, their service in such leadership roles seems to have been directly related to women's suffrage. Women taxpayers had been granted school suffrage in 1877. Beginning in 1883, women were granted full suffrage twice only to have it revoked by the Democratic-controlled Territorial Supreme Court twice, the second time in 1887. Full suffrage appeared as a separate ballot issue on the state constitutional ballot in 1889 but it was defeated by a two to one margin. As indicated in Figure 1 (p. 11), the proportion of county

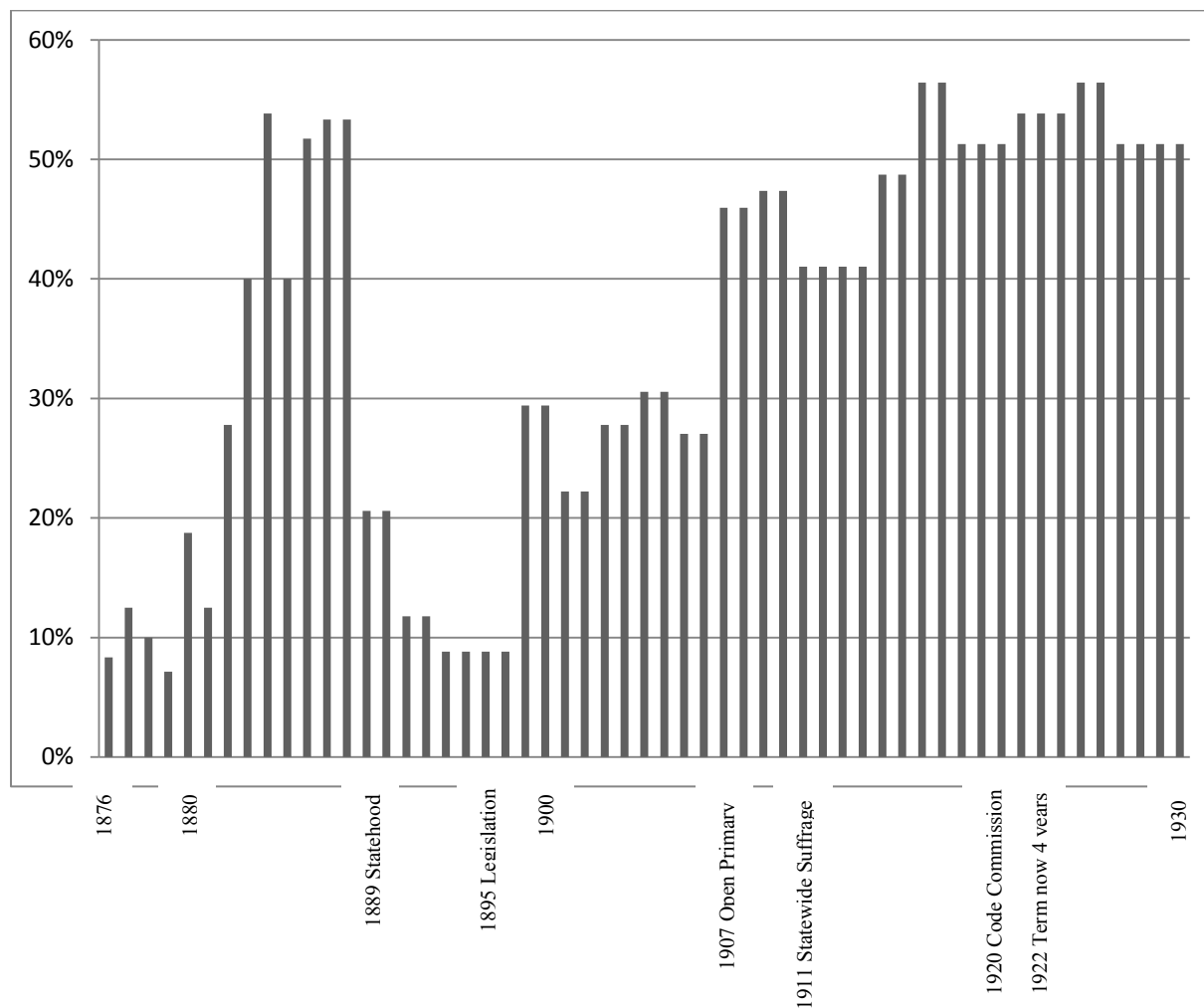
¹⁶ Blount, *Destined to Rule the Schools*, 68-69.

superintendents who were women declined dramatically at statehood when women lost the suffrage they had enjoyed during the last decade of territorial days. Indeed, it would take thirty years (until the mid-1910s for women to regain the proportion of county superintendencies they had in the 1880s during the territorial period. It should be noted that despite the loss of suffrage and restrictions on women holding public office under the new constitution, from 1889 through 1895, some women continued to be elected to the county superintendency. Men may have been unwilling to run for the office, but more likely women's continued election was because women were seen as being educational experts by the counties' voters.

The state constitution did specify that the state could pass legislation allowing for school suffrage for women, however, and in 1890 the legislature did so, meaning that women could vote for school offices. School suffrage was a form of partial enfranchisement that usually included the right of women to vote for school related ballot issues including school directors and school funding. It also often included the right to hold school offices. Kentucky adopted school suffrage for widows and single female taxpayers in 1838. Many of the arguments in support of granting school suffrage grew out of the belief that women's natural vocation was as mothers and teachers resulting in their being more knowledgeable about the issues related to schooling than their male counterparts were.¹⁷ In 1895, the legislature passed legislation allowing women to hold elected positions related to common schools at both district and county levels. Following this change in the law, the proportion of county superintendents who were women increased significantly (see Figure 1). A second even more dramatic increase began in 1907 when the state adopted a direct primary where candidates for public office were no longer required to have political party endorsement in order to run for office. After this change in nomination procedures, the number

¹⁷ Marilyn Schultz Blackwell, "The Politics of Motherhood: Clarina Howard Nichols and School Suffrage," *The New England Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (2005), 570-598.

Figure 1
Percentage of County Superintendents who were
Women
Washington Territory and State
1876-1930*



*Information on the number of women who served as County School Superintendents in the State of Washington is based on the best available information. Actual numbers may be under reported because in official records many of the superintendents are identified only by first initials making it impossible to determine the individual's gender. Several individuals identified by initials, and assumed to be male based on traditional naming patterns of the era, were later found to actually be female through other data sources beyond the official records. Records during the territorial years and early statehood are incomplete. In order to obtain as complete data as possible records contained in the Biennial Reports of both the Territorial and State Superintendents of Public Instruction as well as records provided in Dennis Troth's *History and Development of Common School Legislation in Washington*. (University of Washington Press, Seattle, WA, 1927) were consulted.

of women elected to the county superintendencies jumped from 27 percent to 47 percent. (See Figure 1)

The scholar Michael Pisapia, in his study on women's role in American political development, has documented a significant relationship between women's suffrage, women's educational leadership, and women's participation in electoral politics particularly in western states. The most significant factor for women's office holding was that the office was elective rather than appointive. Educational office holding did not require full suffrage, only school suffrage that included the right to hold school offices. He found an inverse relationship between the perceived strength of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction's position and the possibility of women serving in the position. Pisapia determined the strength of the office using two factors; the difference between the salary of the governor and the state superintendent's and the number of personnel serving in the State Department of Education. The greater the difference in salary and the smaller the size of the staff thus indicating a weaker state superintendent. Pisapia reported that "[a]lthough gendered ideologies of womanhood are found at the origins of women's entrance into teaching, the authority and expertise they accumulated as educators may have qualified women, perhaps in a gender-neutral way, for their eventual political authority as office holders."¹⁸

The set of relationships identified by Pisapia is illustrated by the history of female school leadership in Washington State. Full woman suffrage passed in 1910 with a two-to-one margin. Washington becoming the fifth state to grant women voting rights, the first to do so in the 20th century. During the 1912 election – the first statewide election after women received statewide voting rights - voters elected a woman, Josephine Corliss Preston, as State Superintendent of Public Instruction. In 1920, with Preston still in office, the state had a woman as State

¹⁸ Pisapia, "The Authority of Women in the Political Development," 54.

Superintendent of Public Instruction, women were 51 percent of the elected county superintendents, women served in 42 percent of school administrative positions (superintendents, principals, supervisors), and made up 84 percent of the public-school educators in the state, including 91 percent of the rural educators.¹⁹ In Washington, much of the improvement in educational condition for both rural schools and the state was the result of women working as rural schoolteachers and county superintendents. Further discussion of the role of rural schoolteacher and their leadership role will be discussed in the following chapter on rural school constituencies. For the remainder of this chapter, the focus will be on female administrative leaders.

While the number of women elected to county superintendencies increased with the granting of school suffrage to women, it increased dramatically when school elections were decoupled from conventional party politics. With the successful passage of the direct primary bill in 1907, the president of the Direct Primary State League declared: “The Direct Primary law has sounded the death knell of the old political oligarchy. The people now have the political rule in their own hands.”²⁰ Prior to the bill’s passage, candidates for office had to receive the nomination of a political party during a party convention in order to run for election. Beginning in 1907, anyone qualified for the office they sought could submit their name for the primary ballot, pay their fee and indicate their own party preference without having to have the approval of party leaders. This did cause some consternation when Margaret Bayne attempted to file as a candidate for the County School Superintendency in King County. The Chief Deputy Auditor “got just a little bit rattled” when Bayne along with another woman asked to be permitted to file

¹⁹ Data was collected from Territorial and State Reports of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and Dennis C. Troth, *History and Development of Common School Legislation in Washington* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1927).

²⁰ Christopher W. Horr as quoted Ralph Metcalf, *Direct Primary Legislation: A Brief Sketch of its Progress in the Various States* (Tacoma, WA: Pioneer Bindery & Printing Co, 1907), 22.

their candidacies. “He didn’t know whether it was proper or not, according to the new primary laws” and had to consult with a deputy prosecuting attorney who declared that she had the right to file for the position.²¹ The change in election laws was not intended to increase women’s participation in elective offices, but because they were not required to gain approval of the political parties’ inner circles their election to office increased.

It is important to recognize that women’s educational leadership in Washington State was not just limited to elected positions. Julia Kennedy, trained at the University of Chicago under Francis Parker, was appointed to serve as the Superintendent of Seattle Public Schools from 1887 to 1890. She, along with the superintendents of the Tacoma and Olympia schools, was part of the impetus behind the founding of the State Teachers’ Association in April 1889.²² The limited existing records seem to indicate that all of the major districts in the state had women serving as school and curricular supervisors, building principals and assistant superintendents during both territorial period and the first three decades of statehood. They also served in leadership roles in the State Teachers’ Association and, later, the Washington Education Association even serving as president of the organization. Their seeking and accepting such positions came despite attempts by men both within and outside of the profession to prevent them from doing so. By 1920, women also served in a wide variety of administrative roles acting as school supervisors, principals and superintendents holding 42 percent of such positions.²³

Women serving nationally in educational administrative positions had increased dramatically from 1870 to 1918, in part because women had moved from 59 percent of the teaching force to 84 percent of the teaching force. As with male teachers, it was considered

²¹ “Woman a Candidate for County Superintendent,” *The Star [Seattle, WA]*, August 8, 1908, 8.

²² Washington (State) Superintendent of Public Instruction [R. B. Bryan], *11th Biennial Report*, 179.

²³ Washington (State) Superintendent of Public Instruction [Josephine Corliss Preston], *25th Biennial Report*, 333-335.

appropriate for those individuals who desired to continue in education to seek administrative positions that included positions such as supervising teacher, elementary principal, and education specialist as well as various city, county and state superintendencies. In 1918, 857 women served as county superintendent with the vast majority living west of the Mississippi. At the same time, five women served as state superintendents with this number increasing to nine by 1922. An analysis of the selection of county and state superintendents found that “in most of these states ... the superintendent is selected by a direct vote of the people.” Opportunities for women seeking those types of positions were found in the West rather than East or South. The recommendation of Edith Lathrop, a rural school specialist for the Bureau of Education, was that “[t]he college girl who is ambitious for educational leadership, won by the way of political competition, may well take Horace Greeley’s advice to young men anxious for opportunity and a career: ‘Go West, young man, go West!’.”²⁴

At the time of Lathrop’s writing in 1922, Washington State had a living example of the possibilities open for women who moved west. Josephine Corliss Preston had moved with her widowed mother and siblings to Washington after the death of her father in the early 1890s. She already had teaching experience in her home state of Minnesota, and subsequently was able to secure a teaching position in Waitsburg’s graded schools. Her first teaching experience had been in rural Minnesota when she was just over 14 and it was nothing like she had imagined as a child. It was in a school she would later describe as being far back in the country where all of her students were the children of recent immigrants and the vast majority spoke little or no English. She was so homesick that her family had to come to get her each Friday and she reported crying

²⁴ Edith Lathrop, “Teaching as a Vocation for College Women,” *The Arrow* 38, No. 3 (1922), 419.

all the way back to school on each Monday.²⁵ Although her teaching positions in Washington were in graded schools, Preston understood intimately the conditions that faced rural schoolteachers.

In February 1904, she accepted the position of Deputy County Superintendent under Superintendent J. E. Myers. She was reappointed to the position in September 1905 by County Superintendent Grant Bond when he took office. In July of 1908, Josephine C. Preston filed as a Republican candidate for the office of County School Superintendent for Walla Walla County. There is little evidence to indicate that Preston was involved in Republican Party politics prior to her running for County Superintendent and it is likely that she took advantage of Washington's Direct Primary Law allowing anyone qualified for office to file for the primary. She was elected in November 1908 by an almost three-to-one margin over her Democratic opponent. Ironically, her lowest score in each of her Washington State teacher examinations was in the area of school law. Superintendent Bond resigned his position effective February 1, 1909 and she was appointed to serve out his unexpired term prior to beginning her own term the following September.²⁶ Two years later, she was re-elected County School Superintendent after running unopposed for the position.

The announcement of State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Henry Dewey, in the summer of 1911 indicating he would not be seeking re-election meant educators across the state began discussing who might be an appropriate candidate. Preston was considering the possibility

²⁵ Information on Josephine Corliss Preston's early life has been gleaned from a wide variety of sources; most of which were newspaper and magazine articles. Many were clippings contained in a scrapbook housed in the Special Collections of the Washington State Library. The clippings cover the time period of 1912-1920 with the majority of them from 1916-1919. Many were clipped by clipping bureaus although some were obviously collected through other means. In several places pages have been cut out of the scrapbook but it is unknown who or when these pages were removed. Also refer to "Mrs. Josephine Corliss Preston," *The Educator Journal* 20, no. 1 (1919), 12-14; "Rural Schools' Isolation Mitigated by Woman's Zeal," *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 6, 1922, 6.

²⁶ "School District Minute Record Book, 1878-1908," *Educational Service District 123 – School District Records*, Eastern Regional Archives of Washington State Archives [Cheney, W], Record Group EA823-41-7.

of running. A series of letters between Preston and Stephen Penrose, the President of Whitman College, indicates that Penrose was acting as her political mentor. Late in October 1911, Penrose wrote to then Governor Hay making the suggestion that “since Washington has become a woman’s suffrage state, the position of state superintendent might, with propriety, be given to a woman. The custom of other suffrage states favors this position and I think that probably the women’s clubs of the state will adopt it as their principle.”²⁷ Penrose had a specific woman in mind: Josephine Corliss Preston. He had already been writing to other educators around the state in her support. Not everyone responded positively to the inquiries of both these individuals regarding the potential of her running for State Superintendent. In a letter to Penrose, she wrote that three schoolmen from the west side of the state had written that Noah Showalter (the president of Cheney Normal School), when her name was mentioned, would say that she was a very nice woman but the state needed a man because “he did not believe that a woman would stoop to the political manipulation of legislatures that a man superintendent had to with the midnight caucuses.”²⁸ Preston suspected that he had promised his support to J. M. Layhue, the assistant state superintendent, in the hope that they could get bigger appropriations for the Normal school. Showalter had previously indicated that he would support Preston if she were to decide to run, but he had obviously changed his mind, most likely for political expediency.

Preston announced her candidacy for State Superintendent of Public Instruction on November 28, 1911, the week after Penrose had sent a letter formally requesting her to become a candidate, as “we believe that your experience and training, your personal character and your tact

²⁷ Stephen B. L. Penrose, letter to Marion Hay, October 25, 1911, Washington State Historical Society, <http://digitum.washingtonhistory.org/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/nwmacwomens&CISOPTR=135&REC=6> (accessed 12 January 2012).

²⁸ Josephine Preston, letter to Stephen Penrose, November 17, 1911 Stephen B. L. Penrose Papers, Whitman College and Northwest Archives [Walla Walla, WA]. Collection HTM_WCA38, “P” Correspondence File 1906-1912 hereafter referred to as Penrose Papers.

in dealing with people and problems of administration, peculiarly fit you for the position and that you will be able to serve the educational system of this state with wisdom, integrity, efficiency.”²⁹ She had gained support from Frank Cooper, Superintendent of Seattle Public Schools, Dr. E. O. Sisson, formerly of the University of Washington, J. L. Dumas, Washington State Country Life Commission, and five of the county superintendents. All five were women, but they only represented half of the women county superintendents. The other five had given their support to Layhue. Historian John Putnam, in writing about Preston’s candidacy, felt that it was a step forward in helping women to lay claim to full and equal citizenship in a way that did not threaten gendered political boundaries as schools were already regarded as “woman’s natural sphere in political life.”³⁰ Not everyone agreed. Ellwood Cubberley, one of the nation’s leading administrative progressives, made it clear that he felt that women were not qualified to serve in administrative positions. In fact, he felt that they were not even qualified to advance the schools in a way that allowed the schools to become more effective social institutions because “[w]hat teachers need ... is a knowledge of democracy’s needs and problems, and of conditions to be met. Our teaching force is composed largely of women, and women are seldom interested by nature in this point of view.”³¹

Albert Burrows, the King County Superintendent of Schools, entered the race for the state office as a Republican candidate the end of January 1912, before Layhue’s withdrawal. He was also serving as President of the Washington Education Association. Like the other leading candidates in the race, Burrows and his supporters would focus on ideas of how to improve the rural schools. Included in his plans were “[t]he selection of all teachers through the

²⁹ Stephen Penrose, letter to Josephine Preston, November 20, 1911, Penrose Papers.

³⁰ John C. Putnam, *Class and Gender Politics in Progressive-Era Seattle* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008), 133.

