

Reforming Twentieth-Century Rural Schools: Implementing the Standard School Program in Iowa and Colorado

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The vast array of social programming and legislation that defined America's Progressive Era included many prescriptions for improving rural schools, particularly rural one-room schools. One of the largest rural reform efforts of that era was the standard school program, an initiative created in Illinois that spread to more than thirty states across the country. Despite the quick replication, there has been remarkably little research shedding light on standard school initiatives. Utilizing contemporary state department reports and other primary data, this article highlights the two major ways that standard school programs were deployed: through state legislation (as in the case of Iowa) or through rules and regulations created by state departments of education (as in the case of Colorado).

—Eds.

From a contemporary vantage point, it is difficult to appreciate the extent to which rural one-room schools dominated the nation's educational efforts during the first decades of the twentieth century. Those decades became known as America's Progressive Era because of the vast array of social programming and legislation put in place to improve the lives of American citizens. Muckraking journalists inspired reforms by bringing the problems of immigrant-dominated cities to the attention of Americans everywhere.

Though urban areas garnered much public interest in the Progressive Era, the period's developments also greatly affected rural communities. The stakes related to what might be done about deteriorating inner cities were heightened by one additional Progressive Era development: the quickening pace of cityward migration among the

nation's rural youth. One University of Wisconsin sociologist claimed that the departure of the most talented rural youth was creating rural areas "populated chiefly by bullheads and suckers."¹ Perhaps worse, however, was the fact that talented rural youth, upon their arrival in the nation's cities, would inevitably intermingle with the immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, effectively lowering the mean IQ of the nation, or so it was argued.²

These circumstances culminated in Teddy Roosevelt's creation of the Commission on Country Life in 1907. Without defining it, President Roosevelt charged the thirty commission members with finding solutions to the "rural problem." Others defined this phrase for the President. For instance, Mabel Carney, one of the nation's leading rural education experts, defined the problem as "keeping a standard people on our farms."³ In short, the main goal of prominent country life advocates, those who served on the Commission and the countless others who supported its work, was to stop the persistent and growing population shift among youth away from the country to the city. There was a surprising consensus among this group that in order to accomplish this, reform in the nation's rural schools was necessary.

It was in this milieu that the Illinois State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Alfred Bayliss, began to formulate a plan for improving his state's rural schools. Bayliss decided to visit rural schools to evaluate the condition of the buildings and assess the quality of the academic programs being offered. If the schools met his "standards," they would receive a special diploma. Thus, the Standard School Program was born. Bayliss retired in 1907. His successor, Francis G. Blair, in the midst of the growing concern for rural youth highlighted by a presidential commission, decided to continue and expand the program.

Blair took the Bayliss plan and formalized it by writing rules and regulations for the Illinois Department of Education. Those rules and regulations became law in 1907. He broadened this effort by hiring two inspectors to visit rural schools. They used a state-created checklist to evaluate schools and issued written reports with suggestions for needed improvement. Schools that scored well on the checklist were certified as standard schools and given metal rectangular doorplates with the wording "Standard School."⁴ When the U.S. Commissioner of Education issued a bulletin in 1912 describing the Illinois

program and use of the doorplate award, other states began adopting this approach for rural school improvement. Two years later George Herbert Betts and Otis Earle Hall wrote about the Illinois program in their book, *Better Rural Schools*.⁵ Their comments and a follow-up study by Edith A. Lathrop, assistant specialist in rural education for the U.S. Bureau of Education, helped encourage other states to develop a number of similar approaches that varied a great deal in form and implementation. Unlike the “No Child Left Behind” school improvement program approved by Congress in 2002, the standard school initiative was a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach to school improvement.

National Survey

As the number of states using this approach increased, the U.S. Bureau of Education conducted a national study. Edith Lathrop used a survey to produce a comprehensive state-by-state summary. She found 34 states that were using standardization to improve rural schools. This study, based on data collected in 1922, was published by the U.S. Bureau of Education in 1925 under the title “The Improvement of Rural Schools by Standardization.”⁶

