

Legislative History for Connecticut Act

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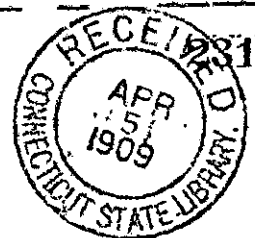
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JOINT
STANDING
COMMITTEE
HEARINGS

EDUCATION

CONN.
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY
1909



B. V. B.

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION.

Wednesday, March 31, 1909.

Senator Luther, Chairman,

Mr. Brinsmade, House Chairman, Entire Committee present.

Mr. Bliss, Clerk.

B. B. #68, Concerning Town Management of Public Schools.

Senator Luther.

Is there anyone to speak on this Bill?

James M. Payne, Killingly.

This bill comes before you with the unanimous endorsement of the Association of School Officers of the State. The Superintendents of the State did not feel that it was proper for them to agitate in relation to any change of the conditions under which they were employed, and for that reason did not act upon the matter. I believe in addition to this that there is a consensus of opinion of those who have studied educational matters in this State that something of this kind is fundamental. My own opinion is based on the twelve years' experience I have had as school officer. During that time the town has changed from the district to the town system, and it has been my privilege to observe the rules of both systems in that and neighboring towns. Now under the district system as you all know, there are two sets of officers, each so situated that they may obstruct the policy of the other, and each situated so that they are able to disclaim responsibility for poor

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results. There will never be absolute harmony between the two sets of officers and to make it harder these sets are divided into another, and in the actual working out of the system it results in obstruction and is detrimental to the best interests of the schools. For one thing, there is no question of vesting more authority in the State Board of Education. It is certainly a subject of great controversy, and I wish to state that it does not enter into this matter at all. It does not take away from the town any working out of the problems in their own way. It simply provides for a way in which each town for itself shall work out its own problems. It does not invest any more power in the State Board; it does help them in that it established one set of officers for working out their problems..

Mr. Comstock, Danbury.

I am quite well acquainted with the special education commission which has been appointed, and also with the arguments that have been presented by the Committee through the Connecticut School Document. I wish to state some things that came under my observation in a town that has had town management for 12 years, and also my observations as acting school visitor, and committeeman for the same number of years. I wish to state that the funds of the little town of Wilton which I represent have been largely wasted and through the fact that there has been this bad management that has been referred to. Now in the largest district, with one exception, there has been so little interest in the work of that school district that in one instance

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there was no meeting at all, and the very next year there was no meeting, and the board of school visitors was obliged to appoint the committee. Now I think the town of Wilton has a good many bright people, but there seems to be paying out money and not getting the results. I did all I could last year to arouse interest in that place, and I found at the last meeting there were only four people present and it needed five to make a quorum, and I went and telephoned and induced an old man to come so we could have a quorum. Now I think in many respects they have done well; there have been some districts at one time under a good management, and have a committee that will take interest, and they will go on for a while and succeed pretty well, but the next committee will undo all the good that has been done. Now with regard to the experience of our town so far as expense goes; I want to say this about that, and it is that I notice that the general average based upon the average attendance, the average cost per scholar is \$21.00, but in one or two districts where there was less than eight in attendance the cost amounted to \$44.00 to \$50.00 for each scholar. Now one of these schools was closed up for about half a day every few days because they thought it was hard to keep the school open for one or two scholars. One of the school officers went there to visit the school and he found the school closed up, and I think that has been done there so often that the town of Wilton has lost a large part of the funds that have been spent for schools. I think they have opposed this town management in some cases because they felt that the cost

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would be greater if the change was made. It is the great bugbear. We have come near having town management once or twice. I hope this law will pass and the whole thing be wiped out. I think this system has proven to be so efficient that it is about time the state took hold of the matter and stopped the district system which has clearly proven to be inefficient. I think it about time that those who are suffering from bad management should have some help. I want to say that school supervision would be better under town management than under district management. I was talking with one teacher who told me that she did not believe anybody knew what she was doing, and that she did not think anybody cared. She said it was discouraging and did not tend to make a teacher take interest in her school. I most heartily hope that this bill be passed.

Mr. G. M. Hall, New Milford.