³¹ Ellwood P. Cubberley, *Changing Conceptions of Education* (San Francisco: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909), 66-67.

superintendent's office; the superintendent's control of the finances of the school districts; the economical use of the automobile in supervision of outside schools; the employment of a county attendance officer, who will gradually take on the work of medical and sanitary inspection of rural schools; and a persistent effort to connect the school with the life and development of the community."³² These ideas paralleled those of the administrative progressive nationally focusing on efficiency and administrative control. Preston, instead, wanted to work for "the promotion of vocational training, the establishment of teachers' cottages, the development of community centers and parent-teachers' organizations, and for the improvement of the rural schools."³³ She was actively involved with the Country Life Movement and believed that improving the rural condition would improve the rural schools. Preston's entry into the race further clarified the divide between the two different factions of the education community. On one side were those who believed that the educational process related to schools should be in the control of educational professionals trained for those responsibilities. On the other side were those who believed that schooling involved not just educational professionals providing for students; it was a community endeavor with teachers and community members as active participants in the process. According to Steffes, "[f]or many school reformers, the rural school problem could not be solved without elevating the school to an important place in the community, aligning it with other agencies of rural development, and redirecting its activities to prepare children for rural life. Commitment to community building was not just a pragmatic necessity but a philosophical

³² "Wishes to Head Schools," Press clipping from a Spokane newspaper as it references County Superintendent F. V. Yeager. This article was included in a scrapbook identified as belonging to Josephine Corliss Preston. It is made from a record book designed for Third Grade Certificates and contains mostly newspaper clippings. Many of these come from different clipping services. There have been groups of pages "excised" at some point. There is no way of knowing who or why this was done. *Mrs. Josephine C. Preston's Scrapbook of Newspaper Clippings, 1912-1920*, Washington State Library, Manuscripts Collection, MS336, hereafter identified as Preston's Scrapbook.

³³ "Efficiency, Not Change, Her Aim," *Tacoma Ledger* in Preston's Scrapbook, 1.

commitment.”³⁴ Preston shared this philosophical commitment with others involved in Washington’s Country Life Commission based, in part, on her experience as a rural schoolteacher and her experience as county school superintendent responsible for improving the rural school condition.

Chauncey E. (C.E.) Beach joined the race for State Superintendent as the Progressive Party candidate in August 1912. He was the superintendent of the Olympia School District and had served as Kitsap County’s County School Superintendent as well as two years on the State Board of Education. He had also served as president of the Washington Education Association for two terms. Most of the information about his campaign related to his broad experience as an educator working as both a county and a city superintendent and focusing on how his experience made him qualified for the position rather than focusing on how he would work to improve the schools. Both Beach and Burrows were members of the Puget Sound Schoolmasters Club. This education organization formed in 1890 and from the limited existing documents, it appears that its focus was to provide a place where men involved in education, particularly education administration, could come together to socialize, to discuss educational issues and to recommend educational reforms. Its constitution was amended in 1896 to allow women but “[a]fter holding two meetings, it was decided that it was unsatisfactory to have women as members” and the organization returned to its “men only” status.³⁵ It was the feeling of many, particular schoolmen, that “a strong man should head the school system.”³⁶

Both Burrows and Preston ran as Republicans in the 1912 primaries in an election so close that it took nearly three weeks before a winner was declared. Preston ultimately won by 2,365 votes representing just three percent of all the votes cast. The general election found three

³⁴ Steffes, *School, Society, & State*, 66.

³⁵ Washington (State) Superintendent of Public Instruction [Josephine Corliss Preston], *23rd Biennial Report*, 150.

³⁶ “Beach Leads in Race for State Superintendent,” *The Leavenworth Echo*, November 1, 1912, 1.

women on the ballot for State Superintendent of Public Instruction: Republican Josephine Preston, Democrat Mary Monroe, a school principal from Spokane, and Socialist Frances Cora Sylvester. Given that the 1912 election was the first election where the women of Washington State could run for statewide office, not everyone felt that C. E. Beach should be running. Many felt that a woman should have the opportunity to win a statewide office providing evidence of the state's support for equal suffrage and equal rights. The fact that the Bull Moose Party was running the only man for the position of Superintendent of Public Instruction as well as the party's failure to run any women for any state office provided evidence that their professed advocacy of equal suffrage and equal rights was only window dressing.³⁷

Preston won the 1912 election with a plurality of just under 33 percent. Her closest competitor was Beach. Although he lost by just over three percent of the overall vote, he did carry Puget Sound's urban core. Ella Higginson, a noted writer and civic activist from Bellingham, felt "[t]he secret of Mrs. Preston's success lies in her emphasis of a new idea – the human side of education. Mrs. Preston is more interested in boys and girls than she is in statistics about them; more devoted to the building of life and character than to compiling of educational data. It is this record and this platform which appeal to men, and particularly to women who cherish the hope that the schools may become, not factories, but centers of human life."³⁸ Drawing on her political authority because of her expertise as an educational leader, Preston recognized that rural school reform would require a commitment to building community support for school improvement in a way that allowed the integration of rural schools into rural life. She knew that this could not be achieved in a top-down manner due to the nature of Washington's rural school constituencies.

³⁷ *The Seattle Sunday Times*, November 3, 1912, 6.

³⁸ "Mrs. Preston Home from Campaigning," *Walla Walla Union*, November 5, 1912, 2.

Chapter Two: Rural Constituencies

“It has been said that one of the few things that can be successfully built from the top down, is a grave.”³⁹

As the population in the United States shifted from a rural, agrarian economy to an urban, industrialized economy at the end of the nineteenth century, more and more students were being educated in urban, graded school systems. Yet even well into the 1920s, the majority of students were being educated in “traditional” rural schools. During the progressive era, two different national organizations made improving the nation’s rural schools a central focus of their mission. One was the National Education Association (NEA) and the other was the Country Life Commission. The NEA’s Committee of Twelve on Rural Schools published their report in 1897. A little over ten years later, the Country Life Commission would conduct a nation-wide survey of the rural condition, preparing a report on their recommendations in 1909. Administrative progressives, as part of the new field of education administration, supported rural school improvements because they felt that it would enrich the educational opportunities for children living in rural areas. Individuals from the Country Life movement saw improvements to rural schools as a way to strengthen rural communities.⁴⁰ The administrative progressives and the Country Life movement both used social improvements as reasons for their proposals. Of nearly equal importance was who was to oversee the implementation of those reforms. For the administrative progressive this was to be professionally trained educational experts and for the Country Life reformers it was to be the people themselves. This difference would be significant for the rural communities of Washington State.

³⁹ Orville Merton Kile, *The Farm Bureau Movement* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1921), 193.

⁴⁰ Reynolds. *There Goes the Neighborhood*, 4-5.

In order to understand how Washington's rural constituencies shaped not only the rural schools but also broader educational discussions, it is necessary to examine the political environment that existed in Washington during the progressive era. It is equally important to recognize the condition of the state's rural schools prior to 1920. For the purpose of discussion, this section begins by providing some background regarding the impetus behind Washington's rural politics particularly the focus on direct democracy and decision-making. Many of Washington's rural activists, particularly those related to the Grange and the Farmers' Alliance, allowed women to be part of their discussions and reform work, creating a different environment for women than was available in more urban settings where organizations were more frequently divided by gender. Understanding the condition of Washington's common schools helps explain the response of rural residents to 1920s reform initiatives.

Rural constituencies remained critically powerful in Washington state politics throughout the progressive era. Despite the fact that the majority of Washington State's population was identified as residing in urban centers in 1910 with over fifty-five percent of the population so identified in 1920, these numbers actually misrepresent the urban/rural situation in the state. Of the thirty-nine counties, eighteen had no population center larger than 2,500 individuals did. Thirteen of these had no population center larger than 1,500. Three counties: King, Pierce and Spokane, were home to nearly 72 percent of the state's urban population with nearly 40 percent of the state's entire population living within the urban centers of these three counties. Outside of the urban centers of Seattle, Tacoma, and Spokane, the majority of the state's population still lived in rural settings. Washington's legislative districts were supposed to be redistricted every ten years based on the federal census' population statistics creating districts with proportional representation. They were redistricted in 1901, but for a variety of reasons they were not

redistricted again until the middle of the 1930s. During the time period under study, rural districts had proportionately higher representation in the legislature because while the population growth in the urban centers had dramatically outpaced the growth of the rural areas, they had no increase in legislative representation.

While Washington is recognized for its labor radicalism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, its pioneering role in defining populist political structures (such as the referendum and the recall) is less well known.⁴¹ In her book, *The People's Lobby*, Elisabeth Clemens found that in Washington “the popular antipathy toward state government tended to increase in direct proportion to the growth of state government. Instead, the desires for a minimalist state and extraparty politics found their voice in the movement toward ever more direct forms of democracy. To a much greater extent than any social-reform agenda, it was this concern for a more democratic political process that provided a unifying theme for Washington’s reform politics.”⁴² The more the state government grew, the more the people desired the ability to control their own destiny. During the 1911 legislative session, progressives⁴³ in Washington State’s legislature passed legislation for a constitutional change allowing the initiative, referendum and recall. These all represented a move toward direct democracy. In 1912, they were overwhelmingly supported by the state’s voters. It is interesting to note that this was also the first election with statewide offices where women had the right to vote since statehood. The idea behind the direct democracy movement was the desire to prevent the political parties and political bosses from controlling the democratic process.

⁴¹ Elisabeth S. Clemens, *The People's Lobby: Organizational Innovation and the Rise of Interest Group Politics in the United States, 1890-1925* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 259; Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1992), 361.

⁴² Clemens, *The People's Lobby*, 266.

⁴³ William T. Kerr, Jr., “The Progressives of Washington, 1910-1912,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (1964), 16-27.

Rural constituencies in Washington have a history of wanting to control their own affairs. Watkins provides several examples of how rural residents pushed against outsiders trying to dictate how things were to be accomplished. These also give evidence to the antistate attitude Clemens found reflected in the political interest groups in the state. When Washington began to require county road supervisors be appointed rather than elected in 1903, farmers in Lewis County saw it as the state taking away their right to decide who made decisions affecting their community.⁴⁴ Most farmers, many already Grange members, saw no reason to join the Farm Bureau just because business leaders and academicians claimed the Bureau could represent their interests better because "professionals" and "concerned businessmen" were involved.⁴⁵ Watkins reports that what county extension agents saw as conservatism was actually the "conscious choice of politically active farmers seeking to control their own economic destiny."⁴⁶ Agricultural extension agents found they needed to provide a personal touch and create personal contact between themselves and farmers in order to break down the distrust some farmers felt toward outside experts.⁴⁷ Just as the need for a personal touch and personal contact was important to break down the distrust toward outside experts hoping to help them improve their farm production, it is likely that such interactions were expected by other "outsiders," like educators, in order for them to be accepted within the community.

At a time when women, particularly urban middle-class women, were seeking to obtain recognition of their value to society, rural communities valued women's contribution to the health of the rural community. According to Thomas Pugh, it was the farm journals, not urban

⁴⁴ Marilyn P. Watkins, *Rural Democracy: Family Farmers and Politics in Western Washington, 1890-1925* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 94-95.

⁴⁵ Watkins, *Rural Democracy*, 144.

⁴⁶ Watkins, *Rural Democracy*, 149.

⁴⁷ Nancy Berlage, "Organizing the Farm Bureau: Family Community, and Professionals, 1914-1928," *Agricultural History* 75, no. 4 (2001), 414.

newspapers, which advocated for the improvement of women's status through better pay, greater respect and the promotion of women candidates for office.⁴⁸ In Washington, both the Grange and Farmer's Alliance included women as members, acknowledged their contribution to farm life and endorsed political equality.⁴⁹ Watkins found that women in rural communities participated as political activists in ways different than their urban sisters, often joining mixed-sex groups that focused on class rather than gender issues. Women tended to be the ones who took care of the social aspects of the mixed-sex organizations often providing food and entertainment for organizations' meetings. The women were responsible for creating the "community network" even if they were not necessarily in leadership positions and it was "[t]he strong ties of rural reform movement to the community gave women access to political activism."⁵⁰ The more urban-centric professionals assumed that the gender prejudices of the city were true for the country, overlooking women's roles in rural communities. These gender prejudices led the Extension Service through the Farm Bureau to see men as needing scientific training for farming and women needing assistance in the domestic arts when in fact women also played a role in farming.⁵¹ The administrative progressives in education advocated a similar division with men groomed for administrative roles and women remaining as classroom teachers.

Rural insurgency, desire for direct democracy, and issues of the production class all created complications for administrative progressives hoping to reform rural schools. The push back created by rural residents to proposed reforms was even greater when reformers tried to impose solutions based on a perceived educational "crisis" that had no bearing on the reality of

⁴⁸ Thomas Pugh, *Rural School Consolidation in New York State, 1795-1993* (PhD diss., Syracuse University, 1994), 293-294.

⁴⁹ Marilyn Watkins, "Political Activism and Community-Building Among Alliance and Grange Women in Western Washington, 1892-1925," *Agricultural History* 67, no. 2 (1993), 199.

⁵⁰ Marilyn Watkins, "Political Activism and Community-Building Among Alliance and Grange Women," 213.

⁵¹ Nancy Berlage, "Organizing the Farm Bureau: Family, Community, and Professionals," 424.

the local community. Compared with other states, Washington ranked high on many standard measures of school attainment, quality and organization. In spite of Washington's rural nature, the Russell Sage Foundation, in 1910, ranked Washington's education system as number one in the nation. In 1918, despite the fact Washington failed to improve attendance rates as rapidly as other states, it continued to outpace the majority of the other states relative to expenditures per pupil and teachers' salaries; thereby retaining a position as high as sixth place.⁵² Among the criteria used by Leonard Ayers, of the Russell Sage Foundation, were percent of school population attending school daily; percent of boys to girls attending high school; average annual expenditure per child of school age; expenditure per teacher for salaries among others. Frank Phillips, the Chief Statistician for the Bureau of Education, used a different set of criteria in order to rank states. Using this "Ranks" system Washington had ranked at second place in 1910 rising to first place in 1918 and remaining in first place until at least 1925.⁵³ Included among his criteria were percentage of illiterates ten years of age or over; percentage of the number of potential students attending high school; average number of days attended by each child enrolled; and percentage of high school graduates continuing their education, among others.

The discussion about Washington State's rural school reforms will focus on the schools of the third-class school districts. School districts in Washington were divided into three different classes⁵⁴ based on the population that they served, with first-class districts having the largest populations and third-class districts having the smallest with 90 percent of the state's schools in third-class districts. These districts included all schools located in communities with populations

⁵² Leonard P. Ayres, *An Index Number for State School Systems* (New York: The Russell Sage Foundation, 1920).

⁵³ Frank M. Phillips, *Educational Ranking of States by Two Methods* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1925); see also L. D. Burrus. "Washington Ranks First Educationally". *Washington Education Journal* 4, no. 9 (1925), 270.

⁵⁴ First class districts included cities with populations larger than 10,000 persons, Second class districts included cities with populations of between 2,500 and 10,000, and Third class districts included all districts whose boundaries included population centers of less than 2,500.

of less than 1,500 as well as the 20 percent of the state's teachers who were working in rural school districts that were not part of any incorporated community. Fifty-six percent of the state's common schools were being held in one-room buildings during the 1919-1920 school year.⁵⁵ One-room schools were not limited to rural (non-incorporated) settings but were also in small, incorporated villages. County school superintendents were responsible for the supervision of all schools of the third-class districts, regardless of whether they were multi-room or single room schools. Even in 1920, some of Washington's active school districts did not have their own school buildings.

Issues related to country life, including rural schooling, drew the attention of Washington's rural residents. At their first meeting, the Washington Country Life Commission, appointed by Governor Marion Hay in April in 1910, discussed a variety of country life problems and ultimately decided to focus exclusively on redirecting rural education. This was not surprising given that three of the commissioners, Carpenter, Dumas and Rogers, were directly or indirectly involved in education with a particular focus on rural education. Robert Harvie, historian and professor of criminal justice, in writing about the Country Life Movement of Washington State, saw the Commission's decision as being one that was relatively safe politically. In general, the Washington Grange and the Farmer's Union opposed many of the Country Life ideas recommended by rural life reformers but they generally agreed rural schools needed to be redirected to fit better the needs of rural life. The Grange had been recommending changes in the course of study since the 1870s. In addition, many of the rural education reforms recommended were already allowed by state law, including school consolidation, curricular reforms, compulsory education and lengthened school years so the legislature would not have to

⁵⁵ Washington (State) Superintendent of Public Instruction [Josephine Corliss Preston], *25th Biennial Report*, 347-348.

be convinced to pass these reforms.⁵⁶ This did not mean, however, that rural constituencies were likely to implement such measures.

Many rural residents “found many Country Life ideas insulting”⁵⁷ although they recognized the need for some changes in rural education. The two things generally singled out for complaint were the lack of practical, rural-focused curriculum and the lack of high school opportunities.⁵⁸ In many rural locations, students had to be sent to larger communities to attend high school. Many rural parents were reluctant to send their children to such schools because they were reluctant to expose their children to what they saw as the immoral influences of town and city districts. Attached to their local school and concerns about the possible immorality of larger school populations and proximity to urban centers, they often found reasons to stall school consolidation efforts. The ungraded school system provided opportunities for children to move in and out of school, as their labor was needed for farm and home duties. Without the platoon system of the graded schools, these students were able to complete their education in spite of their part-time attendance allowing them to complete more schooling, something that would not have been so convenient in a consolidated school with graded classrooms.⁵⁹ According to Danbom, rural residents also resented the condescension of educational reformers along with the implication that they were failing in educating their young people. Even more important, their resistance “rose because country people did not share the urban assumptions” those reformers brought with them.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Robert A. Harvie, “How ‘Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm,” *Columbia: The Magazine of Northwest History* 19, No.2 (2005):39-40.

⁵⁷ Harvie, “How ‘Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm,” 47.

⁵⁸ Steffes, *School, Society & State*, 52.

⁵⁹ William Fischel, *Making the Grade: the Economic Evolution of American School Districts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 112-114.

⁶⁰ David B. Danbom, “Rural Education Reform and the Country Life Movement, 1900-1920,” *Agricultural History* 53, no. 2 (1979), 473.