Lathrop found that fourteen states had passed standard school laws and nineteen used rules and regulations promulgated by state education agencies to implement the program. Pennsylvania used a combination approach—legislation for consolidated schools and rules for one-teacher schools. In Alabama and California, state education officials worked with selected county superintendents to improve rural schools. Lathrop defined the Standard School Program as “the establishment of a definite level of attainment through the adoption of certain minimum requirements authorized by law or the State Education Department . . . these requirements related to the building or the management of the school or both.” According to Lathrop, participation in the Standard School Program was voluntary. Thirty of the thirty-four states participating in the program used some type of scorecard to evaluate schools. But Lathrop noted, “it is difficult to make a comparison of the subject matter on the thirty score cards because there is but little uniformity either in the selection or organization.”⁷

One way to understand the effect standardization had on rural schools early in the twentieth century is to compare and contrast how the program was operated in a state using rules and regulations versus one using a legislative approach. Colorado and Iowa provide good case studies in this regard. Colorado used Department of Education rules and regulations. Iowa, on the other hand, enacted a law with an annual appropriation of \$100,000. We will examine each approach in turn.

The Colorado Approach

Colorado State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Mary Bradford, started laying the groundwork for standardization in 1913. After two years of study by a six-member planning committee, the program was announced in 1915.⁸

At that time Colorado had four classes of schools based on numbers of rooms:

- first class (consolidated elementary schools with junior high grades)
- second class (elementary buildings with four to six rooms)
- third class (elementary schools with two or three classrooms)
- fourth class (one-room schools).⁹

Initially Colorado's Standard School Program covered only second and third class schools. A "Colorado Standardization Score Card" created by the planning committee was used by county superintendents to evaluate local schools. It included a one-hundred point checklist divided into two sections worth forty and sixty points respectively. Section one listed very specific requirements for buildings and grounds such as one square foot of glass for each six square feet of floor space. Windows were to have shades and be located on the left and rear sides of the room because cross-lighting produced by windows on both sides of the room was thought to produce harmful stress on students' eyes.¹⁰

Cleanliness was important as evidenced by the requirement which read: "Oiled floors or the use of sweeping compound should be used—no feather dusters." Floors and windows were to be washed and woodwork and furniture cleaned monthly. A minimum of two hundred cubic feet of air and fifteen square feet of floor space was to be provided for each pupil. The school grounds were to be a minimum of one acre, but two or more were

recommended. Providing a teacher residence was worth eight points, but no specific requirements for such a facility were listed.¹¹

The sixty-point second section was entitled “functioning value.” Here specificity was lacking. The use of the school as a community center was worth ten points while the use of the school as a means of training children was given the highest point value of fifty.

Requirements under this heading included:

- use of the Colorado course of study
- county uniformity of textbooks
- punctuality, interest and attendance of pupils
- salary of teacher (no amount specified)
- teacher’s personality, preparation, teaching ability, attitude toward children.¹²

The Colorado Department of Public Instruction published the rating card in a standardization bulletin in 1915, and produced two-color posters listing the requirements. The posters were to be displayed in all second and third class school buildings.

Colorado’s Standard School Program was divided into three classes: probationary, standard and superior. A school had to score at least eighty-five points on the one-hundred point rating scale to qualify for probationary recognition, ninety for standard and ninety-five for superior. Teachers at qualifying schools were to attach a tablet or doorplate on the outside of the school above the door. Door plate wording and a color scheme were class specific as indicated below:

State of Colorado
Standard School
Superior Class

The color scheme was scarlet on white for superior, blue on white for approved standard and black on ivory for probationary (Figure 1). Since no state money was appropriated for standardization, the planning committee decreed that the tablets were “to be made by

Colorado school children under the supervision of a teacher and are to be extremely beautiful.”¹³



Figure 1: A tablet announcing probationary ranking still adorns this historic elementary School in Twin Lakes, CO. The photos in this essay are courtesy of William Sherman.

Bradford knew it would take more than beautiful tablets to start the standardization program. She issued a Standardization Proclamation on February 25, 1916, which encouraged teachers to organize special community programs in second and third class schools in February. The two-color Colorado Standardization Score Card was to be displayed and reviewed, followed by a discussion of how the school could be improved. Additionally, Bradford organized a county versus county competitive program. The county with the highest percentage of standard schools would be deemed the “Superior County of Colorado” and would receive a Colorado state flag.¹⁴

Over the next five years Bradford and county superintendents worked to implement the Standard School Program. Although progress was made, it was not at the level Bradford foresaw. After the first year, ninety-five schools received probationary status, 107 were approved as standard schools and ten were designated as superior. After six years, the number of qualifying schools had increased to 295 probationary, 269 standard and fifty-seven superior.¹⁵