I am surprised because I have not been notified that I was to say anything, and I will confine myself to a very brief word based on certain features, and I know that some of the gentlemen here are loaded with statistics which will be valuable to you, but a little fact is worth a great deal of theory. I have a great deal of personal knowledge of about 60 towns, and a pretty accurate knowledge of school conditions in 20 other towns. I will say that it is invariably that the good schools are found in towns under town management, and the poor schools are found in the towns under district management. I do not see how the Committee here can see it in any other way. Now I will admit that there can be poor schools under town management, but it is rarely that there can be good schools under district management. The division of

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authority and the scattering of money, and the fact that the committee have not only no knowledge but have no care of such matters but many times are not competent to take care of the work, makes it work out to a disadvantage. It was only two years ago that a committeeman came to me and asked me to write a notice; he could neither read nor write. I have known that to be the case in five districts, where the committee could neither read nor write, but they were appointed because it was their turn to be appointed. I have known committees who have been elected and who have hired themselves; some have hired relatives, and they were elected for that purpose alone.

Mr. Kingsley, ^{burg} Coventry, Conn.

Probably this is the last time I shall get at this committee so I want to make the most of it. The other day at your hearing a gentleman said that the advocates of the matter before you at that time were connected with certain school trusts and systems, etc., suggesting that possibly they were persons who ~~would~~ receive large salaries, and I feel somewhat as the country editor did when the burglar broke into his house and demanded his money, and he said in a pleased tone, "Hold on a minute until I strike a light, and we will hunt for it together and go halves." A few have spoken of their experience, so you will pardon me if I say it, you may think I am older than I am, but I can look back over 25 years as a member of the school board of our town mostly under the district management. Recently we voted town management. Now I will call attention to one feature where the

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town management has the advantage over the district system. It is in regard to the better management and equipment of the schools, better school houses, better conditions all around. Now this is not wholly owing to indifference or to parsimony, but to the difficulty under the district system of raising money. Now some times we need money for repairs and these repairs do not cost enough to warrant a laying of a tax; I refer to small districts where perhaps \$75.00 is wanted for repairs, and it is a question whether the committee will pay it and wait for the district to pay him, or borrow it, or go without the repairs. Now many times they put off making these repairs because the expense and the work in getting this small amount is so difficult that they let it go. Then again the committee this year thinks to himself that the next fellow will do the work, so he defers it until after his term has expired, and so it goes. In town management you would have a board that if they do not fix the school house at least you can tell them so and get after them until it is done. I want to say in closing just this word because as I said I won't have another chance at you--and I know you feel relieved to hear that, but I want to say that I heartily recommend that this bill be passed and that the town management will be the rule not the exception in this state.

Professor Judd, Yale University.

I want to talk on two topics on the brief Mr. Cheney has given us, namely--"E" and "F". I am especially glad to be able to talk on these two topics today, as I was unable to be here when the bills were heard on the Certification of Teachers. I

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fell into the hands of a physician and he made me stay with him, so I could not come here at that time, as I greatly wished to. In the first place, to substantiate the statement under "E"---"It makes supervision less efficient."-- In towns of cities of less than 10,000 inhabitants under town management there is supervision for 61 percent of the children, whereas under district management in towns of the same size, there is supervision for only 45 percent of the children. To substantiate the statement made under "F"---"It employs a lower grade of teachers measured by their relative wages, and also by their certificates of preparation"--- Again comparing those towns of less than 10,000 inhabitants under town management with those under district management we find that the average wage for male teachers is \$86.00 under town management where it is only \$81.00 under district management. Women teachers the average under town management is \$40.00 and under district management \$37.00. Now with reference to the matter of the certification of these teachers, and the preparation of their work, I will refer to one statement; let us consider the number of Normal School graduates. The number under town management is 51 percent and the number under district management is 36 percent. The figures given represent the facts as they can be gathered statistically from this State. I will compare this State with other states in the Union. In the New England States Connecticut must be classified with Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine, and of these four states we can make the assertion that in no other states in the United States is supervision less in quantity or less in degree of efficiency than in these four states. We are deficient in supervision as this shows because there is a lack of solidarity.