In Washington, it appears that one of the primary reasons behind allowing school consolidation originated with the desire to provide citizens with the capacity to establish high schools with large enough catchment areas to make them viable, starting with the laws allowing for the creation of Union High Schools in 1895 and for the creation of joint districts where district borders extended over two counties in 1899. Processes for allowing consolidations of school districts were created in 1902 but it was not until the adoption of the 1909 School Code allowing school districts to provide transportation of students at public expense that the number of consolidations increased. Washington's Superintendent of Public Instruction, Henry Dewey, recognized in 1911 that "consolidation is not a panacea for all the limitations of rural schools. Whether it is desirable or feasible in any locality depends upon many factors, such as density of population, topography of the country, condition of the roads, and above all else, upon community spirit."⁶¹ In two counties, what was being counted as school consolidation was actually small school districts coming together to hire a superintendent for supervisory purposes without actually changing district boundaries or political structures. Washington appeared to be the only state in the Union that recognized this type of organization as a form of school consolidation.⁶² Up until 1915, a county school superintendent at the request of five community members could create school consolidations. That year, the legislature required that consolidations gain the approval of the majority of voters in all consolidating districts rather than just the majority of voters overall in order to prevent a larger district from dominating the decision. This change reflected the State's Department of Education's belief that "the majority must rule. It is therefore unwise to fasten upon communities any system until the people have

⁶¹ Washington (State) Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Consolidation of Rural Schools and Transportation of Pupils [Bulletin No. 7]* (Olympia, WA: E. L. Boardman, Public Printer, 1911), 5.

⁶² Washington (State) Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Consolidation of Rural Schools*, 56.

been convinced of its merits.”⁶³ During the 1919-1920 school year, there were another 40 consolidated districts created bringing the state total to 257 consolidated districts. There were also 92 joint districts where district boundaries extended over at least two county borders.⁶⁴ The creation of joint districts allowed for the recognition that political boundaries sometimes did not reflect the terrain or real community identities.

Among the first school reform issues Washington’s new state legislature had to deal with was finding state funding to provide the constitutionally required education for communities that did not have an adequate tax base to do so. At the urging of John Rogers, a Populist representative from Puyallup (and later governor), Washington’s legislature passed a law allowing for the apportionment of state funds to the state’s schools. It became to be known as the “barefoot schoolboy law.” This March 1895 legislation recognized that many families, particularly in sparsely populated rural areas, found it difficult to provide shoes for the children let alone financially support local schools. In recognition of the constitutional duty to “provide for general and uniform system of schools,”⁶⁵ the legislation provided for the distribution to school districts \$6 per census child residing within their borders, thus providing a minimum level of state funding for public education. These funds were a combination of the interest earned by the state’s permanent education fund and monies collected through property taxes collected statewide. School districts were allowed to continue to assess and collect additional tax revenues above the amount provided by the state. The purpose of the legislation was to shift the burden of excessive taxation from the poor, rural areas of the state to the wealthier communities in an attempt to provide an equalization of financial burden. While wealthier areas of the state felt that

⁶³ Washington (State) Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Consolidation of Rural Schools*, 54.

⁶⁴ Washington (State) Superintendent of Public Instruction [Josephine Corliss Preston], 25th Biennial Report, 348.

⁶⁵ Constitution of the State of Washington, Section 1, Article 9, 35-36, http://www.sos.wa.gov/_assets/history/1889-Constitution-color.pdf (assessed 1 December 2010).

the new tax was a burden, smaller districts felt that they were treated unfairly as the resulting revenues continued to be inadequate to support their schools. The availability of adequate school revenues continued to be an intransigent problem despite decades of attempted interventions.

Inequitable and inadequate school funding drew the attention of the state's tax commissioners during discussions regarding the increase, continuation or discontinuation of the state's apportionment. In 1908, The State Board of Tax Commissioners was "not disposed to suggest any material changes in the 'Barefoot School Boy Law' or make any recommendations to narrow its scope because they recognized "the fact, that it was a very firm hold upon popular favor."⁶⁶ One of the surprising findings of the Board of Tax Commissioners was the fact that some of the wealthier counties were receiving state apportionments greater than the amount of money collected within the county for the state portion of school funds. These counties generally had large industrial bases, including large extractive industries such as immense mills and large lumber interests. The commission felt that the disparity between districts invited "serious consideration and naturally raise[d] the query as to whether or not the so-called 'Barefoot School Boy Law' is really equitable in operation. ... There [was] found existing between the various counties the feeling in each, or rather a fear, that it may be compelled to pay more than a just proportion of state taxes, and a rivalry exists in this respect that has, beyond a doubt, contributed more to low valuations resulting in the unfair conditions ... than all other causes combined."⁶⁷ While they recognized the popularity of the "Barefoot Schoolboy Law," they recognized that it did not necessarily work in the manner desired nor did it necessarily benefit those it had been intended to benefit but they were unwilling to alter it because of its popularity. The state's \$6 per census child was increased to \$8 per census child in 1899 and again raised to \$10 per census

⁶⁶ Washington (State) State Board of Tax Commissioners, *First Biennial Report of the State Board of Tax Commissions* (Olympia, WA: C. W. Gorham, Public Printer, 1906), 42.

⁶⁷ Washington (State) State Board of Tax Commissioners, *First Biennial Report*, 43.

child during the 1909 legislative session. The continued inequity in the ability to raise school funds led to an adoption of a countywide tax for each county, collected and distributed by the state, of an additional \$10 per census child that same session. This “10-10” funding indicated that \$10 per census child was raised by the state with an additional \$10 per census child raised by each county. The funds raised by these taxes were apportioned to the school districts based on average daily attendance and, in the case of the county tax, on the number of teachers employed. This “10-10” funding continued throughout the 1910s.

While not generally an issue to rural school patrons, the quality of rural schoolteachers was a primary focus of educational reformers. Rural schools, due in part due to the lower salaries they offered, generally attracted teachers who were much younger, had less education, less experience and less professional training than their city peers. In an attempt to change this for Washington’s schools, in 1917 the State Board of Education changed the requirements to mandate the completion of a full four years of high school and, at minimum, nine weeks of Normal school training in order to obtain a temporary teaching certificate. At the time, only Washington and eleven other states required at least a high school diploma to teach elementary school.⁶⁸ Ninety percent of Washington’s rural teachers were women and these women acted as educational leaders within the communities where they worked. According to Steffes, these educational leaders working in country schools “lacked coercive authority and control over fiscal resources, and consequently they had to persuade and advise rather than manage and compel.”⁶⁹ This leadership style fit well with rural school patrons opposed to experts using coercive, top-down directives in attempts to implement change.

⁶⁸ Karen J. Blair, “The Normal Schools of the Pacific Northwest: The Lifelong Impact of Extracurricular Activities on Women Students at Teacher-Training Institutions, 1890-1917,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (2009/2010), 4.

⁶⁹ Steffes, *School, Society, & State*, 66.

For the female rural schoolteachers who opted to continue teaching in rural schools, they often found career satisfaction that may not have been available in other teaching situations. Kathleen Weiler, through her work with women who had served as rural schoolteachers in California beginning in the interwar years, extends Blount's examination of women's role as educational leaders finding that rural schools, instead of diminishing women's opportunities, actually allowed them greater ones. By working in an environment perceived to have less prestige (and less pay) than educational positions in city districts, women were able to take on leadership roles as mentors and supervisors that may not have been open to them in another environment. The fact that rural supervision supported and enriched "the work of capable rural teachers was almost always put forward by women rural teachers and supervisors, who argued for teachers' autonomy and their potential for personal and intellectual growth."⁷⁰ This view was the antithesis of the one put forward by mostly male university professors and administrators who focused on supervision as a way to help schools, including teachers, function efficiently rather than teachers' professional growth.

Another complaint directed at the rural schools nationally was that county superintendents, charged with supervising rural schoolteachers, were often unqualified to make the type of decisions required of them. In Washington, county superintendents were required to hold first class teaching certificates and have at least two years of teaching experience, totaling nine months each, in order to run for office. Washington recognized early the need for county superintendents to receive additional training and support. County Superintendents, even prior to statehood, were expected to attend the annual institutes held under the auspices of the State Department of Education. These institutes provided opportunities to discuss issues relative to the position as well as provide professional development. Cheney Normal School also offered a 6-

⁷⁰ Weiler, *Country Schoolwomen*, 63.

week summer school session specifically for newly elected and inexperienced county superintendents. Mabel Carney, head of the Department of Rural Education at the Teachers College, Columbia University, reported in 1912 that this was the only known attempt to provide special training for county superintendents in the United States.⁷¹ County superintendents could hire deputies to assist them with their duties although not all counties provided salaries for this option. Other than issues of salary, set by the state and equivalent to other county officers, Washington's education community worked to ameliorate conditions such as poor training and inadequate support that affected county superintendents in other states.

Washington State's county school superintendents' responsibilities had significantly increased since the position was first established in 1854, prior to the creation of a territorial-wide superintendency twenty years later. Unlike in other states, county school superintendents in Washington State had broad educational responsibilities. These legal powers and duties were so broad that they were featured in a discussion about rural school supervision in a bulletin released by the federal Bureau of Education in 1917 as an example of how much power some county superintendents were given. Not only were they responsible for the "supervision of the common schools," including the examination, supervision of teachers (including discipline and removal), the collection and distribution of required reports, and apportionment of school funds, they were also responsible for approving the plans for all new buildings in the rural districts (districts of the third-class).⁷² Despite the state superintendent's appointment of an assistant who specialized in rural schools (a position that would later metamorphose into an assistant superintendent position), Washington did not adopt additional rural supervisors appointed either by the state or

⁷¹ Mabel Carney, *Country Life and the Country School* (Chicago, Row, Petersen, and Company, 1912), 261-262; see also Wayne Urban, *Why Teachers Organized* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982).

⁷² Katherine M. Cook and A. C. Monahan. *Rural School Supervision: Bulletin, 1916, No. 48* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1917) 33.

local county superintendent. A deputy county school superintendent provided the only additional professional supervision if one were provided.

It was in this context that Josephine Corliss Preston shaped her vision regarding the reforms needed to improve rural schools. Among the changes she implemented during her tenure included standardizing Walla Walla County's course of study so students changing from one district to another would not lose progress in their studies. She also made sure that domestic science, manual training and agriculture were included in every school's course of study. She was responsible for the teacher's cottage movement and had created social centers by grouping schools together for social events and contests (including spelling bees). Among her goals for 1912, the year she was elected to the state superintendency, was to establish Parent-Teacher Associations in each of the school buildings in each county and to increase the number of playgrounds at rural schools.⁷³ As Walla Walla's county school superintendent, Preston was also responsible for overseeing the approval and construction of the Prospect Point School. This school was built to the standards advocated by the Washington Country Life Commission. The school, described as being flooded with sunlight, was built on a five-acre plot of land and included a teacher's cottage, playgrounds, flowerbeds, school gardens, an athletic field and space for a proposed farmers' hall.⁷⁴ The building received national attention resulting in the Russell Sage Foundation requesting information regarding the school from Preston and Dumas (a member of Washington's Country Life Commission).⁷⁵ Not only did Preston's initiatives in

⁷³ See "State Superintendency," *Quilcene Megaphone*, no date in Preston's Scrapbook; "Mrs. Preston Speaks Here," *The Columbian* [Vancouver, WA], July 31, 1912, Preston's Scrapbook, 9.

⁷⁴ "Acres of Playgrounds at Walla Walla," *The Twice-A-Week Spokesman-Review*, April 25, 1911, 4.

⁷⁵ "Walla Walla Plan Stirs New York," *The Twice-A-Week Spokesman-Review*, June 9, 1911, 6; "Model School Farm" *Ludington Record-Appeal* [Ludington, MI], November 16, 1911, 9; "The Prospect Point School," *School Board Journal* 64, no. 6 (1912), 31.

Walla Walla County garner her statewide support, they helped build her national reputation as a progressive educational leader.

Although Preston's advocacy for building teacher's cottages⁷⁶ probably received the greatest national notice, it was her ideas about grouping schools into natural community centers that had more of an effect on the state's rural schools. One of the first initiatives Preston instituted upon taking office as Washington's State Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1913 was to have county superintendents divide their counties into natural community centers. Drawing on her experience from Walla Walla County in creating community centers, she knew "districts whose social interests were limited by their own district lines, forgot those lines, joined with many neighboring districts in common interests which centered in the school, and before we realized it, we were moving. We were able in a short time to accomplish great and lasting results."⁷⁷ The legislature had approved the wider of use of school plants during the 1913 legislative session clearing the way for using schoolhouses for community gatherings. Preston knew of "nothing more valuable in our State, for it helps to counteract the tendency toward seclusion that country life is apt to bring, and it spreads neighborliness and promotes the public good."⁷⁸

Under Preston's plan, the county superintendent was to divide their rural schools into natural community centers following a similar plan to the one she used in Walla Walla County. She wanted to institute her community center plan "because it readily lends itself to the social center idea, rural supervision, [and] the development of rural high schools with vocational

⁷⁶ Preston advocated the building of Teacher's Cottages near rural school buildings to allow teachers to have a place to live without "boarding around" as had been practiced for years. This idea came to her in 1905 during her time as the Deputy County School Superintendent when one of the rural teachers in Walla Walla County could find no one who was willing to allow her to board with them. See Josephine Corliss Preston, *Teachers' Cottages in Washington* [Bulletin No. 27] (Olympia, WA: Frank M. Lamborn, Public Printer, 1915).

⁷⁷ Josephine Corliss Preston, *The Community Center* (Olympia, WA: Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1914), 27.

⁷⁸ "Rural Schools' Isolation Mitigated by Woman's Zeal," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 6, 1922, 6.

courses.”⁷⁹ Preston’s ultimate goal was to increase the number of union high schools and school consolidations. The state had a school consolidation law “benefiting a number of communities, but when we look at the state as a whole we see that it operates too slowly. Stubborn walls of prejudice and selfishness must be gradually battered down. . . . When I assumed the duties of state superintendent, I felt that we must begin to move faster, yet I realized that public sentiment in the state was not ready for a complete reorganization of the district boundary plan, and a recasting of the present small districts into larger and more economic units.”⁸⁰

By 1920, 33 of the 39 counties in Washington had nearly every school district included in a community center with less than one percent, only 24 districts, not part of a community grouping. The Agricultural and Rural Life Commission had approved the building of 311 community halls since 1913.⁸¹ Beyond the increase of social capital⁸² and community goodwill, it was found that the community center allowed for improved supervision of rural schools without significant increases of cost. The community center organization allowed the county superintendent to receive reports from the community center leaders, thus allowing them to keep in touch with the general school and community activities in a manner that had not been available previously. While their duties required visitations to all schools, the more frequent conferences held with the community center leaders allowed the superintendents to be in better touch with not only the teachers and the schools but also the community.⁸³ Community centers had “proven to be the open sesame through which the people in the sparsely settled and rural

⁷⁹ Calvin C. Thompson, “Manual Training Field Meet,” *The Survey: A Journal of Constructive Philanthropy* 30, no. 17 (1913), 553.

⁸⁰ Josephine C. Preston, “Hopeful Experiment,” *The Kindergarten-Primary Magazine* 26, no. 10 (1914), 285.

⁸¹ Harvie, “How ‘Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm,” 44.

⁸² Similar plans to Preston’s had been adopted in West Virginia beginning in the 1913-194 school year. L. J. Hanifan, in writing about the results of the creating community centers described the development of what he called “social capital.” This is the first known reference of social capital used without reference to its economic roots. see L. J. Hanifan, “The Rural School Community Center,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 67, (1916), 130-131.

⁸³ Evelyn Spencer, “*School Administration Thru Community Centers*,” *School Board Journal* 58, no. 1 (1919), 42.

communities have entered a new world, found new friends, found new interests.”⁸⁴ They had also provided improved supervision for rural schoolteachers.

Washington State’s rural constituencies had a strong political inclination toward local choice and local control that recognized the value of men and women in creating a society they envisioned. Within this context, they were willing to support the improvement of their schools if they could see the benefit that they and their children received from those changes. Because of this support, Washington’s general educational progress was recognized as being superior on many measures when compared to other states in the nation. William Bagley, a recognized national expert on teacher education and professor at Teachers’ College, Columbia University, stated in November of 1920 that “Washington has more nearly solved the rural school problem than any other state, being a close contender for first place in this respect.”⁸⁵ Although Washington’s rural schools still had areas needing improvement, the state’s educators under the direction of Josephine Corliss Preston along with a cadre of female county superintendents and female schoolteachers had obviously worked hard to improve school standards.

⁸⁴ Josephine Corliss Preston, “Community Centers,” *The American School* 6, no. 1 (1920), 12.

⁸⁵ Washington (State) Superintendent of Public Instruction [Josephine Corliss Preston], 25th Biennial Report, 16; “State Normal Schools Win Dr. Bagley’s Praise,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, November 12, 1920, 2.

Chapter Three: The Precipitating Crisis

Regarding "teachers' salaries for the coming year". It is like [the] "Flea telling the dog what kind of blood and the quality and quantity he has got to give them."⁸⁶

While the condition of the nation's schools was brought into focus when a large percentage of the nation's men were ineligible for military service during World War I due to illiteracy or poor physical conditions, these were not the only issues facing the schools. Rural schools, in particular, were affected by the teacher shortages resulting from the low wages that had not kept up with inflation caused by the war effort. Washington was not immune from the teacher shortage affecting the nation. At the beginning of the 1919-1920 school year, Preston had to issue emergency certificates to individuals who have failed to pass the state teachers' examination or had just completed high school themselves. She issued 170 such certificates by the middle of September, still leaving 261 Washington state schools failing to open due to the lack of teaching staff. Most of these schools were in Eastern Washington with two counties, Douglas and Okanogan, each needing more than 45 teachers to fill vacant classroom positions. Preston also granted city and county superintendents the right to issue temporary permits in order to enroll teachers into the teaching ranks.

Preston attributed this to the failure of school authorities to provide teachers with increased salaries leading them to seek positions outside of education because of their inability to survive on a teacher's salary. By 1920, while Washington State's teachers' average salaries had increased 138 percent, their purchasing power due to inflation was only 68 percent of what it had been in 1913. Preston held school district boards of directors responsible for the "emergency"

⁸⁶ Handwritten by W. C. Hall on the back of Washington Education Association Executive Committee, Letter to W.C. Hall, May 3, 1921, Washington Education Association Records, Accession No. 0731-001, Box 1, Special Collections, University of Washington [Seattle, WA], hereafter referred to as WEA Records.

because they had been steadily accepting teachers' resignations without considering how they might replace them. She told the press, "Normal school graduates . . . receive less salary than street sweepers; high school principals and superintendents less than section foremen, country school teachers less for instructing the farmer's children than he pays his hired man to feed his hogs."⁸⁷ This chapter examines the issues that ultimately led to the appointment of the School Code Commission in 1920 in an attempt fix ongoing issues affecting not just rural schools but all common schools in Washington State. It also explores how Preston was able to influence state lawmakers to achieve increased revenues for the state's common schools.