The schools with the most need, however, the fourth class, one-room buildings, remained untouched by standardization in Colorado. A desire to improve one-room

schools prompted Bradford to revise the Standard School Program in 1921. At that time Colorado had more than four thousand schools, including thirty-five first class, sixty-eight second class, 1800 third class, and 2100 fourth class (or one-room schools). There were 268,795 students attending Colorado public schools which were supported with \$17 million in state funds.¹⁶

In 1921 the newly elected State Superintendent, Katherine L. Craig, appointed a new Standardization Committee, which implemented several changes. The original three-tiered system was reduced to two categories: standard, which required a score of eighty-five; and superior, which required a total of ninety-five. The other change involved the inclusion of one-room schools for the first time in the Colorado Standard School Program. These changes helped increase participation in the eleven years before the program ended. The table below (Table 1) provides a numerical summation of schools qualifying as approved and superior (1922-1932).

Table 1. Summation of Colorado schools qualifying as approved or superior, 1922-1932.

First Class	Second Class	Third Class	Fourth Class
Standard	Standard	Standard	Standard
187	348	865	2,417
Superior	Superior	Superior	Superior
263	251	322	271

Sources: State superintendent's biennial reports, Colorado Department of Education.

These totals include duplications. Some schools that qualified for the standard designation went through further evaluations to try for superior recognition. Some schools were also reevaluated when a teacher was replaced.¹⁷

More than six hundred schools earned recognition as probationary, approved, or superior during the first five years of the program when one-room schools were not included in this program. In the final ten years of this program, nearly five thousand schools including 2,744 one-room schools received the standard or superior designations.

J. H. Shriber, who chaired the Colorado Committee on Rural School Progress, acknowledged that changes in standardization would help one-room schools. He argued, though, that school consolidation was the surest way to improve them. Writing in the February 1922 issue of the *Colorado School Journal*, Shriber noted: “Of all the plans, suggestions and experiences undertaken to recognize, rebuild, revitalize, redirect and enrich the rural school to meet the educational needs of the present-day farmer, the consolidated school stands supreme as the only adequate method to meet that end.”¹⁸

Despite Shriber’s lack of support, Colorado’s Standard School Program continued for another decade. The biennial report of the state superintendent included standard school numbers for each county for the final time in 1932. During this sixteen-year run, more than five thousand schools—including over 2,700 one-room buildings—earned some type of recognition from Colorado’s Standard School Program. The program came to an end as the number of one-room schools in Colorado declined. Most of the schools that could benefit from this program had gone through the process or had decided not to be evaluated.¹⁹

The Iowa Approach

In Iowa, standardization started later but lasted longer than the Colorado program. May Francis, the supervisor of rural schools for the Department of Public Instruction, led the effort to develop Iowa’s Standard School Program. She was asked by State Superintendent P.E. McClenahan to draft legislation and produce the rules and regulations to implement the program. The legislation was adopted in 1919 at a time when Iowa had more than eleven thousand one-room schools with more than two hundred thousand students. Over half of Iowa’s students were attending these schools.²⁰

Unlike Colorado’s approach, the Iowa program was used with only one and two-room schools. Like Colorado, a standard school rating card with a one-hundred point checklist was developed to help Iowa’s ninety-nine Iowa county superintendents evaluate schools. The 1919 Official Rating Card for Iowa Standard Schools was more detailed than the Colorado version. It was divided into six sections including forty-nine items with varying point totals.

- grounds and outbuildings, 7 items worth 10 points
- the schoolhouse, 15 items , 30 points
- equipment and care of the schoolroom, 11 items, 20 points
- library and supplementary readers, 2 items, 7 points
- the teacher and the school, 10 items, 21 points
- community activities, 4 items, 12 points.²¹

The item with the highest point total related to quality teaching. If the teacher was ranked excellent or superior by the county superintendent and recorded regular attendance at professional meetings, the school received nine points. Five points could be earned for a library of at least 100 books from the state approved list.

