



# OLR RESEARCH REPORT

February 28, 2012

2012-R-0094

## **MILESTONES IN CONNECTICUT EDUCATION: 1912-2012**

By: Carrie Rose, Legislative Librarian

You asked about milestones in Connecticut education over the past 100 years.

Most of the information in this is taken from *Connecticut's Public Schools: A History, 1650-2000* by Christopher Collier and *Connecticut: A Fully Illustrated History of the State from the Seventeenth Century to the Present* by Albert E. Van Dusen.

### **BACKGROUND**

In the early 1900s, education in Connecticut was very different than it is today. The one-room school house was a common teaching venue; there were 1,110 one-room school houses in 1899. Students rode to school in horse-drawn wagons. Prayer was part of the school day; in fact, reading passages from the Bible was a routine practice in the classroom. High schools were not prevalent; in 1910 only 61 towns in Connecticut had a four-year high school. As secondary education gained popularity, most students in rural areas did not even attend high school; the majority attending were from the upper-middle class. Teachers were licensed on the local level and often inadequately prepared to do their jobs.

## **MILESTONES: 1912-2012**

During the past 100 years, several milestones have drastically changed the landscape of education in Connecticut.

### ***1913: School Transportation***

Norwalk reportedly owned the first “automobile” for school transportation in the state of Connecticut.

### ***1917: Connecticut Trade Schools***

Connecticut was a national pioneer in implementing trade schools. While most other states began implementing trade schools in the 1920s, Connecticut’s exploration of this educational option began with the Board’s Special Commission on Vocational Education report in 1906. It was followed by the Trade School Act of 1909 (1909, Chapter 212). The 1909 law provided trade school funding for regular education courses during the day and continuing education programs in the evening. The federal Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 (Public Law 64-347) was a national push for trade schools that held up Connecticut’s Trade School Act of 1909 as a successful model for other states to follow.

### ***1919: State Board of Education Reform***

In 1919, the General Assembly passed *An Act Concerning the Appointment, Terms and Duties of the Members of the State Board of Education*. The act implemented a major reform to the State Board of Education including an expansion to nine members (1919, Chapter 344). Before enactment of this law, local school boards presided over school districts and with this reform came a major shift in power towards the State Board and State Department of Education.

### ***1920: Standardized Tests***

The Bureau of Tests was established in 1920 and is an example of Connecticut’s administration of standardized tests in their infancy. The two tests suggested by the Bureau were “National Intelligence Test-Scale I” and “Terman Group Test of Mental Ability”. The implementation of school tests was a trend not only in Connecticut, but also throughout the rest of the country during the 1920s.

## **1920s: Playgrounds**

Schools began to build playgrounds for recreational purposes in the 1920s. Before this time period, most students played in the road. As automobiles became more common, playing in the road became hazardous and other accommodations needed to be made to ensure the safety of the students.

## **1921: Teacher Certification Reform, Health and Physical Education Instruction in Schools, Special Education, and One-Room Schoolhouses**

Teacher certification reform transferred teacher certification authority to the State Board of Education (1921, Chapter 238). Before this law, local boards administered teacher certification. This act also created unique grade-level requirements for certifying teachers.

Physical education and health courses were incorporated into Connecticut schools' curricula for the first time with a law enacted in 1921 (1921, Chapter 399).

In 1921, *An Act to Encourage Special Education Provisions for Children Below Standard, Physically or Mentally* was enacted to promote academic support for students with special needs (1921, Chapter 355).

Also at this time, the once popular one-room schoolhouse began to slowly disappear. There were 653 one-room schoolhouses in 1921; by 1956, there were only 23 in existence throughout the state of Connecticut.

## **1924: Religious Instruction in Schools**

The "Sunday School Movement" began in the 1920s. During this time period, many schools began to eliminate references to Christianity from the classroom. This was of great concern to many parents; therefore, they requested additional religious instruction for their children in conjunction with public school offerings. The creation of these released-time programs allowed schools to provide on or off-site religious education classes. Bridgeport adopted the first released-time program in New England in 1924; many other Connecticut municipalities followed suit as they implemented similar programs in the 1930s and 1940s.

In 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *McCullom v. Board of Education*, 333 US 203, found released-time programs unconstitutional due to the use of school resources for religious purposes. This was a pivotal court case in the trend towards separation of church and state.

### **1925: School Transportation**

By 1925, the majority of schools provided some form of transportation for students. The cost of school transportation, however, was grossly uneven in rural and urban communities. Municipalities with populations over 30,000 residents had a transportation expenditure of only \$1.62 per student while rural communities with populations under 1,000 residents spent as much as \$54.10 per student. There were various methods of traveling to school during the 1920s including walking, school buses, railroads, trolleys, horse-drawn wagons and even ferry boats.

### **1927: School Finance**

School inequality in Connecticut was addressed in a study completed in 1927 called *Financing Education in Connecticut: a Proposed Plan to Enable the State of Connecticut to Meet More Adequately its Educational Responsibility* by the Division of Research and Surveys of the State Board of Education. This group was appointed by the Connecticut General Assembly to revise the education statutes and narrow the inequality gap. School inequality was the result of a variety of different factors including fiscal issues, rural vs. urban demographics, and access to school transportation. This report made several recommendations, including allocation of state grant money for students, and encouraged the use of town tax revenue for school financing. Education professionals continued to use this as a reference source for the next 20 years in order to pursue the goal of an equal education for all.