The dual crisis of low teacher salaries and teacher shortages ultimately led to the creation of the Public School Administrative Code Commission (more commonly known as the School Code Commission) in the spring of 1920. While the original scope of their assignment was to provide solutions regarding the financial and administrative issues leading to the teacher shortages and teacher salary issues, they expand their recommendations well beyond this scope to include a variety of schooling issues not directly related to either. The School Code Commission's recommendations, and Washington State's Superintendent of Public Instruction's response, illuminate how women educational leaders and rural school constituencies responded to the rural school reforms advocated by the administrative progressives and how their responses shaped state educational development.

Preston kept the situation of teachers' salaries at the forefront in her conversations with those who could influence policy makers during the fall of 1919. When she spoke to the Transportation Club of Seattle, she began by telling the audience that it was a pleasure to speak to men who were dealing with transportation and business problems "for they are the men with

⁸⁷ "Educational Crisis Exists in Washington," *The Seattle Sunday Times*, September 28, 1919, 19; "Street Sweeper Salaries," *The Seattle Sunday Times*, September 7, 1919, 6.

thinking brains and anybody with thinking brains must be interested in education of the children of their own state.” She proceeded to tell them that there were 100,000 teaching positions vacant in the United States and that “there must be something radically wrong with the entire school problem and teacher-system.” When a schoolteacher could earn \$75 dollars a month teaching or \$100 dollars a month working as a stenographer, what option would she choose? Young people were choosing not to go into the teaching profession. None of the freshmen at the University of Washington planned to go into teaching. Of the 5,000 students there, 1,000 planned to study business administration. In the past three years, the Normal schools had seen a decrease in enrollment of 20 percent. Preston explained that the situation “has resolved itself into a matter of taxation . . . and it is just as much the state’s duty to educate its young citizens and future men and women as it is its duty to keep up jails, insane asylums and almshouses. After all the proper training of the young and susceptible mind is really a great measure against the refilling of such institutions. In this way the future and educated citizen will produce more revenue instead of becoming a liability.”⁸⁸

The public schools were not the only schools suffering from economic woes. College professors also faced decreased buying power due to low wages. A national study done by the Department of Commerce and Labor found that the median salary for the 6,593 professors in the seventy-four colleges and universities on the Carnegie Foundation list was \$2,000 annually. The median salary for associate and assistant professors, as well as instructors was only \$1,300 annually. Analysis of the budgets of 7,012 families found nearly one in four families, with an average family size of five members, unable to earn enough to cover living expenses. The average living expenses for a family of five was just over \$1380 annually meaning that the average salary of \$1,300 annually paid to college teachers meant that they were unable to support

⁸⁸ “More Schools and Teachers Needed,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, November 18, 1919, 16.

a family on their salary.⁸⁹ In December of 1919, the presidents of the state-supported colleges and universities of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana met in Seattle to discuss available options for increasing wages as soon as possible given the financial constraints faced by their institutions.⁹⁰ By the end of December, *The Seattle Times* printed a front-page editorial on the financial situation at the University of Washington focusing on both the need for higher salaries for the professors and the significant increase in enrollment.⁹¹ In February 1920, the University of Washington Board of Regents voted to increase professors' salaries with the State College of Washington Regents quickly doing likewise. In order to raise the salaries, both institutions agreed to expend their allotments over 21 months instead of the budgeted 24 months with the idea that the legislature during its next session, in January of 1921, would provide them emergency funding to get them through to the new biennium in April of 1921.⁹²

On March 2, 1920, Governor Louis Hart called a special session of the Legislature, the third time in state history, for March 22, 1920. The reason given for calling the legislature together was so "that it may provide funds for continuing the state university, the Washington State College and the state Normal schools, and to consider the ratification of the proposed amendment to the federal constitution relating to suffrage, and such other matters as it may deem advisable."⁹³ Hart made the decision to hold a special session following a conference that included the presidents and regents of the institutions of higher education, legislators and leading businessmen where it had been disclosed that the institutions of higher education would be facing a combined total shortfall of about \$1,500,000 by April of 1921. It was his expressed hope

⁸⁹ "Professors Fight Halved Dollar," *The Seattle Daily Times*, October 20, 1919, 19.

⁹⁰ "College Chiefs Meet Tomorrow," *The Seattle Daily Times*, December 12, 1919, 4.

⁹¹ "University Needs Additional Funds," *The Seattle Sunday Times*, December 21, 1919, 1.

⁹² "Funds Sufficient for Salary Raise," *The Seattle Daily Times*, February 12, 1920, 5.

⁹³ "Special Session of Legislature," *The Pullman Herald*, March 5, 1920, 1.

that the legislature would be able to find a way of solving the crisis without having to raise the state's total tax levy.⁹⁴

Although Hart called the special session with two specific goals in mind, he had left the agenda of the session open to other matters if the legislature deemed any other business to be necessary. This was all the invitation that Josephine Preston needed. She had been in New York at a meeting of the NEA's Commission on the Emergency in Education when Hart had called the special legislative session and was heading home when she sent her first volley in the fight for increased funding for schools and increased pay for teachers. In a telegram sent to Governor Hart on the morning of March 7, 1920, she wrote "In compliance with your plan decided upon before I left home I am calling a state conference on school problems may I say in letter of invitation which goes out from my office tomorrow that the educational congress [scheduled for March 22nd] is with your approval and enthusiastic support if so advise Mrs. Nagel Reach Spokane Thursday."⁹⁵ Hart quickly responded with "'Legislature convenes in extraordinary session March twenty-second Stop This will test capacity of Olympia Hotel accommodations to the limit stop Would it be possible to defer education conference one week, if so, will you please wire Mrs. Nagel."⁹⁶ Preston responded to this request to consider changing the date of her Education Congress with:

"The Crisis in education in our state makes a conference of teachers superintendents and school board members imperative if anything other than the ratification is to be considered by the Legislature I am sure that you will join me in presenting the needs of our schools to that honorable body in its true light realizing keenly shortage of teachers STOP Lapse of education standards last few years and 587 emergency certificates which I was forced to authorize this year in

⁹⁴ "Educational Emergency Makes Necessary Special Gathering of Lawmakers," *The Post-Intelligencer* [Seattle, WA], March 3, 1920, 1.

⁹⁵ Josephine Corliss Preston, Telegram to Louis F. Hart, March 7, 1920 Governor Louis F. Hart, State Agency and Institutions Files, Collection AR2-J-3, Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1920 Washington State Archives [Olympia, WA], hereafter referred to as Hart Papers, 1920.

⁹⁶ Louis F. Hart, Telegram to Josephine Corliss Preston, March 8, 1920, Hart Papers, 1920.

order that hundreds of our children could have any educational advantages I feel sure that you would not have me leave anything undone to meet this emergency the conference at the time called cannot possibly be detrimental to public interest and may prove of the richest benefit I congratulate you on calling the special session for the ratification of the suffrage amendment the women of the nation as well as the women of own state are rejoicing.”⁹⁷

Governor Hart again, by return telegram, tries to convince Preston to change the date for the educational conference. “You are evidently laboring under mistaken idea of work of extraordinary Session stop Nothing is anticipated which can in any way affect public schools stop Can you not deter State Conference until twenty-ninth stop In the interest of the general public I beg you to assist us in holding the work of the legislature within reasonable bounds.”⁹⁸ Governor Hart had opposed the state education conference “declaring that the ‘matter of higher wages for teachers’ is not a matter for legislation but for local taxation.”⁹⁹

While Preston was still returning from the East, members of the State Teachers’ League and the WEA’s legislative committee met with Governor Hart on March 13, 1920. Both A. S. Burrows and W. F. Geiger, who would later be actively involved in developing and promoting the recommendations of the School Code Commission, were part of this committee. They presented a salary relief proposal where they urged a doubling of the “Barefoot School Boy” allowance from \$10 dollars per school census child from both state and county funds to \$20 dollars from both sources. This “20-20” funding scheme had been suggested by the King County Teachers’ League and endorsed by the County School Superintendents at their meeting the previous October. Although they suggested that increased appropriations for the public schools could be attached to any bill to deal with the budgetary shortfalls of the institutions of higher education, the Governor did not support such a plan. The school committee intimated that the

⁹⁷ Josephine Corliss Preston, Telegram to Louis F. Hart, March 8, 1920, Hart Papers, 1920.

⁹⁸ Louis F. Hart, Telegram to Josephine Corliss Preston, March 8, 1920, Hart Papers, 1920.

⁹⁹ “Teachers’ Pay is a Local Matter,” *The Ellensburg Daily Record*, March 9, 1920, 1.

legislators they had spoken with were unwilling to take up the issue of funding for the public schools separate from funding for the colleges and universities. The Governor told the group that he and Preston had previously discussed a plan for providing financial relief to public schools and that it would be a discourtesy to take up the matter with anyone else until he had the opportunity to speak with her further.¹⁰⁰ The following day, less than a week after declaring teacher salaries a local issue, Hart would admit that something needed to be done to help resolve the common schools' funding situation. However, he would imply that he had been waiting for a concrete suggestion from the State Superintendent of Schools, Josephine Preston, before he decided what he would recommend to the legislature.¹⁰¹ This was despite the fact that he indicated a day earlier to educational groups that he had met with Preston and they had discussed a plan to help resolve the crisis.

Preston's office placed a request for county school superintendents, city school superintendents and high school principals to come to Olympia for an Education Congress. As the *Olympia Daily Reporter* correctly surmised, "Mrs. Preston must have suspected that maybe the legislative session would be ended in a week and discovered that she couldn't deter the teachers because the object of calling them at all is to have them right here with their lamps trimmed and burning when the legislature is in session. They want better pay and the way Mrs. Preston sees to get them better pay is to give them the opportunity to so remark frequently in the ears of the men who provide for the paying."¹⁰²

Preston had already tried to influence political change through the "regular" channels. The plan Hart had recommended included teachers and school patrons lobbying their local school districts in the hope of improving the economic condition of the schools. This time, she

¹⁰⁰ "Teachers Claims Are Outlined to Governor," *The Seattle Sunday Times*, March 14, 1920, 20.

¹⁰¹ "Compensation Bill Presented at Olympia," *The Seattle Daily Times*, March 19, 1920, 8.

¹⁰² "Governor Pleads all in Vain with Mrs. Preston," *Olympia Daily Recorder*, March 9, 1920, 1.

opted for a much more direct form of intervention. As a result of her experience with Women's Clubs and the style of political lobbying of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, as well as other organizations like them, which had been used in order to affect social change (mother's pensions, temperance, woman suffrage), she knew that the best way to influence change was to bring a group of informed lobbyists to speak directly with the legislators. This action fits well with the pattern recognized by Crowley and Skocpol as to why voluntary organizations were so successful in disseminating information was they had found "that what could not be achieved individually could be attained collectively; and organizers as well as potential members [of large voluntary organizations like the General Federation of Women's Clubs] clearly knew how to assemble great endeavors with remarkable speed."¹⁰³ Since Women's groups had different organizational patterns instead of influencing the political process through the traditional power structure related to political parties, they developed a system of lobbying for legislative change by going directly to state and national policy makers with their change agendas.¹⁰⁴

Preston also used the fact that many men in power had stereotypes about women to her advantage. Once she reached Spokane, she met with a variety of educational professionals to begin planning their strategy. At that time, it was suggested she change the date of the conference to March 20, two days prior to the opening of the special session. According to the *Olympia Daily Recorder*, "Governor Hart appeared to be slightly pained by the prospect, but made no comment. Folks who have differences with Mrs. Preston commonly get that way. Their characteristic gesture is a throwing up of hands, so to speak, when the subject is mentioned."¹⁰⁵

Scholars have found that women were able to draw on different resources and strategies than

¹⁰³ Jocelyn Elise Crowley and Theda Skocpol, "The Rush to Organize: Explaining Associational Formation in the United States, 1860s-1920s," *American Journal of Political Science* 45, no. 4 (2001), 824.

¹⁰⁴ Elisabeth S. Clemens, "Organizational Repertoires and Institutional Change: Women's Groups and the Transformation of U.S. Politics, 1890-1920," *American Journal of Sociology* 98, no. 4 (1993), 783-784.

¹⁰⁵ "Mrs. Preston Changes Her Mind About It," *Olympia Daily Recorder*, March 13, 1920, 1.

men given the same situation. They also had a tendency to use their distinct gender attributes to their advantage.¹⁰⁶

The Education Congress was held on Saturday, March 20. Several members of the legislature who supported the teachers' claims spoke positively to group. A. S. Burrows, County School Superintendent for King County, furnished information on how the "20-20" plan would help solve the problems for King county country schools. In Preston's prepared statement, she made an appeal reminding the state's residents that

"Equality of opportunity is a basic principle of democracy. Each of the democratic American commonwealths in assuming statehood has accepted the responsibility of giving its children adequate educational privileges. Washington is one of seventeen states which expressly recognizes in their existences, the paramount duty of education. ... [W]e have reached an economic crisis which threatens the very foundation of democratic education through the shortage of teachers and lowering of standards."¹⁰⁷

Governor Hart's opening address to the special session acknowledged the situation but suggested that the plan originally mapped out earlier with the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, prior to his calling special session, be adopted. This plan included a concerted effort to convince local school boards and school electors to take advantage of state statutes allowing them to increase local school taxes through a vote of the people thus increasing funds available to pay for increased teacher salaries. Hart believed that by doing this any legislative solution could wait until the next regular legislative session.¹⁰⁸ The Legislature claimed that they had not been aware of the public school funding crisis until they held joint appropriations committee meetings as "[t]heir condition had not been brought to public attention and they would have been

¹⁰⁶ Kim Warren, "Separate Sphere: Analytical Persistence in United States Women's History," *History Compass* 5, no. 1 (2007), 266-267.

¹⁰⁷ "Teachers Stand by 20-20 Plan," *The Seattle Sunday Times*, March 21, 1920, 7.

¹⁰⁸ "Message from the Governor," in Washington (State) Legislature. Senate, *Senate Journal of the Extraordinary Session of the Sixteenth Legislature of the State of Washington*, (Olympia, WA: Frank Lamborn, 1920), 11.

ignored because of lack of knowledge.”¹⁰⁹ It is hard to believe that the legislative body had no clue regarding the situation regarding teacher shortages and teachers’ salaries as educators in the state had been diligently presenting the issue, using a wide variety of venues, for the past year. By the end of the two-day emergency session, the public schools’ appropriations had been increased to “20-10” with the state providing \$20 per school census child and the county providing \$10.

Changing economic circumstances and the many different competing plans offered to address the financial situation led legislators to appoint a commission to study the problem and present recommendations for legislative action during the next session. This second piece of legislation related to the public schools also passed, Senate Joint Resolution Number 1, “Relating to the Revision of the Common School Code of the State of Washington.” Governor Hart was charged with appointing members to the Public School Administrative Code Commission (more commonly known as the School Code Commission). Meanwhile, the institutions of higher education came away from the special session with no relief to their financial situation, essentially being told that they would have to wait until the next legislative session. This only increased the animosity they felt toward Josephine Preston.

In reviewing the success of the public school lobby, M. M. Mattison of *The Seattle Times* pointed out that “[t]he school teachers owe the success of their fight primarily to Mrs. Josephine Corliss Preston, state superintendent of public instruction.”¹¹⁰ A day later he expanded on these comments with: “the happiest person in Olympia is Mrs. Josephine Corliss Preston, who was not counted in when the original program for the session was shaping up, but who obtruded her common school program on the lawmakers and who received even more than she expected. ... In

¹⁰⁹ M. M. Mattison, “Sunday Caucus to Decide Session Plans,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, March 20, 1920, 3.

¹¹⁰ M. M. Mattison, “Political Aspirants Are Not Over-Elated,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, March 24, 1920, 16.

this connection members of the Legislature and Republican politicians are speculating on the effect of the session on Mrs. Preston's own political future." When Hart called the special session, she had been in New York at a meeting discussing the national crisis created by the serious shortage common school teachers. At the time of the special session, Preston was president of the National Education Association, she was a member of the Republican Party's national executive committee, and gossip around the country placed her on the short list to serve as Cabinet Secretary if a national Department of Education were created under a Republican president through the Smith-Towner Bill.¹¹¹

Although, Preston's strategy for increasing school funding and teacher salaries had indeed proved highly successful, her victory did not go unchallenged. Within a year, many of the men who had been highly visible in the campaign for passage of the "20-20" funding plan for the common schools of Washington State would be actively opposing Preston's vision as it related to the administration and financing of common school education in the state. These included the members of the State Teachers' League/WEA Legislative Committee who had met with Governor Hart while Preston was away as well as the Normal school presidents. It also must be remembered that the presidents of the state's higher education institutions had expected to receive financial relief when Governor Hart had called the special session and they ended up being told to "make do" until the next regular session because the legislature had come to believe that the common schools were financially in a more precarious position than their institutions. The lines were being drawn in an attempt to determine who was going to control not only Washington state education, but possibly the national agenda.

¹¹¹ M. M. Mattison, "Gossip Selects Federal Place for Educator" *The Seattle Daily Times*. March 25, 1920, 1; "Cabinet Woman? She May Be One," *The Muskogee Times-Democrat* (Muskogee, OK), March 5, 1920, 8.

Chapter Four: The School Code Commission

"...the multiplication of specialists - who have been defined as "those who say more and more about less and less" - has not done away with the useful general practitioner..."¹¹²

One of the few pieces of legislation passed by the state legislature during the 1920 Special Session was Senate Joint Resolution No. 1. Proposed by the Joint Committee on Appropriations because "the common school laws of the State of Washington are in great need of revision and readjustment to existing conditions ... [with] several different plans ... proposed for correcting existing evils in our present system." The resolution asked the governor to appoint a state commission to make "a comprehensive and exhaustive study of the common school system."¹¹³ The issue of teachers' shortages and teachers' salaries due to inadequate school revenues had become an education crisis. Governor Louis Hart was responsible for appointing the Commission's members. His vision regarding the Commission's work was not necessarily the vision of the state's administrative progressives. He wanted to separate the business of schools from the purpose of schools. The administrative progressive saw it as an opportunity to shape the state's schools.

¹¹² Mrs. A. H. Reeve, "What the Parent-Teacher Movement Really Is" in National Congress of Parents and Teachers, *A New Force in Education* (New York: Teachers' College, Columbia University, 1930), 14.