The Iowa rating card specified twenty square feet of floor space for each student (five more than Colorado) and 220 cubic square feet of air space (twenty more than Colorado). The Iowa card also recommended that school windows should be located to the left and rear of the students to avoid cross-lighting. Teaching and community activities were emphasized. Schools could earn twenty-one points for items related to teacher activities. For example, extra points were awarded if the teacher earned a new certificate, made home visits to all students, had an average school attendance of eighty-five percent or better and stayed at the school for at least two years. Six points could be earned if the teacher organized three to six school/community meetings during the year. The first Iowa rating card also included a drawing illustrating a satisfactory arrangement for interior toilets.²²

The most significant difference in the standardization programs of Colorado and Iowa was the \$100,000 annual legislative appropriation for the Iowa program. Iowa standard schools received \$6 for each student who attended the school for at least six months during the previous year. Half that amount was used as a teacher salary supplement and half was designated as a discretionary fund the teacher could use to purchase instructional materials.²³ That meant a standard school with fifteen students would receive ninety dollars. According to Lathrop, no other state used this type of funding formula to support standardization.



Figure 2: A bronze doorplate for an Iowa standard school.

A portion of the Iowa funding was also used to provide qualifying schools with a bronze oval doorplate with raised letters and the wording “Iowa Standard School” (Figure 2). Iowa and Colorado may have been the only places where the state name was included on the doorplates. Lathrop reported 13 of the 34 states with standard school programs used doorplates or tablets to recognize qualifying schools.²⁴ The doorplates from Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, and Nebraska were made of tin and used the wording “Standard School,” with no state name. They looked like a rectangular automobile license plate and were not nearly as attractive as the bronze Iowa doorplate or the color-coded Colorado tablets.

Iowa’s standard school requirements were more rigorous in many areas than those in the Colorado law. The Iowa legislation specified that standard schools must have been in operation for at least eight months the previous year in a suitable schoolhouse with outbuildings in proper condition and repair. The school was to be equipped with needful apparatus, textbooks, and supplies and have an adequate heating and ventilation system. Teachers were to be employed for a full year and to hold a first-grade Uniform County Certificate or its equivalent. Further, the school must have had a minimum average attendance of ten students during the previous year. Additional requirements on the Iowa rating card included:

- two inside separate sanitary toilets or two outside ordinary toilets
- trees on the school grounds and a good flag and flagstaff
- a good school foundation with siding and roof in good condition
- good windows with locks, shades and sash curtains
- a good desk and two good chairs for the teacher

- three good framed pictures and a globe ten inches or more in diameter
- two sets of supplementary readers for all grades one to seven
- a course in citizenship and current events
- following the Iowa state course of study

Schools had to earn at least eighty points to receive standard school recognition. A score of eighty-five was required for the second year to maintain the rating and ninety was needed for every year thereafter.²⁵

STATE OF IOWA
Department of Public Instruction

RATING CARD FOR STANDARD RURAL SCHOOLS

County..... Township..... District..... Date.....
 Teacher..... Address..... Salary per Mo.....
 Total enrollment..... No. months of school..... Date of Inspection.....
 Number of pupils belonging for six months..... Average Daily Attendance..... First date approved.....

President of the Board..... Address.....
 Secretary of the Board..... Address.....
 Treasurer of the Board..... Address.....

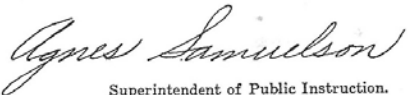
This school has met the requirements specified for standardization by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and should be designated as a standard school and receive state aid as provided by law. Should this school fail to maintain the required equipment and efficiency, I will remove its certificate of standardization and will notify the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

.....
County Superintendent.

Standard School—800 or more points
 B Class School—700 to 800 points
 C Class School—600 to 700 points

D Class School—500 to 600 points
 E Class School—below 500 points
 Points marked * are required for standardization

No district will be satisfied to attain only the minimum score but will try to provide for its boys and girls better educational opportunities each year.


 Superintendent of Public Instruction.