### **1930s: Public Secondary Schools**

The Public High School movement began in the 1930s as there was a sharp increase in the number of students attending some form of secondary schooling. The Depression was a major factor in this movement due to job shortages; especially in rural towns with the decline of the agriculture industry. Other factors that spurred this movement included immediate employment opportunities for high school graduates and an acceptance of the social belief that young adults should be in an environment specifically tailored to their needs. Also, for the first time, the high school diploma was conceived as a measure of competency. Due to these factors, the number of high school graduates grew

exponentially in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; in 1911, 1,580 students were graduates and in 1938, 14,418 students graduated from high school. The average number of students attending high school also rose significantly; in 1924 there were 32,287 students in attendance and this number increased to 67,047 students in 1934.

### ***1939: First Regional High School in New England***

Connecticut opened the first regional high school in New England in 1939. The Housatonic Valley Regional High School in Falls Village, Canaan was created by Special Act 428 of 1937. This school acted as a model for the implementation of regional high schools throughout the country. Region Number 4 was the second regionalized high school system that emerged in 1953; it was comprised of the towns of Chester, Deep River, and Essex.

### ***1940s and 50s: Public School Construction***

School construction projects increased sharply in the 1940s and 50s. After World War II, there was a rise in the number of births known as the baby boom. In addition, the number of children attending high school had almost doubled since the 1930s. The rise of the student population caused an extreme shortage of school facilities. In the early 1940s, the legislature began passing laws to assist with the construction costs, and in 1947, passed Public Act 266 to assist with public school building grants.

### ***1947: Married Teachers Employment Discrimination Prohibition***

Before 1947, discrimination against married women was a common practice. It was a shared belief that women should be homemakers and that a teaching job would interfere with domestic obligations. In order to address this practice, the General Assembly passed an act which prohibited municipalities from discriminating against married teachers (PA 1947, No.288).

### ***1956: Middle Schools and Junior High-Schools***

There were 27 junior-high schools that emerged in Connecticut between 1956 and 1960. During this time period, school administrators began to recognize the importance of facilitating learning in an environment specific to the needs of pre-adolescents. In the 1960s, school construction created additional opportunities to incorporate middle schools as a part of school districts' educational structure. Therefore, 25 additional middle schools were established by 1969.

### ***1958: Math and Science Curriculum Expansion***

After World War II and the launch of Sputnik, there was a movement in the United States for advancement in the fields of science and mathematics. Before this, greater emphasis was placed on subjects such as language arts and social studies. During the 1958-59 school year, 464 programs were implemented throughout Connecticut to enhance the math and science curriculum.

### ***1959: Special Education Required***

During the 1950s, in addition to the math and science movement, the need for mandatory special education services was also acknowledged. By 1958, about 55 school districts had already developed special education programs. This practice was mandated in 1959 with the passage of *An Act Concerning Educationally Exceptional Children* (PA 1959, No.664).

### ***1960: School Transportation Financing***

During the 1950s, about 20% of all students were bused to private or parochial schools using publicly funded transportation. This caused many questions to be raised regarding whether this was a violation of the separation of church and state. The Connecticut Supreme Court, in *Snyder v. Newtown*, (147 Conn. 374 (1960)), found that private schools' use of publicly funded transportation did not violate the constitution because it was considered in the best interest of the students.

### ***1960s: Homework***

World War II and Sputnik, by spurring international competition, also encouraged a more rigorous educational environment in the United States. In response, homework was implemented as a curriculum requirement in the 1960s. Homework was not seen as essential before the mid-1950s; in the 1930s and 1940s it was given to students, but was minimal at most. Therefore, homework was much more prevalent in the 1960s than it had ever been before and was seen as a way to gain a competitive edge over other countries' educational systems.

### ***1963: Foreign Language Courses***

In 1963, 48.7% of Connecticut's students were enrolled in foreign language courses. According to the Modern Language Association, at that time, Connecticut had the highest percentage of students enrolled in foreign language classes throughout the entire country. This figure illustrated a radical change from only a decade earlier since, in 1954, Connecticut lagged behind the rest of the nation in foreign language instruction.

### ***1964: Collective Bargaining for Teachers***

Connecticut established the first teacher collective bargaining law in the United States (PA 1964, No. 298). This law allowed teachers to negotiate several facets of their jobs including salary, class size, and other assigned duties. It also gave teachers the right to appeal in the event of employment termination.

### ***1960s: Racial Segregation in Connecticut***

Connecticut's African-American population increased by 68.6% in the 1960s and the majority resided in urban areas. On the other hand, many of Connecticut's white residents made a demographic shift towards the suburbs. This led to a racial imbalance in Connecticut's schools. In 1967, 43.4% of Hartford's students were African-Americans but in West Hartford, the figure was fewer than 1%. As racial segregation became an issue in Connecticut's schools, the State Board of Education asked local school boards to take immediate action to address this issue.