¹¹³ Washington (State) Legislature. Senate, *Senate Journal 1920*, 33-34. Since the Public School Administrative Code Commission was an independent commission, its records were not required to be maintained as part of the governmental records. The archivists at the Washington State Archives in Olympia, WA were unable to locate any records for the School Code Commission of 1920-1921 except for limited materials referenced in Governor Hart's records for 1920 and 1921. Based on the information available in the Biennial Reports published under the direction of Preston during her sixteen years of tenure, there should be thousands of pages of correspondence. Limited records exist for 1913-1918 and 1926-1928. On September 9, 1926, *The Seattle Sunday Times* reported "a fire of undetermined origin [had] razed the western half of the old state Capital and badly damaged the eastern wing. ... Many valuable records of state departments, some of which could never be replaced, were destroyed by flames or ruined by water, state officials fear." (p. 1) "Considerable fear was expressed for the safety of the records of ... those in the office of the state superintendent of public instruction. Many of the records were in wooden cases." (p. 3). It is likely that the records were lost either because of the fire or resulting water damage.

The possibility of reopening the state's school code provided administrative progressives the opportunity to propose, and then implement, the reforms advocated by educational leadership at the national level for nearly three decades. Many of the proposals had been articulated in the 1897 Committee of Twelve's report on rural schools. Among these were abolishing the current district system of school organization for administrative and taxation purposes, consolidation of schools, and improved supervision of schools while requiring certain levels of training for both supervisors and teachers. Josephine Corliss Preston, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, was of a different opinion. She had served with many of proponents of these reforms on the NEA's Commission on the Emergency in Education, established in 1918 to address issues that had arisen because of World War One. This commission included twenty-seven of the top educational leaders in the United States. It had been given the broad task of determining how to improve the nation's education system that had been shown lacking when the nation's young men were unprepared to protect the nation during the war. Dr. Ellwood Cubberley, the Dean of Stanford University's School of Education and leading expert on education administration, served on the same committee. During Preston's three years on the commission, she "attended a number of conferences where such theories as Dr. Cubberley advocated were discussed. Even the leading experts of our nation are not fully agreed upon this plan. It is yet in an experimental stage."¹¹⁴

Preston was of the opinion that, although the present school system was a human institution filled with human foibles, it should be retained. "We are told," she said, "that the present educational system is primitive, archaic; that its forms are obsolete and inadequate; that they extend back to territorial days. ... In our desire for a changed order of things, let us not cast

¹¹⁴ "Battle Over New School Code Now Seem Certain," *Olympia Daily Recorder*, December 4, 1920, 1.

aside the results of slow, steady and sure progress for what may prove to be but a costly and experimental failure.”¹¹⁵ She did not see a reason why the state should adopt such dramatic administrative and financial changes based on theories not on actual experience. In answering the charge that district units and elective county and state superintendents were based on a primitive system, Preston recalled that the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were also old, and that the state system that had worked well for Washington should not be changed because of college professors’ theories.¹¹⁶

Hart’s response to a correspondent on April 1, 1920 clearly demonstrated his intention in regards to the purpose of the commission. “I am strongly of the opinion that this Commission should be made up, so far as possible, of those not actively engaged in school work. It will not be much trouble to get the information from those engaged in educational work as to the educational feature of the work. One of the very important features of this work will be the business or financial administration of a reorganized public school system and will not have very much to do with the real educational work.”¹¹⁷ Administratively, the state education system was in the control of Josephine Preston, the elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and she had just embarrassed him as well as the presidents of the state’s institutes of higher education through her ability to rally the state’s educators in order to gain legislative benefit. She would also play a significant role in defeating the proposed changes to the state’s School Code proposed by the 1920 School Code Commission.

¹¹⁵ “Opposes County Unit,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, January 19, 1921, 5.

¹¹⁶ “Josephine Corliss Preston,” *Who’s Who and Why in After-War Education* (New York: Institute for Public Service, (1912), 191.

¹¹⁷ Louis F. Hart, Letter to Thos. S. Ambrose, April 1, 1920, Governor Louis F. Hart’s Records, State Agency and Institutions Files, Accession 2J-1-52, School Code Commission, 1922 Washington State Archives [Olympia, WA], hereafter referred to as Hart School Code Commission.

Governor Hart approached Henry Suzzallo, President of the University of Washington, regarding recommendations for individuals to serve as an external expert for the School Code Commission. Suzzallo recommended that he consider approaching Dr. Ellwood P. Cubberley, Dean of the School of Education and professor of Education Administration at Stanford and considered a national expert on educational matters.¹¹⁸ Having been editor of Cubberley's *The Improvement of Rural Schools* (1912), Suzzallo was aware that Cubberley was a busy man but that would probably consent to serving as a consultant for a week for a \$500 fee.¹¹⁹ Cubberley had published numerous books and articles about school administration, so his beliefs about how states and counties should administer their common schools were well established.

Although Cubberley did not meet with the School Code Commission and the Governor until the end of November 1920 (at the time of the Commission's release of their preliminary recommendations), the administrative recommendations mirror those that Cubberley presented in his book *State and County Educational Reorganization: The Revised Constitution and School Code of the State of Osceola* which had been published in 1918. In this volume, Cubberley created a constitution and laws relating to education for the hypothetical state of Osceola with the hopes that it would provide suggested reforms for members of educational code commissions and state legislators,¹²⁰ suggestions that were obviously taken up by Washington's School Code Commission. Cubberley also generally discounted women's appropriateness to serve in administrative positions. Stanford University, where he was employed as Dean of the School of Education, restricted women's enrollment to 25 percent of the student population, a policy in

¹¹⁸ Henry Suzzallo, Letter to Louis Hart, April 15, 1920, Hart School Code Commission. The letter from Suzzallo to Hart was headed with "Personal and Confidential" and appears to have been typed by Suzzallo himself as there are no typist initials (as there are on most of the other letters sent from his office). Nor has his title been typed under his signature.

¹¹⁹ Henry Suzzallo, Letter to Louis Hart, April 15, 1920, Hart School Code Commission.

¹²⁰ Ellwood P. Cubberley, *State and County Educational Reorganization: The Revised Constitution and School Code of the State of Osceola* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1918), vii, 4, 7.

place until his retirement in 1933.¹²¹ In his own writings, Cubberley made it clear that he felt men made for better teachers. In his book on rural education published in 1914, he wrote “[t]he earlier school-teachers were nearly all men, and they taught the community in which they worked, as well as the children. The teacher was commonly a student, thoughtful, judicious in his conduct, and devoted to his work. He may not have really known very much, judged by our present-day standards, but to the community he seemed very learned.”¹²² While Cubberley described the male rural schoolmaster from earlier positively, he felt it necessary to apologize for any intentional disrespect when he described the current female rural school teacher as “a mere slip of a girl, often almost too young to have formed as yet any conception of the problem of rural life and needs; that she knows little as to the nature of children or the technique of instruction; that her education is very limited and confined largely to the old traditional school subjects.”¹²³ In his opinion, the uneducated and untrained male schoolmaster provided a better education than the uneducated and untrained female schoolteacher. While the School Code Commission and their supporters did not overtly discount women’s abilities to have such positions, many of their less guarded comments provide insight into their notions that women, particularly those who had not had university training, were not qualified to hold high school principalships or superintendencies. This was despite the fact that women, including some of the administrative progressives' supporters, had a long history of being involved in educational leadership in the State of Washington.

Despite the governor’s stated opinion that only businessmen should serve on the commission because he wanted them to examine the administration and financing of the

¹²¹ Mariam K. Chamberlain, *Women in Academe: Progress and Prospects* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1991), 5.

¹²² Ellwood P. Cubberley, *Rural Life and Education: A Study of the Rural-School Problem as a Phase of the Rural-Life Problem* (Chicago: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914), 88.

¹²³ Cubberley, *Rural Life and Education* (1914), 283.

common schools, he ended up with a commission full of schoolmen and former schoolmen. Several were members of the Washington Education Association and involved in educational reforms that increased administrative control of the schools. One was a former candidate for State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Four of the six members of the commission had been schoolteachers. Two had served as county school superintendents, one as a city school superintendent. Two had personal ties to Cheney Normal School, and although the school code commission was to focus on the common schools, they had political interests in making sure that any changes in the school code would advance the prestige of the Normal schools in the state. Except for one individual who would not complete her term with the commission, all came from urban centers. (See Table 1, p. 61, for membership of the School Code Commission.) The School Code Commission began meeting the end of June 1920 and was ready to release their preliminary recommendations the following November.

According to its report, the commission believed that it was possible for a good rural school to exist in every school district in the state and that the “chief obstacles in the way of better rural schools are found in the present system of administration and taxation, and that great improvement may be made in this respect.”¹²⁴ The most significant recommendations made by the School Code Commission included the reorganization of the State Board of Education, the appointment of both the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the County School Superintendents, the creation of a county unit for district organization rather than the current school districts and an increase of state funding for common schools using a 30-10-15 formula¹²⁵. While the School Code Commission was supposed to be an independent agency,

¹²⁴ “Changes in State Schools Need,” *The Seattle Sunday Times*, August 29, 1920, 12.

¹²⁵ 30-10-15 means that \$30 dollars per school census child would come from the state, \$10 per school census child would come from the county and school districts would be allowed to collect up to 15 mills in property taxes without the vote of the people. The funding in 1921 was a 20-10-10 formula.

Table 1

**Members, and Allied Individuals, of the School Code Commission
as Appointed by Governor Louis Hart, June 1920**

Name	Qualification/Background
Committee Members	
William J. Sutton, Chairman	Businessman from Cheney, the second principal of Cheney Normal Schools, former State Senator (1912-1916), unsuccessful candidate for Governor in 1916, wins re-election to State Senate in November 1920
Alfred Lister	Brother of Governor Ernest Lister (whose death led to Hart becoming governor), former City Controller for city of Tacoma, current secretary and business manager for the Tacoma School Board
Albert S. Burrows	King County Superintendent of Schools, former candidate for State Superintendent of Public Instruction
William M. Kern	Superintendent of Walla Walla City Schools
Irene Reed [Mrs. Mark Reed]	Wife of Washington's Speaker of the House, former school board member, Shelton Public Schools, Mason County
Elizabeth Meyer [Kelley]	Former Adams County Superintendent of Schools, current treasurer (Adams County) recently elected secretary for the state G.O.P.; resigns and moves out of state after marriage in the summer of 1920.
De Facto Member	
Noah D. Showalter	President, Cheney Normal School, Member of 1907 School Code Commission
Outside Expert	
Ellwood P. Cubberley	Dean, School of Education, Stanford University; Leading authority on education with a particular interest in school administration and school finance

their recommendations paralleled those developed by the Washington Education Association's legislative committee headed by William Geiger, the superintendent of Tacoma Public Schools. In fact, at the end of October 1921, prior to release of information by the commission, Burrows provided Geiger, "[i]n accordance with my agreement ... a program of reorganization that may be attempted in the next Legislature" based on the recommendations of the commission.¹²⁶ Following the release of the Commission's preliminary recommendations in November, Ralph Swetman, president-elect of the WEA, would write H.L. Hopkins, the State Teachers' League executive secretary, gloating "[a]re you not rejoicing over the close similarity between the recommendations of the Governor's Code Commission and our own legislative program?"¹²⁷ A review of newspapers and periodicals from around the state finds that while the education community took great interest in the Commission's proceedings, much of the rest of the state was not actually very concerned about the issues they were examining particularly outside the urban areas.

Prior to Preston's election as the National Education Association's president in July of 1919, she and the Washington Education Association (WEA) had had a close working relationship when it came to working on legislative reforms. The Education Omnibus Bill passed during the 1919 legislative session was fostered by State Department of Education and Preston but had been written by the legislative committee of the WEA in consultation with superintendents, secretaries and school board members of school districts of the First, Second and Third class.¹²⁸ By August 1919, Burrows (later a member of the School Code Commission)

¹²⁶ A. S. Burrows, Letter to W. F. Geiger, October 23, 1920, Albert Selden Burrows Papers, 1905-1931, Washington State University, Manuscript, Archives and Special Collections [Pullman, WA], Cage 245; Hereafter referred to as the Burrows Papers.

¹²⁷ Letter to H. L. Hopkins from Ralph W. Swetman, November 30, 1920, WEA Records.

¹²⁸ Harvey P. Bittner. "School Measure Would Kill Small Districts and Graft." *The Spokane Daily Chronicle*, January 27, 1919, 5; "New Laws Make for Better Education," *The Seattle Daily Times*, March 24, 1919, 5.

helped form the King County Teachers League. A committee had begun meeting earlier in the spring and they presented a proposed constitution for approval at the King County Teacher Institute. The purpose of the league was to advocate for increased teacher professionalism and “a steady propaganda for the better understanding of the schools by the general public in order that all teachers may be insured such a wage as will maintain their freedom, efficiency and dignity as a professional people engaged in a high type of social service.”¹²⁹ Within months, teachers’ leagues had been established in the majority of the states and an executive director had been hired. Members of the State Teachers’ League, who also happened to be members of the WEA, met with Governor Hart prior to the special session trying to advocate their proposals for resolving teacher salary issues when Preston was out of state.

The School Code Commission was surprised by the amount of resistance these proposals met, particularly from rural residents. Drawing from widely accepted theory on educational administration, they believed “that the solution of the rural school problem lies in profiting by the experience of the older states and in providing that the rural schools shall have the same general plan of administration now prevailing in a large number of our older states and in all of our cities.”¹³⁰ By using the most current educational theory, the commission felt their plans fixed the “rural school problem” while they completely ignored rural school reforms that had been underway in the state of Washington for at least a decade. For many of the rural school constituencies, trying to understand not only the intent but also the facts of the Commission’s plan proved to be much like trying to catch quick silver.

Members of the School Code Commission believed once people understood the facts behind their plan, they would be fully accepting of the proposals. The Commission’s chairman,

¹²⁹ “County Teachers May Form League,” *The Post-Intelligencer* [Seattle, WA], August 28, 1919, 4.

¹³⁰ Washington State Code Commission, *Report of the Public School Administrative Code Commission of the State of Washington* (Olympia, WA: F. M. Lamborn, public printer, 1921), 11.

Senator W. J. Sutton, reported, “It is the hope of the commission to present the facts to the people of the state in order that they may see that good business judgment, as well as fairness to the children of the state, will demand a change from our present system.”¹³¹ Showalter felt that “[n]o farmer in Washington can afford not to support the report of the commission ... The farmer has paid his share of school taxes without complaining, yet he has been forced to accept schools of a very inferior sort for his children. Such a condition is not fair, and the code commission proposes that it shall no longer exist.”¹³² Despite the claims of Showalter and other commission supporters, the most vocal opponents to the Commission’s plans were the rural school constituencies. They flooded their legislators with letters proving “[t]hat the opposition developing against the proposed school code is formidable ... evidenced by the volume of protests being filed with members from taxpayers in the rural districts, urging that control of the schools as comprehended in the present system of electing directors and administering their school affairs be left undisturbed.”¹³³ In general, opposition fell into two categories; the first related to increased taxation and the second about the autocratic, undemocratic nature of the proposed changes for the county schools.

With respect to the School Code Commission’s recommendation related to increased tax collections by the state to support the schools, they appeared to have little understanding of the economic situations faced by individuals living in rural districts. They and other administrative progressives presented the proposed increases due to their concern about educational inequality resulting from the financial inequity faced by the rural schools in the state. Farmers and other rural residents, meanwhile, were concerned about farm production costs, availability of farm labor, the ability to obtain financing, good roads, and other issues that directly influenced their

¹³¹ “Rural School System Fails: Need Change,” *The Cheney Free Press*, September 3, 1920, 1.

¹³² “Farmers Entitled to Fair Profit,” *The Cheney Free Press*, December 24, 1920, 8.

¹³³ “School Code Arouses Interest,” *Kitsap County Herald*, February 11, 1921, 1.

ability to make a living and support their families. In 1920, farmers still needed to deal with labor shortages that had become acute during the war as young men left the farm to join the army. Labor shortages decreased farm production and increased the cost of living.¹³⁴ Rural residents had not been immune to the inflation brought on by the war. Often they had to mortgage their farms to cover increased production costs. The number of mortgaged farms in Washington increased nearly 50 percent from 1910 to 1920.¹³⁵ While attending an education conference in December 1920, Preston noted that the farmers in Washington would oppose any attempt to increase school or any other taxes. Many of the farmers in the wheat counties had mortgaged their crop for more than the present market price leading many to be in desperate financial situations.¹³⁶ The farmers of Whitman County met in the end of January 1921 to discuss how they could express their concerns about their increasing tax burden to the Legislature. Along with demanding that all appropriations be cut to the lowest level possible, with the goal of holding total state appropriations to the 1919 levels, they declared their unanimous opposition to the “new school code as proposed by the code commission on the ground that it [was] not democratic in that it would grant authority to levy tax[es] without the voice of the people.”¹³⁷ The proposed school taxes were just part of the entire tax burden farmers felt.

Rural residents were not the only ones in the state concerned about the proposed tax changes. Seattle residents also felt they were already being overly burdened by taxes. For the commission and its supporters to suggest that it was appropriate to collect more money from

¹³⁴ “Appeals to Cities for Farm Labor,” *The Seattle Sunday Times*, May 23, 1920, 28.

¹³⁵ Bureau of the Census (United States), *Fourteenth census of the United States. State compendium. Washington: statistics of population, occupations, agriculture, irrigation, drainage, manufactures, and mines and quarries for the state, counties, and cities* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1920), 55.

¹³⁶ “Better Teaching Staffs in Plan of Educators,” *The Seattle Sunday Times*, December 5, 1920, 32.

¹³⁷ “Farmers Say Taxes Must be Reduced,” *The Pullman Herald*, January 28, 1921, 1.

them and other wealthier communities than they would receive back was objectionable to many, particularly given that they would face additional taxes without additional benefits. Both the \$10 increase in state apportionment and the increasing millage (from 10 mills to 15 mills) that school districts could levy without voter approval caused consternation not only for individual taxpayers but also for other governmental officials. When the county assessors met at their annual conference in January of 1921, they “strongly opposed” the School Code Commission’s plan and agreed “that the burden of taxation has reached the limit and that every possible step should be taken to prevent any increase and to equalize the load as fairly as conditions will permit.”¹³⁸

Ellwood Cubberley, the Commission’s outside expert, in his 1905 volume on school finance, supported the shifting of financial resources from wealthier regions to poorer regions. Using data from Washington’s 1904 biennial report to support his claim that the collection and distribution of a state tax provided equalization of the financial burden for supporting a state’s schools, Cubberley described it as “merely the pooling effort on a large scale to secure a uniformly high standard of education throughout the state.”¹³⁹ In Cubberley’s opinion, “the increase in tax rate on the wealthier communities is small compared with the decrease of tax rate on the poorer communities” while improving the uniformity of educational standards across the state in ways not possible under a county or township system.¹⁴⁰ He took the attitude that “[w]hether or not a community pays more school tax to the state than it receives in return *is not a matter with which we have any concern*. This is a matter of educational and fiscal policy which

¹³⁸ “Assessors for Economy,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, January 18, 1921, 9.