I. GROUNDS AND OUTBUILDINGS—120 Points	II. THE SCHOOLHOUSE—(continued)
1. Grounds well cared for, in good condition, accessible, and removed from dangerous conditions.....10	4. Good doors with lock and key.....5
2. Trees, shrubbery, and flowers, attractively placed.....10	5. Outside platform with steps in good condition and provided with handrail5
*3. Flag and flag pole with flag display in good weather (Statutory—Section 4253, School Laws of Iowa).....10	6. Interior walls in good condition, tinted a light shade.....10
4. Adequate grounds, fenced against traffic hazards.....10	7. Windows on left, or left and rear of pupils.....20
*5. Toilets—Two inside, separate, sanitary toilets, or two separate, sanitary, outside toilets, provided with latticed screen for entrance.....20	*8. Windows supplied with good translucent shades and sash curtains10
6. Supervised play, and suitable equipment.....20	*9. Heated and ventilated by approved system (Underline: Basement furnace, room furnace).....30
7. Water supply—Good well or cistern supplying pure water20	10. Separate cloakrooms, vestibule, and storage closet.....20
8. Walks—cinder, gravel, or cement—from schoolhouse to road, well, and toilets.....10	11. Interior clean and tidy. Floors in good condition, smooth, tight, and properly treated for preservation.....10
9. Fuel room in good condition, well supplied with fuel and kindling.....10	12. Twenty (20) square feet of floor space, and 220 cubic feet of air space for each pupil.....20
II. THE SCHOOLHOUSE—190 Points	13. Window space 1-6 to 1-4 of floor space.....10
*1. Good foundation10	14. Twenty linear feet of slate blackboard the proper height, with chalk trays, good erasers and good grade of crayon10
*2. Roof and siding good.....10	15. Provisions for community meetings: (a) Added space (b) Lighting system
*3. Well-ventilated exterior. Good windows with no broken	

Figure 3: A rating card for standard schools developed by Iowa State Superintendent Agnes Samuelson in 1928.

III. EQUIPMENT—190 Points	
1. Single desks	5
Adjustable	5
Movable	5
Properly placed	5
*No child seated so his feet cannot reach floor	
2. Good desk and chair for teacher.....	10
3. Chairs for visitors.....	5
4. Kindergarten table and chairs.....	10
*5. Approved equipment for primary work.....	20
6. Interior of room tastefully decorated.....	5
7. Display and bulletin board.....	10
*8. Three good pictures framed—not more than one portrait included	10
9. Suitable dictionaries	10
10. Charts—reading, hygiene	10
11. Complete set of eight (8) up-to-date maps, including Iowa; evidence that they are used.....	20
12. Globe—twelve inches in diameter; used daily.....	10
13. Good talking machine and ten approved records.....	10
*14. Drinking and washing facilities:	
(a) Sanitary drinking fountain or covered cooler	
(b) Sink and drain—or wash basin	
(c) Individual or paper towels	
(d) Liquid or powdered soap or individual cakes	
(e) Individual drinking cups if cooler is used.....	20
15. Other equipment:	
(a) Waste basket	
(b) Song books	
(c) Thermometer	
(d) Atlas	
(e) Pencil sharpener	
(f) First aid kit	
(g) Mats for cleaning shoes	
(h) Latest world almanac	
(i) Desk copies in all subjects	
(j) Material for some good writing system including teacher's manual	20

IV. LIBRARY AND SUPPLEMENTARY READERS—90 Points	
1. Good bookcase used for books only.....	10
2. List of 100 books chosen from state bulletins.....	20
3. Standard set of encyclopedias of recent date.....	20
4. Supplementary readers for all grades from one to seven as listed.....	20
5. One current events paper—one farm paper.....	10
6. One table for primary grades, with many varieties of primers and lower grade reading material.....	10

V. TEACHER AND SCHOOL ORGANIZATION—290 Points	
1. Training:	
High School Normal Training.....	10
College, including special training for rural schools.....	10
2. One year of previous experience (5)	
More than one year (5).....	10
3. Teacher retained a second year.....	10
4. Professional Spirit:	
(a) Membership in state or National Education Association	2
(b) Attendance at educational meetings called by county superintendent	4
(c) Reading of at least one professional magazine every year	2
(d) Reading of at least one professional book every year	2
5. Attendance at summer school within past three years	15
6. Interest in community.....	10
7. Management:	
(a) Well-kept records and prompt reports	
(b) Daily program posted and followed	
(c) Not over 28 classes per day	
(d) Good order—all children profitably employed.....	20
8. State Course of Study and bulletins followed.....	10

V. TEACHER AND SCHOOL ORGANIZATION—(Con'd)	
9. An average daily attendance of 85 per cent required. Not over 2% of tardiness. School hours closely observed	10
10. Housekeeping:	
Careful attention to light, heating, ventilation and cleanliness, including cloakroom, toilet, playground, and basement	20
11. Efficiency of teacher (Ranked by County Superintendent)	
(a) Professional attitude (10)	
(b) Teaching and discipline (35)	
(c) Playground management and care of property (10)	
(d) Personal appearance and manner (10)	
(e) Community and social contacts (10).....	75
12. Attitude of Pupils:	
(a) Orderly	
(b) Neat and clean	
(c) Courteous	
(d) Industrious—trying to do required work	
(e) Loyal to school and careful of school property.....	20
13. Homes of pupils visited by teacher.....	10
14. At least two demonstrations of school work prepared and given to public.....	20
15. Organized health program.....	10
*16. Physical Education as prescribed by State Course of Study	10
17. Hot lunch in season.....	10
18. Other improvements not listed: (a) radio (b) window ventilators (c) textbooks on art (d) chart printing outfit (e) hectograph (f) paper cutting machine (g) piano (h) screens for windows and doors (i) manual training equipment (j) additional records, 15, for teaching music (k) provisions for outdoor lunch	
Not over 25.....	25