### ***1966: Project Concern***

Project Concern addressed racial segregation by busing students from the city to the suburbs. This program was born out of the recommendations from the report *Equality and Quality in Public Schools: Report on a Conference*. The report also specified that segregation in schools leads to unequal education for minorities and ultimately, a society tolerant of segregation.

### ***1968: Advanced Placement / Enrichment Programs***

Advanced placement programs, honors classes, and enrichment classes were encouraged by the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). By 1968, 42% of Connecticut high schools offered advanced placement courses and this number grew to 60% in 1970.

### **1974: Education Finance Equalization**

The case of *Horton v. Meskill* (172 Conn 615) challenged the education finance structure in Connecticut. The case focused on access to equal education. The Connecticut Supreme Court found that that state's reliance on local property taxes to fund public education resulted in such an unequal distribution of wealth across many Connecticut municipalities as to violate the state constitutional requirement of equal educational opportunity. The Court gave the Connecticut General Assembly the task of creating a more balanced education financing program. PA 79-128, which was the General Assembly's response to *Horton v. Meskill* stated that each child should have the opportunity to receive an equal education.

### **1975: Moment of Silence**

Through legislation, Connecticut enacted a moment of silence to be observed by the public schools in 1975 (PA 75-367). Prayer in schools, daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer, and reading from the Bible passages were authorized under Connecticut law and took place in schools into the early 1960s. However, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Engle v. Vitale*, (370 U.S. 421 (1962)), made prayer in schools an unconstitutional practice. The idea of the separation between church and state was further advanced by the Court's ruling in *Lemon v. Kurtzima*, (403 U.S. 602 (1971)) which specifies that legislation should not be combined with religious issues. These rulings led many states to adopt "silent minute" laws to allow for a moment of personal reflection formerly observed through prayer.

### **1984: Statewide Mastery Tests**

Statewide mastery tests were implemented for the 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades with the passage of PA 84-265. Mastery tests are comprised of reading, writing and math sections. This test was formulated to measure students' academic achievement individually and as a whole in order to make pertinent curriculum changes. Mastery test scores are also used to identify schools in need of state assistance.

### **1986: Educational Enhancement Act of 1986**

Teacher salary reform, new certification and evaluation standards, and retirement modifications were enacted in the Education Enhancement Act of 1986 (PA 86-1, May Spec. Sess.). The act's main purpose was to increase teacher salaries to attract qualified candidates in order to enhance the educational system in Connecticut.

### **1988: Education Cost Sharing**

An Education Cost Sharing (ECS) Program was established in 1988 (PA 88-358). This program is also known as equalized cost sharing. It established a complicated formula that provides state grants to assist municipalities with their education costs. It included a minimum expenditure for each student, state aid allocation based on town's wealth, the use of mastery test scores to determine financial need, and a reward system for improved student performance.

### **1996: *Sheff v. O'Neill***

The *Sheff v. O'Neill* case (238 C 1 (1996)) arose over the concern that schools in the Hartford area were isolating students through racial segregation and therefore, did not provide an equal and adequate education. This pivotal case, which began in 1988, continues to affect Connecticut's educational system by requiring new plans, still being formulated today, to address racial, ethnic, and economic isolation in Connecticut's schools.

### **Charter Schools**

In 1996, the General Assembly authorized the creation of state and local charter schools to offer an alternative to regular public education in Connecticut as well as an initiative to reduce racial segregation in the schools (PA 96-214). Charter schools do not have to adhere to many of the statutes or regulations that govern other public schools. Some charter schools provide an alternative choice to those in urban, low-performing school districts; others employ innovative teaching methods; and still others have a specialized instructional focus.

### **1997: School Readiness**

School readiness initiatives began to spread across the nation in the 1990s as many states began to improve the quality of their prekindergarten programs for young children. Connecticut followed suit by implementing PA 97-259 to improve the caliber of day care and head start programs by creating different financing methods and accreditation standards. The law also required early childhood staff training programs and background checks for security purposes. The State Department of Education was charged with administering school readiness initiatives.

### ***2000: Connecticut Digital Library***

The Connecticut Digital Library was established to provide electronic access to newspaper archives and research databases (PA 00-187). This digital library provides access to resources that specifically meet the educational and research needs of the students and teachers in Connecticut's public schools. Before the development of this resource, many schools did not have access to the expansive list of journals provided by this digital library.

### ***2002: School Bullying***

Connecticut's first school bullying law was implemented in 2002. It required all school boards to implement anti-bullying policies (PA 02-119). Among components of this law are: (1) allowing bullying accusations from parents and students; (2) mandatory reporting of bullying incidents by teachers and school administrators; and (3) ensuring that a list of confirmed bullying cases within each school district is publically available.

### ***2011: Academic Achievement Gap***

An academic achievement gap is a disparity in academic performance between races and ethnic groups. A 2011 Connecticut law (PA 11-85) passed proposed several reforms to close this gap in Connecticut. They include the creation of a master plan to close the gap, the option to expand the number of school days per year or hours per day, and the development of culturally relevant lesson plans for students who do not speak English as their first language.

CR:tjo