¹³⁹ Ellwood P. Cubberley, *School Funds and Their Apportionment* (New York: Teachers College - Columbia University, 1905), 80-81.

¹⁴⁰ Cubberley, *School Funds and Their Apportionment*, 81.

was settled when the state decided that ‘the wealth of the state should help to educate the children of the state’ (emphasis added).”¹⁴¹

One of the ways that the School Code Commission wanted to facilitate the equalization of taxes and the tax burden was the creation of county units in place of the traditional school districts. The county unit had long been advocated as providing a solution to the problems of school supervision and school finance for small, rural school districts. The NEA’s Committee of Twelve on Rural Schools in 1897 defined the county unit as a school unit incorporating both city and rural schools as it was in the interest of both to be so connected. They felt that the adoption of the county unit, where a single board of directors and a superintendent were responsible for all the schools within a county, would solve many of the problems of the rural school. They saw the transfer of tax funds from the city to the rural sections as being appropriate given that the residents of the city benefited from not only the crops raised by those living in the rural sections but from the good roads that allowed them to move between urban centers. They also benefited from having rural children educated to the level available to city children.¹⁴²

Cubberley saw “[t]he county system of school organization ... [as] merely an attempt to apply to our educational affairs the same commonsense principles of business administration which have been put into practice, in whole or in part, in other departments of our governmental service, and which have been found to give such excellent results everywhere in the business world.”¹⁴³ During one interview regarding the adoption of the county unit, Preston asked rhetorically “[i]f the county school district is in practice as beneficial as in theory ... it would

¹⁴¹ Cubberley, *School Funds and Their Apportionment*, 153.

¹⁴² National Education Association of the United States, *Report of the Committee of Twelve on Rural Schools* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1897), 60-61.

¹⁴³ Ellwood P. Cubberley, *Rural Life and Education: A Study of the Rural School Problem as a Phase of the Rural Life Problem* (San Francisco: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1922), 191.

seem that the city districts logically should have been included.”¹⁴⁴ Despite the advantages educational theorists saw in the creation of a single county-wide school district including all of the schools within the county, the School Code Commission recognized that forcing First- and Second-class districts, including Seattle, Spokane and Tacoma, into a county-wide school district would create so much political pushback from city residents that the recommendation would never be enacted if it included the existing city districts.

According to Noah Showalter, president of the Cheney Normal School and de facto member of the School Code Commission, in order “[t]o insure ... efficient management [the commission] is asking for the county unit plan, and without its adoption the commission rightly feels that the increase in the state tax will serve no useful purpose, but, on the other hand, might lead to waste in some districts in the handling of school moneys.”¹⁴⁵ Along with the official members of the School Code Commission, Showalter felt that without changing the administrative structure of state’s education system any changes in funding through increased state taxes would not only fail to fix the problems found in the state’s rural schools but would lead to further economic waste. His statement in support of the county unit proposed by the School Code Commission seems incongruous, given that just four years earlier he had come out strongly against the county unit plan even though it was already gaining popularity among national educational leadership. At that time he went as far as to say: “We are growing toward a ‘greater democracy’ each year, and any plan proposed for the improvement of our educational system, which at the same time takes out of the hands of the people that which is most sacred to them – upon any pretext whatsoever – should at once be labeled as un-American. ... To propose that we (appointed agents) know better how to administer to the needs of the people than they

¹⁴⁴ “Opposes County Unit,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, January 19, 1921, 5

¹⁴⁵ “County Unit Plan Urged by Cheney Normal’s Head,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, January 10, 1921, 2.

know how to provide for their own well-being is nothing more than an old antiquated theory. It will work out in practice only when such agents are directly responsible to the people, and subject to their suggestion and direction.”¹⁴⁶ Showalter’s reputation of being nothing more than a politician, as Preston had discovered in 1912, continued as he appeared to change his opinion based on his perceived professional benefits. His published views in 1916 more closely matched the beliefs of rural school constituencies while those reported in 1920 mirrored those of the administrative progressives. During those four years, he had attended Stanford University, where Cubberley was Dean of the School of Education, during summer sessions for advanced training and it is likely that he shifted his thinking in order to gain political cachet among those he saw as having national educational leadership.

The Commission recommended that instead of the election of school directors for each individual district, there should be an election of a five member county board of education. This board was then to appoint a professional educator trained in educational administration as County Superintendent. This was already the same administrative pattern used in the city schools and the commission felt that its adoption would create efficiency and cost savings. Responding to the Commission’s request for an endorsement of its recommendations, J. F. Bobbitt, professor of education administration at the University of Chicago, sent two separate responses. The first statement supported their plans with “[i]ts major recommendations are without exception exactly in line with the best current practice in our most progressive states. Naturally, it therefore complies with the administrative theory of state school organization and administration.”¹⁴⁷

So as not to confuse the Commission’s campaign, Bobbitt sent his actual evaluation as a separate document. In this evaluation, he pointed out that the commission had not sufficiently

¹⁴⁶ Washington (State) Superintendent of Public Instruction [Josephine Corliss Preston], 23rd Biennial Report, 145-146.

¹⁴⁷ Washington State Code Commission, *Report of the Public School Administrative Code Commission*, 33.

defined the duties and responsibilities to be performed by the county and state superintendent leaving such duties as those currently required for the positions. This failure would not guarantee highly qualified superintendents because “[i]t is by specifying duties which can be performed only by highly trained and experienced men that one has a proper foundation for enforcing the selection of a high-grade personnel.”¹⁴⁸ Despite the Commission’s claim that individuals with better training would be appointed to the state and county superintendencies, they had failed to define the positions in a way that required such qualifications.

In 1920, Washington State had 2,540 school districts with 7,640 elected school directors who served on their boards. The proposed county unit plan would have eliminated 96 percent of them.¹⁴⁹ For a third of the counties, 13 in number, the Commission’s recommendations meant the consolidation of every school district in the county. Cubberley and other administrative progressives felt there was no business or educational reason for the election of such a large number of school directors. Not only was it unnecessary having so many school board directors, it was “one of the most serious blocks in the way of progressive educational action. To have a fully organized school board in every little school district in a county ... is wholly unnecessary from any business or educational point of view, and is more likely to prevent progressive action than to secure it.”¹⁵⁰ Elected school officers did not have to have educational expertise but they did have local expertise relative to the needs of their own schools. Administrative progressives argued for the reduction in the number of school districts because doing so allowed for coordination of effort, broader fiscal support and greater efficiency. It also allowed the schools to be overseen by properly trained educational administrators without the interference of too many

¹⁴⁸ John F. Bobbitt, statements of approval and suggestions, School Code Commission, Burrows Papers, no date; Washington State Code Commission, *Report of the Public School Administrative Code Commission*. 33.

¹⁴⁹ “Commission Working on Reorganization,” *The Cheney Free Press*, November 19, 1920, 1

¹⁵⁰ Cubberley. *Rural Life and Education* (1922), 186.

untrained school directors who felt they should have the authority to make school-related decisions.

The implication of the administrative progressives was that the common people were not capable to judge the matters that pertained to the education of their children. It also devalued the work of school directors who had “served on local school boards, giving their services freely and voluntarily in the development of our American common school system.”¹⁵¹ There was a fear among rural residents that the creation of a single countywide school district would result in their concerns about their local schools being ignored or decided months later by a board who did not have connections to the community. The editor of the *Leavenworth Echo* felt the adoption of the county unit “would cause such interest as is now taken in our schools to die out, for it would remove the management of these institutions from the hands and minds of those directly and earnestly interested in them to a board whose meetings would be held at the county seat, away from local contact, inaccessible or at least inconvenient of attendance.”¹⁵² Preston saw the move as being “inimical to the vitalizing and socializing of country life through community center organization” that she, through her office, had been developing since taking office in 1913.¹⁵³ These natural community center groupings had already positively affected the schools in communities where the centers were most active.

Not all educational professionals at the national level supported implementing the county unit in all states. Harold Foght, rural school and educational practice specialist for the Federal Bureau of Education had been a part of a survey team sent to Washington at the request of the Legislature to survey Washington’s educational institutions in 1916. The focus of the survey was the state’s institutions of higher education and the creation of a seamless movement of students

¹⁵¹ “Opposes County Unit,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, January 19, 1921, 5.

¹⁵² “Defeat It,” *The Leavenworth Echo*, February 28, 1921, 2.

¹⁵³ “Opposes County Unit.”

between levels.¹⁵⁴ In commenting on the appropriateness of the county unit for Washington, Foght said, “But even the county system of school administration . . . does not prove satisfactory under all conditions. In this state, the counties are generally too large and the population too scattered to warrant such a system. Okanogan County, for example, has an area equal to New Hampshire, and is more difficult to traverse. The population is comparatively small, living in a great measure under pioneer conditions. The same is true of large portions of the state. For such counties it is better to retain, for the time being at least, the local district organization as it now prevails, and to seek a remedy for the lack of general administration and supervision in some other way.”¹⁵⁵ He did go on to recommend the possibility of a permissive county unit structure where counties meeting a specific population size of over 6,000 census children well distributed throughout the county could opt to try the county unit. A similar plan had recently been adopted by Montana.

The School Code Commission had not just been concerned about the financial situation of the state’s schools. They also wanted to change how education policy was established and who was eligible to make that policy. Under their plan, the State Board of Education would become a board made up exclusively of lay people, appointed by the governor. While no additional qualifications were given, it is likely that the School Code Commission intended that they be men with business interests. No other qualifications for a position were defined, although the Commission’s plan was that this board would appoint the state superintendent. This appointed superintendent was to be charged with administering the state’s schools with even more authority than the current elected superintendent, having been granted additional legislative and judicial powers by the appointed State Board as defined in Senate Bill No. 10. The

¹⁵⁴ For more information on this survey, refer to Bureau of Education (United States), Samuel P. Capen, et. al., *A Survey of the Educational Institutions of the State of Washington* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1916).

¹⁵⁵ Washington (State) Superintendent of Public Instruction [Josephine Corliss Preston], *23rd Report*, 143.

appointment of lay members was ostensibly to allow lay people to have a say about state educational policy. In reality, the commission knew that lay members would have to rely on their appointed educational expert, the state superintendent of public instruction, thus allowing the superintendent to dictate state education policy.

It would have been necessary for the state's voters to approve a constitutional amendment to change the position of state superintendent of public instruction from an elective to an appointed office per the proposal made by the School Code Commission. They desired the change because "the most important educational position in the state is a matter of partisan politics and subject to all the vicissitudes of a political campaign."¹⁵⁶ Being able to run a successful partisan campaign had little relationship to being able to act as an educational leader for the state. Burrows went even further by explaining they wanted the office to become one of expert service so that "competent men and women may be placed at the head of the different departments which would come under the jurisdiction of the board."¹⁵⁷ As an elective office, it also meant that only someone living within the state not someone who might be better qualified but lived elsewhere could fill the position. The current low salary (\$3,000 annually) meant those who would be able to provide "high-class efficient service"¹⁵⁸ would not be interested in seeking the position because they could be paid more elsewhere. With the state superintendency becoming an appointed position, the State Board of Education could set the salary and qualifications for the position. Currently, no requirement relative to educational training existed for the position, although all of those who had served as state superintendent had worked as educators.

¹⁵⁶ Washington State Code Commission, *Report of the Public School Administrative Code Commission*, 18.

¹⁵⁷ "Discuss School Needs," *The Seattle Daily Times*, December 8, 1920, 2.

¹⁵⁸ Washington State Code Commission, *Report of the Public School Administrative Code Commission*, 19.

The call to remove politics from the selection of state and county superintendents through their appointment rather than election failed to recognize that the selection and retention of city superintendents was also fraught with politics. They also did not address the fact that allowing elected officials, like the governor, to appoint board members meant political cronies could be appointed without regard of qualifications. The vulnerability of school superintendents to political influences related to their career aspirations and influenced the amount of administrative risk relative to school reform they were willing to take. Those superintendents who wanted to remain in a community, becoming place-bound, relied “upon the loyalty of the local power structure and diverse community members. They therefore, perceive good public relations as a large part of their responsibilities and tend to take few risks that might alienate their community supporters.”¹⁵⁹ In order to keep an administrative position regardless of whether it was a city, county or rural one, it was important to be cognizant of the political landscape.

Many of the supporters of the Commission’s recommendations making the superintendencies appointed positions would refer to Cubberley’s work. He believed that the only reason the position continued to be elective was due to historic precedent and “the argument so often advanced that the appointment of a state school superintendent would be taking the schools away from the people represents a conclusion based upon incomplete evidence. What the people want is efficient service from their public servants.”¹⁶⁰ Voting for school directors and school superintendents created an inefficient system where “political expediency rather than any educational standard has been used in selecting candidates for the position.”¹⁶¹ The desire to take partisan politics out of the selection process was a common refrain for many, but in the case of

¹⁵⁹ William B. Thomas and Kevin J. Moran, “Reconsidering the Power of the Superintendent in the Progressive Period,” *American Educational Research Journal* 29, no. 1 (1992), 25.

¹⁶⁰ Ellwood Cubberley quoted in Mary A. Lucas “The School Code,” *The Colville Examiner*, February 26, 1921, 2.

¹⁶¹ Ellwood Cubberley quoted in Mary A. Lucas “The School Code.”

Washington State it is likely this was a politically acceptable way to prevent, or remove, individuals that commission members found to be unacceptable because of their lack of training as educational administrators. The implications of the Commission was that the current office holder was unqualified for the position and many in the state felt that this proposed change was actually an attempt to remove Josephine Preston from office.¹⁶²

Although the changes recommended regarding the selection of State Superintendent of Public Instruction focused on the current office holder, the changes the School Code Commission recommended relative to the selection of County School Superintendents reflected similar concerns found in national education publications. Inadequate supervision of the undertrained, under-performing rural schoolteacher was an accepted cause of the rural schools' failure according to the administrative progressives. The "opportunity for professional leadership, plus a commensurate salary, largely determine the *quality* of leadership a school system can hope to obtain."¹⁶³ Low salaries, short terms of service and inadequate professional preparation were common refrains for those seeking to reform supervision of rural schoolteachers. In addition to these complaints, Washington's School Code Commission felt that Washington "will have poor schools just as long as political availability rather than education, training and competency prevail in selecting ... county superintendents."¹⁶⁴ In a circular sent to the school directors and teachers of Skagit County, County Superintendent Mabel Graham made the following observation: "One objection we are told to the present system is that our county superintendents are politicians and are not a high standard educationally. Perhaps they are not all university graduates, but neither are the superintendents of the city schools. You will find

¹⁶² "Fight Brewing on School Code," *Port Townsend Leader*, January 13, 1921, 1; "Opposes County Unit."

¹⁶³ Albert S. Cook, "Centralizing Tendencies in Educational Administrations; the County as a Unit of Local Administration," *Educational Administration & Supervision*, Vol. 4 (Baltimore, MD: Warwick & York, Inc., 1918), 135.

¹⁶⁴ Washington State Code Commission, *Report of the Public School Administrative Code Commission*, 14.

politicians in every branch of school work, as well as in the legislature. Under our form of government every person should be a clever politician. There is nothing wrong about politics.”¹⁶⁵ While the commission was concerned about county superintendents’ lack of training in education administration, this was something not even required for city school superintendents.

The Commission’s goal was to professionalize the position of county superintendent, increasing educational requirements, length of term in office, and salaries, while reducing the number of teachers requiring supervision to allow for supervision that was more consistent. Graham, Skagit County School Superintendent, reminded her readers that “[w]e can’t make our rural schools copies of city schools and we don’t want to. City schools are the result of city conditions ... We can be too much graded as well as too little, and certainly a great deal of supervision weakens the initiative and independence of both pupils and teachers.”¹⁶⁶ While the School Code Commission wanted to create for the rural schools conditions that were available in the city schools, these ideas may not have been appropriate to the rural condition.

The term limitations faced by the state’s county school superintendents was a reason the commission gave that the position become appointive in order to allow county superintendents to carry out necessary education reforms that the consecutive two-year terms did not allow due to their short tenure. Commission members made a point to focus on the short term of service for county superintendents comparing these to the longer terms possible if these became appointive like those of city superintendents. They failed to acknowledge that, beginning in 1922, the term had been increased to four years instead of two years although there remained a two consecutive term limitation. From statehood, the average term of service for county school superintendents was 3.63 years. Despite the term limitation as defined by law, nine county superintendents

¹⁶⁵ Mabel Graham, “A Discussion of the Proposed Educational Code Known as Senate Bill No. 10” [no date], Burrows Papers.

¹⁶⁶ Mabel Graham, “A Discussion of the Proposed Educational Code,” Burrows Papers.

served continuously for six years and one for eight years. Eugene (E. C.) Bowersox of Chelan County served for a total of twelve years. Albert (A. S.) Burrows, of the School Code Commission, served as either county school superintendent or deputy county superintendent (an appointed position) for King County continuously beginning in 1904. He served as the elected county school superintendent for a total of 18 years, 10 of those prior to 1922. One county superintendent was elected to serve in two different counties for a total of six years of service, as well as serving as deputy superintendent for one of the counties (an appointed rather than elective position).¹⁶⁷ Washington's County School Superintendents, despite the two-year two-term limitation, had longer tenure in the position than did the average city superintendent even before the change to four-year terms beginning in 1922.

Commission members failed to disclose that the average length of tenure for city superintendents was actually less than four years. Of the cities studied by Frank Ballou in 1915, the average term for superintendents of First-class cities was only 3.56 years less than the average tenure for Washington's elected county superintendents. For cities of the Second class, they averaged only 2.62 years, and for those superintendents in Third class cities the average term was 1.91 years.¹⁶⁸ While these numbers only represent contractual terms, in comparing the seventy-three cities being studied, only twenty-nine percent had the same superintendent in 1913 as they did six years earlier in 1907.¹⁶⁹ Cities of the first class, despite their longer terms, only kept 25 percent of their superintendents for a minimum of five years. Educational experts examining the issue of city superintendencies felt that "[w]hen as many as one-third to one-half

¹⁶⁷ Tabulation of values was done by author using information from the Biennial Reports of the Territorial and State Superintendents of Public Instruction as well as records provided in Troth, *History and Development of Common School Legislation in Washington*.

¹⁶⁸ Frank W. Ballou, *The Appointment of Teachers in Cities: A Descriptive Critical and Constructive Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1915), 153-154.