We have an abundant number of school officers but they are not technically trained. They are simply appointed under the system of diversified officialism without technical training. The same statement holds with regard to teachers. With regard to certification of teachers in this State the condition is deplorable and there is no excuse. We have the ~~xxxxxxxsystem~~ loosest system of certification of teachers than anywhere in the United States except those states I have mentioned. New Hampshire is far advanced toward Connecticut in its organization, and if you will go outside of New England you will see the certification system is more advanced than in this State. If you can get away from ~~the~~ a small unit for the employment and judgement of teachers, if you have someone that is technically trained, we shall have an improvement in the line of certification of teachers. I should advocate most heartily from the experience I have had in Connecticut towns, the development of a central authority in every place where school systems are involved, and the employment of technically trained men to manage the schools, should advocate technical training and some sort of solidarity and centralization that will make it better in all respects.

Miss. Cummings.

The thoughts I wanted to present were not directly along this line. I want to offer a few facts in regard to one town and one county, town and county typical of the whole State. In this one town after town management of 9 years an investigation was made and the results were made public in the town and I have never heard them as being changed. Before town management, of twenty-six teachers, or fully one-half, were poor, many having come

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directly from the district school. After 9 years of town management all but two were graduates of a high school and had Normal training, all except the two mentioned, and they were very successful teachers. Wilful injury to school property was almost unknown; new text books had been substituted for antiquated ones. A successful course of study had been put in, whereas under the district management almost no course of study had been furnished. There were two more weeks added to the school year. Under district management there was practically no material for the teachers to work with; repairs had been delayed or omitted, and in one case the children actually had to sit under umbrellas on a rainy day because the roof leaked so badly. Books, maps, supplementary reading were unknown, and under town management all these were provided. Now in regard to one county it was wished to grade the county, using as a basis, "poor, Medium and Best." Now the towns having the best schools were at the top, medium next and poor at the bottom. Opposite these towns were placed the letters "T" or "D" showing the system of management for each town. There were 29 towns, and it was very striking to note that the towns with "T" opposite them were at the top of the list and those with "D" were at the bottom. I think that will show you how the two systems work out in regard to good schools.

Mr. -----Colchester, Conn.

Like Mr. Kingsbury I want to speak for the small country town. I have been a member of the board of school visitors in my town and we have done all that the board could do to raise the

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standard of teaching by requiring state certificates, by requiring the school houses to be repaired and making a course of study. Fifteen years ago the town was a flourishing town with a good manufacturing concern. It fell into the hands of a Trust and the Trust shut it down and the people had to move away. After that time there was a colony of Hebrews that came and bought the farms and while the grand list has been lowered the number of children has increased. I find that out of 1416 children, 356 were born in the United States, but of them 164 were the children of parents of which only one of the parents was born in this Country. There were 207 of those children born in Russia. It means that practically 55 percent of the parents were born in a foreign country and over 50 percent were born in Russia, and in a graded school where there were 75 children the parents of 68 percent of them were born in Russia. Now these people are anxious that their children be educated, but only a part of the parents can speak English and almost none of them can read or write English, and there are only a few families left where the fathers could act as district committee. We had a meeting last week and we came to the conclusion that we wanted town management so that the schools would be run as they should be run.

Mr. Roberts, Huntington.

I will only say that I approve of the town management of schools, and if it is adopted the improvement in the whole school system will more than outweigh the increased cost. I am heartily in favor of this bill.

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Mr. Sanford, Winchester.

I was born and brought up under the district system, I taught school under the district system, and have been a school visitor under the district system, and I did not thoroughly understand it until I got to be a school visitor, and I found then that the district system was a conglomeration of absurdities or so it seemed to me. Now a crisis came last Spring. I did not live in the district in which the important question arose, but I was interested and I was just foolish enough to go to the meeting as an outsider. They asked me my opinion and they got it. I told them if they would commence a campaign of education in this town I would guarantee that the next October they would get a vote for town management. They did not think it could be done. I found that every member of the school board was in favor of it, and with such a unit for town management it was not hard. I think the conditions in Winchester have given us a first-class school system under town management.

Mr. Hubbard, Middletown.

I have nothing to say except to add my testimony to what has been given here in favor of town management. I believe that district management is a great obstacle in the way of improving our schools, and I think that unless this is removed that all the other measures which have been spoken of here will none of them avail so long as this system of district management exists. Now I greatly regret to say that this does not include a city or borough for I think they need town management just as much as any place.