VI. COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES—120 Points	
1. Teacher Salary	
\$10 above minimum (10).....	10
Each additional \$5 (2).....	
2. Nine month term.....	10
3. Attitude of directors	
* (a) Visit school	
(b) Have building in order and supplies on hand at opening of term	
(c) Hold regular meetings with minutes recorded	
(d) Encourage teachers to attend professional meetings	10
4. Cooperation with County Superintendent:	
(a) Attend meetings called by county superintendent	4
(b) Consult county superintendent before buying supplies	8
(c) Consult county superintendent before hiring teachers	8
5. Represented at state, district, or county fairs.....	10
6. Compete in spelling, arithmetic, dramatic, music, or other contests.....	10
7. Conduct a school literary society, Boys' and Girls' Clubs, Boy Scouts or Campfire Girls, Girl Reserves.....	10
8. Be a community center for two or more meetings.....	10
9. Community activities:	
(a) Board or patrons assist in scoring school	
(b) At least one-half number of parents visit school once during the year	
(c) Donations of labor or equipment by community or individuals	10
10. Community organizations:	
(a) Active Parent-Teachers' Association affiliated with state and national organizations.....	10
(b) Other community clubs.....	10

Like Colorado, the Iowa program got off to a positive start. By 1922 county superintendents had approved 894 standard schools with a student enrollment of 10,288.²⁶ That same year politics affected standardization in Iowa. Mary Francis shocked the educational establishment and Iowa citizens by announcing she would be a candidate for State Superintendent of Public Instruction. She was the first woman to run for statewide office in Iowa.

The incumbent State Superintendent, P. E. McClenahan, had already said he would run. Soon a third candidate, W.H. Bender, director of vocational education, announced his candidacy. The key issue in the 1922 race was improving Iowa's one-room schools. Both McClenahan and Booth favored continued use of school consolidation. Francis argued that the standard school law should be used to improve rural schools because farmers could not afford the cost of school consolidation, which required the construction of costly new multi-room schools. From her visits to more than 1800 schools in Iowa as the supervisor of rural schools, Francis understood that farm income was declining rapidly because prices for corn and oats as well as cattle and hogs were plummeting. She knew farmers could not afford to pay higher property taxes to build more expensive consolidated schools.²⁷

The severity of the farm crisis was revealed in a 1935 study done at the University of Iowa by Howard R. Bowen. This research showed that farm income had declined from one billion dollars in 1919 to 336 million by 1921.²⁸ David Reynolds, author of *There Goes the Neighborhood* put it this way: For an average size farm, the additional tax levy represented a tax increase of \$140 per year, shrinking average profits for its owner-operator to only \$105 per year. This was an increase many farm families felt they could not afford.²⁹

Francis won the election and school consolidation came to a halt in Iowa. Standardization became the primary program used to improve rural schools. However, a financial problem soon surfaced. The initial \$100,000 standard school appropriation was more than adequate for the first years of the program. But in 1924 Francis realized that amount would soon be insufficient to fund the growing numbers of standard schools. She asked the legislature for a \$50,000 increase. They responded by amending the law in 1927. But rather than increasing funding, they eliminated the three dollar teacher salary supplement. Despite this setback, Francis and the county

superintendents continued to promote program participation. By 1928 the number of standard schools had increased to 2,020, with 37,000 students. Since the funding level remained constant, the state subsidy slipped to \$2.70 per pupil.³⁰

Francis soon faced another political problem. Her opposition to school consolidation had angered the educational establishment. They responded by recruiting Agnes Samuelson to run against her. In the next election Francis was defeated by Samuelson, who expressed support for the resumption of school consolidation. Still, Samuelson understood that school consolidation was controversial in rural Iowa, so she also worked to improve the standard school program.