¹⁶⁹ Ballou, *The Appointment of Teachers in Cities*, 164.

of the heads of our city schools change annually, the situation is serious enough to demand nation-wide concern and consideration.”¹⁷⁰ From 1909 until 1921, Washington State’s city school districts saw similar turnover of those observed nationally. Bellingham had three city superintendents, as well as Olympia, Spokane, Tacoma, and Yakima. Centralia and Everett had both had four superintendents in the twelve years and Auburn had had five. It was unusual for school district for a superintendent to serve over four years even in first-class districts.¹⁷¹ The 1919 change, effective in 1922, set the minimum term for county superintendents to four years with a possibility of eight continuous years if an individual were re-elected.

The issue of county superintendents’ inadequate salaries dated from before statehood. The state superintendent of public instruction in 1896 recognized this fact when he wrote, “Under our present law the pittance paid the superintendent in some of the counties can be called a salary only by courtesy.”¹⁷² Unlike other states where county superintendents’ salaries were locally controlled, the state legislature set the wages and other remunerations of all elected county officers, including county school superintendents, based on the population density of the county. Increasing county superintendents’ salaries was one of Preston’s priorities when she entered office in 1913.¹⁷³ Salary schedules included all elected county officers - to increase one officer’s salary meant the others had to be increased as well. It is likely the legislature felt that if they increased the salary for one member of the class they would have to increase salaries for all members of the class, as they did not want to deal with the political ramifications if they did so because it often meant tax increases.

¹⁷⁰ J. Howard Stoutemyer, “The Educational Qualifications and Tenure of the Teaching Population,” *The School Review: A Journal of Secondary Education* 25, no. 5 (1917), 271.

¹⁷¹ “Battle Over New School Code Now Seems Certain,” *Olympia Daily Recorder*, December 4, 1920, 1.

¹⁷² As quoted in Troth, *History and Development of Common School Legislation*, 121.

¹⁷³ “Pay School Heads More, Says Chief,” *The Spokesman-Review* (Spokane, WA), November 4, 1913, 10.

The salary issue became even more significant when inflation due to the war decreased buying power by over half. In 1919, Preston was able to get small increases approved by the legislature, but these increases represented nowhere near the buying power of salaries she proposed earlier. In 1920, salaries for county superintendents ranged from \$600 to \$3000 with an average of \$1,262.82. The salary changes approved by the legislature resulted in salaries ranging from \$900 to \$3600 with a state average of \$1790.08, beginning with the 1921-1922 school year.¹⁷⁴ These salaries would not change throughout the rest of the decade. At the same time, the superintendent of Seattle Public Schools received \$10,000 annually. Other superintendents of the cities of the first class received salaries of between \$5000 and \$6000. Neither the salaries of the state superintendent nor the county superintendents reflected the responsibilities nor the amount of work required. Despite this, the state legislature showed no desire to increase the pay they received.

The School Code Commission's plan of appointing rather than electing state and county superintendents and members of the State Board of Education would have had a detrimental effect relative to the number of women serving in administrative positions. Showalter, when asked what he thought about the recommendations would say, "I am very much in favor of selecting the county superintendent in the manner prescribed by the commission. It removes the office from politics and *makes it attractive for men* of exceptional ability. A county superintendency should be considered as responsible a position as a college presidency, and only men of college presidential caliber should be selected to fill such positions. Under the plan proposed by the commission, a longer tenure of office is assured" (emphasis added).¹⁷⁵ Although the School Code Commission's language was always presented in gender-neutral terms, the men

¹⁷⁴ Salary data comes from the Washington (State) Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Biennial Reports of the Superintendent of Public Instruction* (Olympia, WA: Public Printer).

¹⁷⁵ "Leading Educators Approve Report of Code Commission," *The Seattle Daily Times*, December 17, 1920, 2.

of the commission had to be aware that men were more likely to be appointed to administrative positions, while election to administrative positions greatly increased the odds that a woman would be elected. They also knew that the numbers of women being admitted to education administration programs were limited and that leading administrative progressives like Cubberley derided the intellectual and administrative capacities of female teachers and administrators.

Despite the fact that Senate Bill No. 10 failed to pass the Senate and the School Code Commission's proposals were not implemented, their proposals did have an effect on the election of women as county school superintendent. The election of men or women became much more polarized after 1920, with those counties traditionally electing men only electing men, and those counties traditionally electing men or women, electing women with significantly greater frequency. (See Figure 2) No such polarization was evidenced during election policy changes relative to election process and office holding, including the clarification of female office holding for school positions, the adoption of the open primary, and statewide woman suffrage. This polarization appears not to be related to a county's status as urban or rural. Two different urbanization indicators were examined. The first was to look at counties with at least one population center with a population greater than 15,000 persons in 1920. These counties were Grays Harbor, King, Pierce Snohomish, Spokane, Walla Walla, Whatcom and Yakima. Using population density, the vast majority of the state has a density well below 50 persons per square mile so that value was used to determine rate of urbanization with Clark(e), King, Kitsap, Pierce and Spokane counties above that level. Overall, 14 counties elected women exclusively during the ten years following the School Code Commission's recommendations. Eleven counties elected only men. Prior to 1920, only one county elected exclusively women and two counties

Figure 2
Percentage of Women as County Superintendents
Comparing 1889-1919 and 1920-1930

Adams
Asotin
Benton
Chelan
Clallam
Clarke
Columbia
Cowlitz
Douglas
Ferry
Franklin
Garfield
Grant
Grays Harbor
Island
Jefferson
King
Kitsap
Kittitas
Klickitat
Lewis
Lincoln
Mason
Okanogan
Pacific
Pend Oreille
Pierce
San Juan
Skagit
Skamania
Snohomish
Spokane
Stevens
Thurston
Wahkiakum
Walla Walla
Whatcom
Whitman
Yakima

elected exclusively men. The supporters of the Commission's recommendations repeatedly argued that elected county school superintendents were not as well qualified as those who would be appointed to the position, thus implying that women were not as qualified. Voters in some counties obviously disagreed with this assumption voting for the individual they felt was the most qualified and would do the best job in advocating for the rural schools in the county.

One of the most important things to rural communities was the right to make decision for themselves through democratic processes. Tied to the proposed changes of county school administration were questions around democracy and control. The perception of rural school patrons was that they would not only lose a voice in the selection of who would represent them, their concerns about local schools would be ignored once they lost their local school district. They had concerns about the responsiveness of school directors who may not live in the local community and, with board meetings being held at the county seat, the convenience of getting to meetings to voice concerns suddenly felt limited. School directors who lived in the same community knew what the community felt about the teacher, the school and related financial matters. These social connections were important for both the individuals and the community. Watkins found that rural residents, despite the perception that they were isolated, had a wealth of opportunities both formal and informal that allowed them to connect with their neighbors. The lack of significant class and racial division made it possible for rural communities in Washington to organize social groups, both formal and informal, in a way that may not have been available in more divided regions.¹⁷⁶ Preston's community center plans built upon this impetus as a way to improve the condition of rural schools.

Much of the debate about the administrative changes around county schools focused on the different interpretations of what it meant to live in a democracy. For Commission members,

¹⁷⁶ Watkins, *Rural Democracy*, 29.

the fact that school patrons continued to vote for those who would represent their interests allowed the intent of democracy to be intact. For Cubberley, the Commission's outside expert, "Democracy ought to mean good government and efficient administration, - the best and the most efficient that the taxes we pay can secure. This, however, does not of necessity mean that the people should vote for all, or even for any large number, of those who are to secure such government for them."¹⁷⁷ He also believed it was the university-trained individuals who were to be the leaders to provide the standards of democracy.¹⁷⁸ Burrows felt that democracy "is generally secured through truly representative, yet centralized responsibility."¹⁷⁹ The "equitable taxation, fair distribution and equal opportunity are the very essence of American democracy," according to Burrows, on another occasion adding, "it is claimed that the elective system is 'democracy's last line of defense,' a protest which is more sentimental than real."¹⁸⁰ Sutton in writing about the School Code Commission's mission after the defeat of Senate Bill # 10 said it had developed a plan "that will insure equitable taxation, fair distribution, efficient administration and equal educational opportunities. Such a plan, it believes, is the very essence of representative democracy and the foundation upon which all American institutions are built."¹⁸¹

The opposition that greeted their plans surprised the School Code Commission. They had hoped that the overwhelming support of national and state educational experts would convince the people of the state (and more importantly their legislators) to approve their proposals because they provided "the educational Magna Charta for the school children of the state ... If the report

¹⁷⁷ Ellwood P. Cubberley, *Rural life and Education; a Study of the Rural-School Problem as a Phase of the Rural-Life Problem* (New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1914), 320-321.

¹⁷⁸ Ellwood P. Cubberley, *An Introduction to the Study of Education and to Teaching*. (San Francisco: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), 367.

¹⁷⁹ "School Code Championed by Burrows as Big Reform," *The Seattle Daily Times*, January 26, 1921, 2.

¹⁸⁰ "School Code is Upheld," *The Seattle Daily Times*, February 1, 1921, 7.

¹⁸¹ "Code Going to Voters," *The Seattle Sunday Times*, March 6, 1921, 6.

of the commission should be scrapped through lack of understanding of it, it would reflect very unfavorably on the people of the state. Other states are watching us, and the disposition which the legislature makes of the report may influence public school education far beyond the confines of the state of Washington.”¹⁸² The Commission had failed to take into consideration that education takes place within a larger societal context. In particular, they failed to take into account the political dynamics of women school leaders as well as those of the rural constituencies. Rural school constituencies truly had no reason to adopt the Magna Charta proposed by the 1920 School Code Commission.

¹⁸² “The Report,” *The Cheney Free Press*, December 3, 1920, 4.

Chapter Five: The Defeat of the Administrative Progressives

It is said that history is written by the winners, but this is not always the case. The attempt of Washington State's administrative progressives to shape the state's education system following the "best" theory of the day failed because the theory did not match the reality of the state's rural constituencies. Despite this, they would attempt to legislate related reforms for nearly the next twenty years. Josephine Corliss Preston, the state's first female state superintendent of public instruction, worked hard to prevent their success. The conflict led to further polarization of the state's educational leadership. In the process, her value as an educational leader, recognized by state and national leaders, was discredited and discounted to such an extent her role in shaping Washington's education bureaucracy ended up being forgotten. Ultimately, the administrative progressives managed to remove her contributions from the historic record despite the fact she served during a time when Washington's education system ranked among the best in the nation, reflecting the positive effect of the state's increased role in education under her guidance.

The School Code Commission and its supporters knew that one of the strongest opponents to their plans was Josephine Corliss Preston, the state's popularly elected Superintendent of Public Instruction. Despite the fact she recognized the state's public schools needed improving, she did not support the Commission's recommendations. Preston called together a group of the state's educational leaders to discuss the proposed school code changes. This act caused consternation of both the WEA and the School Code Commission. Clark W. Hodge, the superintendent of Snohomish Public Schools informed the executive director of the State Teachers' League, "that SHE is calling together school men from over the state and organizing a movement in opposition to the code commission and WEA reports. ... I understand

she says all she wants is thirty days unmolested and she will be able to block the commission and all other opposition. She is promising that no 30-10 will be necessary if the legislature will only let her have her say in all matters. This will be a very strong argument with certain elements” (emphasis in original).¹⁸³ Sutton, the Commission’s chairman reported to Burrows that “[i]t is reported Mrs. Preston’s campaign against the work of our commission carried out through her committee of twelve she called to Olympia a week ago and others is working some headway. . . . Any plans you may make to effect [sic] her propaganda will be satisfactory to me or if you think I can assist shall be glad to do so.”¹⁸⁴ The administrative progressives were concerned about the influence Preston could have not only on other schoolmen but also on the legislature.

In order to discredit her efforts, the decision was made to begin a propaganda campaign against her. Commission members claimed to the press that she had taken no interest in the Commission’s mission and had begun issuing propaganda against the Commission’s proposals. A statement released by Sutton “charge[d] that ‘insidious political propaganda,’ in its various phases, has been and is being promulgated by Mrs. Josephine Corliss Preston . . . through every possible channel for the purpose of defeating the bill prepared by the public school administration code commission.”¹⁸⁵ These claims were broadcast nationally¹⁸⁶, in part to harm her national reputation, as Preston had served on various national NEA committees and had been the president of the National Education of Association in 1919.

Telegrams sent between committee members on January 3, 1921 indicate that the Commission’s final report was still not finished because they had not yet defined their financial

¹⁸³ C. W. Hodge, Letter to H. L. Hopkins, December 1, 1920, WEA Records.

¹⁸⁴ W. J. Sutton, Letter to A. S. Burrows, December 12, 1920, Burrows Papers.

¹⁸⁵ “Attacks School Head,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, January 14, 1921, 8.

¹⁸⁶ “Woman Educator Faces Grave Political Charge,” *The Ogden Standard-Examiner* [Ogden, UT,] January 15, 1921, 4; dateline Olympia [WA].

propositions and were recommending a meeting on Friday, January 7th.¹⁸⁷ The Commission's financial plan was released the evening of January 10. A press release on Tuesday, January 11th, stated: "It is claimed by many legislators that her criticisms were not based upon the merits of the revision which the commission proposing. Several important changes in the report have been made since the preliminary notice was published, and up to Tuesday morning Mrs. Preston was not aware of them."¹⁸⁸ It would have been hard for Preston to have been familiar with the updated plans when they had just been released. It was not until February 6th that the final report was ready for publication. The majority of the revisions made between the first part of December and the publication of the final report had little to do with the intent of the Commission's proposals. The only significant change was a modification of the definition of school districts exempt from the county unit to those that employed at least 25 teachers. This change was due to the complaints of made by superintendents of the larger consolidated school districts that were active members of the WEA leadership team.¹⁸⁹

Preston eventually responded to the claims she was spreading propaganda. Opponents claimed she had scattered 97,000 pieces of literature against the proposed school code across the state. In fact, she had published seven thousand copies of an extract from her biennial report

¹⁸⁷ A. S. Burrows, Telegram to W. J. Sutton, January 3, 1921; A. S. Burrows, Telegram to W. N. Kern, January 3, 1921; Burrows Papers.

¹⁸⁸ "School Code Biggest Issue of Legislature – Mrs. Preston Works for Defeat of Bill," *Cheney Free Press*, January 14, 1921, 1. In fact a review of the School Code Commission's Preliminary Report ("School Reform Urged" *The Seattle Sunday Times*, November 28, 1920, p. 32) and their final report (Washington State Code Commission, *Report of the Public School Administrative Code Commission*) found only three changes to the structure of the recommendations. One was that the recommended apportionment of school funds had been changed from being based on a two-third per attendance and one-third per teacher basis to a fifty percent per attendance and fifty percent per teacher. The second was that school districts of the first class were further defined as those districts employing a superintendent and more than twenty-five teachers. The third was a change going from an elected trustee for the sub-districts in a county to an appointed trustee. The final report hints at but does not include additional changes that were included in the final bill (Senate Bill No. 10) including English-only teaching in all public and private schools, length of school year, textbook adoption, establishment of parental schools, provisions for medical examinations, school building requirements and other school administration issues.

¹⁸⁹[Frank] Salisbury, Letter to A.S. Burrows, November 16, 1920; George Carver Howard, Letter to A. S. Burrows, November 17, 1920; F. S. Thompson, Letter to A. S. Burrows, November 17, 1920; F. S. Thompson, Letter to A. S. Burrows, November 20, 1920; H. C. Crumpacker, Letter to A. S. Burrows, January 25, 1921, Burrows Papers.

analyzing the bill on the belief that “[t]his department is responsible to the people of the state school administration and we are entitled to have some voice as to the means by which we are to work out our policies. We have been uncompromisingly opposed to substituting a system of appointive group control of the schools for local control.”¹⁹⁰ While she had been doing her job, “[e]xtension workers from the state Normal schools and even some of the presidents have neglected their legitimate business to travel about to urge the imposition of an unrepresentative and undemocratic school system.”¹⁹¹ All four presidents of the state’s Normal schools had agreed to give their united support to the recommendation of the school code commission.¹⁹² Two years later during the 1923 legislative session, Sutton would continue his campaign against Preston claiming “that [her] analysis of the school code and distribution of it to school directors two years ago was ‘political propaganda,’ constituting misfeasance in office and ‘she ought to be impeached.’”¹⁹³

When Senate Bill No.10, the bill that contained the School Code Commission’s recommendations, finally came to a vote in early March 1921, its supporters participated in a variety of political maneuvering in an attempt to get it passed. When the bill was introduced for its second reading, Sutton requested that the bill be read in its entirety before any action on amendments be considered. Senator Bishop of Jefferson County, leader of the opposition to the bill in the Senate did not object to this request but when Sutton indicated that he had an amendment to offer that had not been presented previously to committee, Bishop “declared that the code commission evidently had not perfected its work, but [was] still amending its own

¹⁹⁰ “Mrs. Preston Claims Right in Code Fight,” *Olympia Daily Recorder*, February 17, 1921, 5.

¹⁹¹ “Mrs. Preston Claims Right in Code Fight.”

¹⁹² “Educators Unite on Commission’s Report,” *The Cheney Free Press*, December 17, 1920, 1.

¹⁹³ Richard Hamilton, “Sutton is Lashed by Mrs. Preston,” *The Spokesman-Review* (Spokane, WA), February 2, 1923, 1.

measure.”¹⁹⁴ An amendment was made from the floor by Senator Rockwell to reduce the state’s portion of the financing portion of the Commission’s recommendations from \$30 dollars to \$20 per census child, the same rate that was currently in effect. In an attempt to pass the administrative portion of the Commission’s recommendations, Sutton, the chair of the commission and senator who had sponsored Senate Bill 10, voted in favor of this reduction.¹⁹⁵ Sutton and his colleagues appear also to have been involved in vote trading with “friends of the Hart school code... [coming] to friends of the racetrack and boxing bills and offered to “swap” votes in order to put the code into law.”¹⁹⁶ Wray, the sponsor of the boxing bill, was strongly opposed to the school code so refused to consider the proposition. Ryan originally voted for the bill, only to change his vote when it came for a re-vote. His shift in vote “compares with the statements of many of the senators that they did not understand the bill when it was introduced. Many of them in the argument today said they still were at sea on just what the bill stood for and how it would work out.”¹⁹⁷ The amended bill failed, by a single vote, to obtain a constitutional majority twice.

The vote had been, for the most part, along urban and rural lines with senators from urban areas overwhelmingly supporting the suggested reforms. Ryan, from Pierce County and the only Farmer-Labor senator, and O’Hara, from King County and the sole Democrat in the Senate, both voted against Senate Bill No. 10. Senator W. J. Sutton released a statement at the end of the legislative session that the commission felt that the reforms were so necessary that they were considering presenting an initiative for the next election cycle. Commission members and their

¹⁹⁴ ”School Code Up in Senate,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, February 24, 1921, 1.