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I suppose the exception was made so as to avoid running against Hartford. I believe that Hartford wants town management as much as any town in the State. We have schools that have eight scholars, others have twelve, and we have schools that might be brought together and in a measure graded. I heartily endorse this bill and I have this to say that from my knowledge and experience I think it is a great barrier to progress not to have town management.

Mr. Payne, Killingly.

Mr. Chairman, so far as the Association which I represent is concerned, the hearing is closed.

Mr. F. O. Davis, Pomfret.

There has been apologies made for bringing up sections, but I want to talk about my town. Now the conditions in Pomfret are anything but pleasant under the district system. We hold our meetings, and it is very rarely--unless a child has been whipped or something like that comes up to bring out a crowd-- it is as I said before very rarely have anyone at our meetings. If there is any trouble then they all come out to the meeting so some one of them can be hired and "fire" the teacher who has gone against their own wishes. There was a case lately where a child had been punished and at the meeting they had about that time there was the largest crowd we had in years, in fact in 28 years, and they elected a committeeman who was going to hire a teacher that would not punish that particular child. The child that was punished richly deserved it, but that made no difference with the parents.

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Then the teachers have to board with the committeeman and she was in one case brought to task because she did not favor the children in that family, and it went on so that she had to leave the house because they treated her shamefully. She is boarding now at another place, but there are rumors that this particular teacher is not going to be hired next year. Now all this would be changed under the town system. I certainly hope that this measure will pass and that consolidation in Pomfret will be a certainty.

Mr. Strong, Arsenal School.

I am very much in favor of this bill. I feel that the effectiveness of supervision in towns would be very greatly increased under this town management. I have a friend who is a superintendent in a town under district management and most of his time is spent in going around and getting curtains for one school, seeing that another has a step repaired, and so forth, so his time is spent in that way and not in active supervision. **IF** the schools were under the town system of management he would be able to give his time to better advantage than chasing around looking after those little things. I am certainly in favor of this bill.

Mr. Brown, Pomfret.

I want to add my testimony to what has been said in favor of this bill. Briefly I will say that I am in favor of this bill.

Senator Luther.

Your town of Pomfret has a large summer population. To what proportion of these summer visitors are electors?

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Mr. Brown.

Only a small portion.

Senator Luther.

I will ask all those in favor of this Bill to stand.

Mr. Jones, New Haven.

I want to say a word in favor of the bill from a supervisor's point of view. I have supervised schools in country towns as well as in the city, and have had my experience in three country towns in Massachusetts. There was a great deal to do as the three towns were consolidated, each one with a town school committee with varying interests and varying ideas to work with, so that even in that case with three committees to work with I found it hard to keep in touch with my committees, inasmuch as I was responsible to them, and it was some of the most taxing work I ever did. I certainly hope the bill will become a law.

Mr. Elliott, Pomfret.

I find I am in the hopeless minority, and since I have heard the miracles that this town management have wrought I feel that I should not say a word, but it occurs to me that the schools have not been so badly managed in the past, or else how is it that so many men have gone out of these schools and done so well. It is not quite so bad as has been represented here. I will say that I represent the sentiments of the town when I say that I oppose the consolidation as represented in this bill.

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Mr. Potter, Pomfret.

I am not a public speaker but I have read over this bill and I have compared it with the statute laws now existing, and I cannot see any reason why the old law did not cover the whole ground if you can bring the community up to it. The fact seems to be that the community is not quite ready, and this law fixes it so if we are dissatisfied we must carry it out for five years and then we can go back to district system. If the legislature passes this we cannot go back to the other system. I know the plea has been made that we won't want to go back. Now we have seen the district system and how the schools are. We have good teachers who have taught their scholars conscientiously and the scholars have amounted to something in the world, but we have not seen how the schools would be under the town management system. We have three or four times brought this matter of town management before our meetings and voted it down every time. Well now are the common people in Pomfret so ignorant, is that the reason? I see one man nods his head yes. I do not think so. I cannot admit it. Last Fall the matter was brought up in our town meeting and we voted 112 to go along under the district system and 62 for town management. Of course very naturally those who are in favor of it think that if they can come here and get the legislature to pass the law they will be all right.

Mr. Odgen.

There seems to be some division of opinion in the school committee in the town of Pomfret.

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Mr. Davis.

No, I don't think it amounts to anything.

Senator Luther.

If there is no one else to be heard on this matter, we will consider the hearing closed.