In 1928 Francis revised the rating card and switched to a 1,000 point rating scale. The original requirements for the schoolhouse and grounds remained largely unchanged. More specific requirements were developed for the teacher preparation, classroom management, and community program categories.³¹ The most significant change was the addition of a superior school award. To gain that recognition, schools had to qualify for the standard school designation for three years and score more than 900 points on the rating card. Superior school recognition did not include additional funding, but a bronze rectangular door plate with the wording "Superior School" was provided.³²

This change helped increase standardization activity in Iowa. The number of standard schools peaked in 1932 when 2,715 schools with an enrollment of 47,140 qualified. More than 30 percent of the existing one-room schools had been standardized. The peak year for superior schools was 1940 when sixty-three schools qualified for that honor. School standardization ended in Iowa in 1949. That was the final year funding for this program was included in the State of Iowa budget.³³ Most public one-room schools had closed or would soon close. Better roads and larger farms operated by fewer families led to the demise of the one-room school in Iowa.

Comparing Colorado and Iowa

The standard school program operated for thirty years in Iowa compared with sixteen in Colorado. Even with fewer years of operation and a lack of state funding, Colorado standardized a higher percentage of schools than did Iowa. Perhaps, however, this may

have been due to the fact that Iowa requirements made it more difficult for schools to obtain recognition.

Both Colorado and Iowa had success using standardization to improve rural education. Many community meetings were held at rural schools in both states to discuss what could be done to improve education for children. Changes were made to improve school buildings and grounds. Even though the scorecards used in both states focused more on building requirements than academic issues, health and learning environments were improved during difficult economic times in both states. Going through the process of being inspected by an outside evaluator was probably beneficial even for those schools that did not achieve the standard school designation.

Political change, which resulted in the election of new state superintendents, broadened and improved the standard school program in both states. One-room schools were added to the program in Colorado. The superior school recognition was added in Iowa. Despite these successes, there was not universal support for standardization. Some educational leaders in both states maintained that school consolidation was the best way to improve rural schools.

Different approaches were used to operate the standardization programs. Colorado officials involved students by asking them to create doorplates for their schools. Colorado teachers organized community meetings to discuss school improvement. For the first time in Iowa history, legislators approved state aid to local schools, and for eight years they provided money to improve salaries for rural teachers.

Iowa has done a better job of preserving standard school records, making it easier for historians to reconstruct the program's effects. There are standard school ledgers for the years 1920-42 located in the archives at the State Historical Society Library in Des Moines. The ledgers contain a county by county listing of all Iowa standard schools plus the name of the teacher, school board secretary, and amount of state aid allocated for each school. Colorado has the number of standard schools for each county listed in biennial reports of the state superintendent. In both states there are a few one-room schools preserved as museums where standard school tablets and plates are displayed.

Conclusion

The standard school program was the most comprehensive effort undertaken to improve rural schools in America, and it was one of the first examples of a program designed specifically for one category of schools. According to Lathrop, by 1922 more than forty thousand rural schools in thirty-four states had received recognition by participating in this program.³⁴

Standardization was a turning point for rural school improvement in many states. It paved the way for future reform efforts as well as for voluntary school accreditation. It demonstrated that positive changes were possible, even without top-down mandates, and that incentives could work better than sanctions to produce needed improvements.

Rural schools were improved in both Colorado and Iowa through the use of the standard school program. Even though participation in this program was voluntary in both states, many local school leaders chose to participate. They benefitted by going through the process of preparing for a review by an outside evaluator. This practice encouraged parents and teachers to work together to enhance learning opportunities for children. The standard school program could be described as a “pathway to progress” during a bleak economic time in both states.

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Notes

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² Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: Norton, 1981).

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¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

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¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ William L. Sherman, "The Iowa Standard School Law: A Turning Point for Country Schools," *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*, Fall 2001, 133.

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²² Ibid., 9.

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²⁴ Lathrop, "The Improvement of Rural Schools," 10-13.

²⁵ Francis, "Regulations for Standardizing the Common Schools," 5.

²⁶ Ibid., 8-9.

²⁷ Sherman, "The Iowa Standard School Law," 133.

²⁸ Howard R. Bowen, "Iowa Income: 1909-1934," Circular No. 34 (Iowa City: College of Commerce, State University of Iowa, 1935), 34.

²⁹ David R. Reynolds, *There Goes the Neighborhood* (Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 1999), 90.

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³³ Ibid., 136.

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