¹⁹⁵ Frank P. Goss, “School Code in Senate Beaten By Close Vote,” *The Post-Intelligencer* [Seattle, WA], February 25, 1921, 1.

¹⁹⁶ Frank Walklin, “Senate Slaps Hart in Face on Labor Act,” *Seattle Union Record* [Tacoma Edition], March 5, 1921, 1.

¹⁹⁷ Frank Walklin, “Ryan, Farmer-Labor Man, Keeps Hart Machine From Capturing State Schools,” *Seattle Union Record*, March 4, 1921, 1.

supporters agreed that “the state [had] out grown the system of administration which was adopted as a makeshift to meet pioneer conditions and the educational leaders must co-operate with the businessmen in planning a system that will meet present-day requirements.”¹⁹⁸

The School Code Commission’s increase in statewide school taxes was not the only plan offered during the 1921 legislative session. Preston and her legislative allies agreed that there was great inequality in tax rates for school support, particularly within counties. In order to resolve this, they introduced a bill that only increased the size of the taxing unit from the school district to the county. This bill competed directly with Senate Bill No. 10, the one containing the financial recommendations proposed by the School Code Commission. Senate Bill No. 128 was introduced at the same time as Senate Bill No. 10. Its sponsors were Senator William Bishop of Chimacum (representing three rural counties in western Washington) and Senator Oliver Cornwell (representing three mostly rural counties in eastern Washington). Described as “an act providing for the support of maintenance of common schools in districts other than districts of the first class,” the bill would have changed the unit for determining tax valuations from the district level to a community or county unit without changing district boundaries or district taxing ability. Unlike for Senate Bill No. 10, the Senate’s Education Committee reported to the Senate that they unanimously recommended passage.¹⁹⁹ In the end, voting on Senate Bill No. 128 was delayed until after Senate Bill No. 10 had failed to pass. Senator Bishop had wanted to modify his proposal based on the discussions around Senate Bill No. 10, but was prevented from doing so through the parliamentary actions of Senator Sutton, chairman of the School Code Commission and sponsor of Senate Bill No. 10. Bishop was recognized as a leading opponent of

¹⁹⁸ “Insufficient Administration Cause of Greatest Waste,” *The National School Digest* 41, no. 5 (1922), 309.

¹⁹⁹ The Senate Education Committee had given a split recommendation regarding the passage of Senate Bill No. 10 with the majority of the committee, headed by Sutton, approved its passage but the committee but almost half of the committee recommended against passage. Washington (State) Legislature, Senate, *Senate Journal of the Seventeenth Legislature of the State of Washington* (Olympia, WA: Frank Lamborn, Public Printer, 1921), 265.

the School Code Commission's bill, with Sutton even declaring on the floor of the Senate that Bishop was actually Preston's representative.²⁰⁰ Given that the Senate was attempting to get as many bills dealt with in the waning days of the legislative session as possible, Senate Bill No. 128 ended up "forgotten" in the rush to complete other business.²⁰¹ Although there is no record indicating why the bill did not come to the floor for a vote, it was deliberately overlooked.

Six months after the School Code Commission's recommendations had been defeated in the legislature, the Board of Managers for the Washington State branch of the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations (WCM-PTA) unanimously agreed to initiate a measure increasing state support from \$20 per census child to \$30 per census child. Initiative Number 46 was identical to the 30-10-15 financing proposal included in Senate Bill No. 10 except it did not include any of the recommended administrative changes. The WEA had joined the WCM-PTA in their efforts going as far as to pay for Ralph Swetman, former WEA president and faculty member in Ellensburg State Normal School's extension department, to be a field worker focused solely on the campaign. He had also been an active proponent of the School Code Commission's recommendations.

Preston, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, along with Reuben Jones, Secretary to the Seattle School Board, and Stephen Penrose, President of Whitman College, were among the most prominent educators campaigning against it. Joining them were granges, local farm bureaus, and farmer unions. Preston opposed the funding change for a variety of reasons. A big part of her opposition came from the fact the results from the increased school revenues created from the 1920 legislation had not yet had time to fully take effect because the increased funds had only been collected for less than two years. It also included the fact that increasing

²⁰⁰ Frank P. Goss, "School Code in Senate Beaten By Close Vote," *The Post-Intelligencer* (Seattle, WA), February 25, 1921, 10.

²⁰¹ Washington (State) Legislature, Senate, *Senate Journal* (1921), 465.

state taxes did not guarantee lower local taxes, especially given the current economic crisis. Most importantly, she felt that no emergency in education existed requiring such a change.²⁰²

Initiative 46 was defeated in November 1922 receiving the approval of only 39 percent of the state's voters. In counties without incorporated communities larger than a total population of 1,500 persons, only 25 percent of voters supported the initiative.

The division among the educational leaders in Washington became even more vitriolic with the defeat of Initiative 46 in 1922. While the leadership of the WEA thought that the initiative had elevated the status of teachers and had proven the value of a unified professional organization, there is little evidence to support this contention. The WEA leadership expressed their displeasure that Preston had not supported their cause using veiled allusions to do so. Minnie Bean, Pierce County School Superintendent and President of the WEA felt the most valuable lesson learned from the campaign was “the fact that we know who are the friends of education and we know equally well who are the enemies. There need no longer be any doubt.”²⁰³ Burrows referred to Preston as the “nominal head of the state's education department.”²⁰⁴ Arthur Marsh, the executive secretary of the WEA, believed that “[s]chool equalization will triumph because it is right. Wrong is on the educational throne in Washington at present, but the God of right is still standing within the shadow.”²⁰⁵ Despite the belief by the WEA's leadership that Preston was an enemy of education during the 1924 primaries, Preston ran against C.E. Beach for the Republican ticket. He had run for state superintendent in 1912 and was the WEA's preferred candidate in 1924. She received 55 percent of the Republican vote in the primary. Even without the support of the leadership of the state's leading educational

²⁰² “Mrs. Preston Opposes 30-10 Plan,” *The Leavenworth Echo*, September 29, 1922, 1.

²⁰³ Minnie D. Bean, “Post-Election Reflections,” *Washington Education Journal* 2, no. 3 (1922), 84.

²⁰⁴ A. S. Burrows, “Washington's Greatest Educational Campaign Progress vs. Reaction,” *Washington Education Journal* 2, no. 3 (1922), 85.

²⁰⁵ Arthur L. Marsh, “Review and Reconnoiter,” *Washington Education Journal* 2, no. 3 (1922), 86.

organization, Preston received 63 percent of the votes gaining over 70 percent in several rural counties during the general election.

Attempts to find a compromise between the educational factions continued through the next five years. Preston recognized the debate as being national in scope and she felt the “present high standing of Washington’s state school system [was] the result of life-giving local interest and initiative insured under the present plan of school district organization.”²⁰⁶ Sutton recognized that any changes to the state’s school organization would have to come through legislative action and have the support of the people even though he continued to believe in the necessity of reforms leading to greater school centralization.²⁰⁷ Continuing lack of cooperation by the state’s Department of Education and the lack of a public outcry demanding changes led him to ask that any legislation related to the public schools consider the welfare of students first and taxpayers second rather than submitting legislation himself.²⁰⁸

During the 1927 legislative session, the Legislature passed a school equalization bill providing extra funds for rural schools that were not able to raise enough funds to support their local schools due to low tax valuations. Originally incorporated in Senate Bill No. 10, the bill that contained the School Code Commission’s recommendations, an equalization fund became part of the opposition’s campaign against Initiative 46, the 30-10 plan. Although the Wilmer Equalization Bill passed the Legislature, Governor Roland Hartley vetoed it along with other measures that increased taxes. According to Preston, a large part the veto of this particular bill resulted from Hartley’s desire to reorganize the entire school system in a way to bring general

²⁰⁶ “Mrs. Preston Submits Report – Opposes School Centralization,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, January 18, 1925, 10.

²⁰⁷ Sutton continued to serve as state Senator from the area of Spokane County containing Cheney Normal School. Both he and his wife had served in administrative roles at the normal school previously and he had been responsible for the school receiving funding to rebuild after a fire in the late 1890s. He continued to maintain strong ties with the school, and often sought legislation that benefited the normal school.

²⁰⁸ “School Taxes Debated,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, January 18, 1925, 10.

relief to school issues without raising taxes.²⁰⁹ Hartley proposed the elimination of the office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the creation of a nine member State Board of Education, appointed by the governor, whose members would have control of school issues from Kindergarten through the university levels. Members of the education community who opposed Preston's vision of continuing local control of schools through the creation of more centralized school administration opposed Hartley's proposal although it looked very similar to their own reform proposals relative to the State Department of Education.

Preston lost to Noah Showalter in her run for a fifth term in 1928. Branded as an opponent to educational progress by WEA leadership, those opposed to her administration utilized claims of taking money to put propaganda into the schools thus "proving" she ethically was unqualified to continue in office. Sutton had been accusing her of spreading propaganda since 1920, but "evidence" of her being involved in putting propaganda in the schools in an attempt to influence the thinking of school children about public ownership of utilities allowed her opponents to use it as a tool to elect their candidate. Preston had received payment for editing materials ultimately provided to schools as reference materials for an essay contest in 1923. When the issue was brought to the attention of the FCC, she was found to have not done anything wrong, but this did not matter to her opponents.

The issue that would become significant in 1928 first arose in 1924 when Homer T. Bone, an advocate of public ownership of power utilities, brought to the attention of Superintendent Burrows that the "power trust" was trying to influence school children through reference materials provided for students participating in an essay contest sponsored by the Northwest Electric Light & Power Association. Bone had discovered that in the reference list of more than 200 books and magazines provided to the students, two paragraphs seemed to have

²⁰⁹ "Mrs. Preston Denounces Veto of School Bill," *The Seattle Daily Times*, March 23, 1927, 5.

written by opponents of public utility ownership. Burrows promptly accused Preston of being part of a propaganda plot and declared that King County students would not be participating in the contest. He also called for Preston not to use her office to support such essay contests. Previously, her office had sent materials for contests sponsored by the National Highway Safety Board, the American Legion, The W. C. T. U. and the American Chemical Society.²¹⁰

Noah Showalter, former principal of Cheney Normal School and a *de facto* member of the 1920 School Code Commission, was overwhelmingly elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction in September 1928. There were no Democratic opponents in the race. Preston's opponents saw this as a referendum on their vision of public school reform. Both Showalter and Sutton submitted bills to the Senate during the 1929 legislative session. The 1929 Showalter Bill incorporated significant portions of the reforms recommended by the 1920 School Code Commission. Showalter did move away from the 30-10 financing plan that had been resoundingly defeated in 1922 by using a funding formula that specified specific values to be paid to school districts per student per day's attendance. As had happened when proposals similar to those made by the 1920 School Code Commission in the previous four legislative sessions, the Senate's Committee on Education returned a divided recommendation, with the majority recommending that the Senate pass the Showalter Bill with an amendment regarding wording.²¹¹

Showalter and Sutton insisted that the Showalter Bill pass exactly as it was written. They had waited nearly ten years to get their education agenda passed and subsequently found every objection as being due to a sinister influence attempting to "submarine" the bill. These

²¹⁰ "See Propaganda Plot in Schools," *The Twice-a-Week Spokesman-Review* [Spokane, WA], February 24, 1924, 13.

²¹¹ Washington (State). Legislature, Senate, Senate Journal of the 21st Legislature of the State of Washington (Olympia, WA: State Printer, 1929), 365-366.

educational leaders had used similar terms in describing those who were opposed to their education plans over the previous decade, claiming that those opposed to them were spreading propaganda. Editorialists recognized that “[a]lthough our education leaders are not always in agreement among themselves they often bristle with resentment at criticism or even query of their conclusions by persons outside their professional circle.”²¹² Lota King Wiley, Grays Harbor County superintendent of schools, accused proponents of the Showalter Bill of using “steam roller” tactics in order to obtain the endorsement of the county school superintendents during their convention. At the end of the convention, a member of the audience moved that the convention endorse the bill. Although a large number of the audience voted no, the man turned to the secretary and declared, “There are no noes.”²¹³

While the Senate passed the Showalter Bill easily, opponents in the house worked hard to modify or defeat the elements they found most offensive. The opposition was an interesting amalgamation of rural counties and the Washington State Grange along with the Seattle Chamber of Commerce and members of the Seattle School Board. Supporters of the Showalter Bill called for the House to be a Committee of the Whole in order to allow Showalter to clarify issues that had arisen during Senate debates. Doing so opened opportunities for opponents to press their concerns. After a variety of parliamentary maneuvers, when the vote was finally called, the bill failed to pass because it did not receive the number of votes required for a constitutional majority with 48 house members voting in favor of the bill and 46 voting against it. It was reported that one of those representatives voted yes, than changed his vote with the

²¹² “No Grave Emergency Calls,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, February 18, 1929, 6.

²¹³ “‘Steam Roller’ Tactics Laid to Showalter’s Supporters,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, February 15, 1929, 36.

hope that the issue would be reconsidered, but the official record does not reflect this attempt to manipulate the parliamentary procedures.²¹⁴

Opponents of the Showalter Bill were not just concerned about the intricacies regarding administration and financing. There were concerns about the true intentions of the proponents regarding their ultimate desire to control the state's schools. Among those presenting concerns was Dr. C. W. Sharples, a member of the Seattle School Board, who included in his testimony that "I fear there is something else behind this. I fear there are some interests trying to get hold of our school affairs."²¹⁵ Representative William Phelps Totten had similar sentiments when he requested a Question of Personal Privilege in order to express his concerns about the proponents' actual intentions. Totten had attempted to amend the Showalter Bill so that the proposed county education board would not be so heavily biased toward residents of Seattle. Part of his personal statement read into the record included that "[t]he sponsors of the bill very brusquely refused to consider my amendment . . . and declined to answer my position. I must therefore, since they so decline, question the sincerity, purpose and reasons advanced by the authors."²¹⁶ Showalter and Sutton were so intent in getting their agenda passed so that the individuals *they* felt were trained appropriately would oversee the state's schools; they were not willing to address the concerns of others subsequently losing potential supporters.

Despite over a decade of effort, members of the School Code Commission and their supporters failed to implement their plans creating a more centralized school system with the state assuming the greatest portion of the financial burden. In Washington State, the administrative progressives who desired to control the educational conversation regarding

²¹⁴ "Educators' Opposition Turns Tide," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, March 13, 1929, 2; Washington (State) Legislature. House. Journal of the 21st Legislature of the State of Washington (Olympia, WA: State Printer, 1929), 696-705.

²¹⁵ "Educators' Opposition Turns Tide." 1.

²¹⁶ *House Journal* (1929), 701.

financing, supervision and administration of the state's schools failed to convince not only their fellow educators but also other agents interested in the control and financing of the state's schools. Administrative progressives may have gained the control of the nation's public schools but, in the case of Washington, they failed to gain control of the state system that oversaw those schools.

Preston found herself outside of the inner circle of the state's administrative progressives. As a woman who believed in the value of local citizens making local decisions, she had supported rural school constituencies making educational decisions that were best for their communities. Because of this, her opponents made sure to write her out of the educational record. After Preston's defeat, she spent a few years as an educational lecturer returning to teaching in the graded school where she lived in 1935. The official history of the WEA claims that Burrows (of the School Code Commission) had been the one responsible for calling the Educational Congress during the special session in May of 1920. Pisapia, in his work on female educational leaders' roles in American political development, examined how Pearl Wanamaker, Washington State's Superintendent of Public Instruction from 1940-1956, fostered the reorganization of Washington State's school districts during the 1940s.²¹⁷ Interestingly, Wanamaker's plan looked very similar to the plan for school district consolidation proposed by Preston in legislation submitted in 1923 and was incorporated into a compromise bill that failed to pass the house, a failure Sutton (of the School Code Commission) claimed was the result of Preston's comments although she had indicated she supported the compromise bill. Wanamaker had served as a rural schoolteacher and county school superintendent during Preston's terms in office.

²¹⁷ Pisapia, *Public Education and the Role of Women in American Political Development*, 227-294.

The administrative progressives' campaign for administrative reorganization and school financing reforms in the early 1920s in Washington mirrored similar campaigns across the nation by educational professionals hoping to shape various states' educational systems. An overview of these campaigns including the shift of various states' courts perceptions regarding the states' role in public school education is articulately argued in Steffes' *School, Society, & State*. This case extends her work by adding a narrative from the western states. These are overlooked as Steffes focused on Southern, New England and selected Midwestern states for her evidence. By failing to include a western voice, particularly those states that had large contingents of women as elected educational leaders, an understanding of the role women as educational leaders may have played in shaping state educational systems is limited. It was this type of limitation that led researchers like Jackie Blount and Kathleen Weiler to focus on women as educational leaders in the 1980s. While this case study highlights Preston's role in the campaign against the School Code Commission and the administrative progressives, the role of female rural schoolteachers should not be overlooked as they, like rural schoolmasters before them, acted as the educational expert for their communities.

The long-term results of the School Code Commission's 1920 proposals were limited. The office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction became non-partisan in 1938 with Washington continuing to be only one of fourteen states that still elect the state superintendent. The position of county superintendent was eliminated with creation of Educational Service Districts in 1970. School districts were consolidated beginning in 1941 under Pearl A. Wanamaker, another woman elected to the office. The issue of equitable school financing continues to be an issue with Washington's Supreme Court declaring the state's funding system unconstitutional in 1974 in *Seattle School District No. 1 v. State*, 585 P.2d 71. In January 2012,

the state Supreme Court affirmed a lower court decision that the state had violated, again, its constitutional obligation to fund adequately education in *McCleary v. State*. Rural schools continue to have issues around resources including appropriately trained and paid teachers.²¹⁸ The educational theories developed by the progressive era administrative progressives had not convinced Washington's rural school constituencies to make dramatic changes in their school organization. While the administrative progressive may have been the experts in education, like the shoemaker was an expert in shoemaking, rural school constituencies recognized that the "shoes" the administrative progressives were making "pinched."²¹⁹

²¹⁸ "Rural teachers deserve equal pay," *The Seattle Times*, June 4, 2012, sec. A11.

²¹⁹ This reference comes from a quote used by Josephine Corliss Preston in her opposition to the recommendations of the School Code Commission. "[A] shoemaker may be an expert in the making of shoes, but the wearer is the only man who can tell whether the shoe pinches." (Washington (State) Superintendent of Public Instruction [Josephine Corliss Preston], 25th Biennial Report, 15.

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