

# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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DOCUMENTS

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# FORTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE.

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HOUSE.

No. 5.

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## REPORT.

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The Committee on Education have had under consideration the order of the House relating to the office of the Superintendent of Common Schools, and beg leave to report :

The order is in the following words :

*“ Ordered, That the Committee on Education take into consideration the expediency of repealing all laws establishing a Superintendent of Common Schools, and County Conventions of Teachers, and report by bill or otherwise.”*

The gentleman who submitted the order is reported to have said that he offered it at the suggestion of many members of the House. He did not feel committed upon the subject in any way, but he did feel a desire to be enlightened on the matter ; and such, he thought was the condition of many other members. Therefore he was desirous that the Committee on Education should investigate the subject—a very important subject—and give us their views in full.

This order was evidently made in a spirit of proper inquiry, with reference to an important part of the public service, and not with any hostility to the great interests of public education.

Your Committee have endeavored to bring a like spirit to the examination of the subject thus referred to them ; and now ask your attention to the considerations which have influenced them in coming to the conclusion which they are about to submit.

Such a report, we judge, will be more satisfactory to the House, and to the friends of education generally, than the naked recommendation to abolish or to retain the office.

## THE DUTIES OF THE OFFICE.

The act creating the office of Superintendent of Common Schools, thus defines the duties originally assigned to him. [Revised Statutes, chapter XI.]

SECT. 63. The superintendent shall devote his time to the improvement of common schools and the promotion of the general interests of education in this state. He shall carefully investigate the operation of our school laws; collect information in regard to the arrangement of school districts, the location and construction of school-houses, and the use of the best school apparatus; consult and advise with superintending school committees on the selection of text books adapted to the wants of schools, and on the methods of ascertaining the qualifications of teachers, and of visiting and examining schools; inquire into the most approved modes of teaching, and the best means of training and qualifying teachers for their duties; examine the returns made by superintending school committees to the office of the secretary of state, and obtain from them such facts and statistics as may be useful, and in general, procure information from every available source for the improvement of common schools.

SECT. 64. By correspondence with teachers, school officers, and others, and by public addresses from time to time in different parts of the state, he shall endeavor to disseminate the information he has acquired, and awaken a more general interest in public education.

SECT. 65. He shall prepare blank forms for all returns required by law, or deemed by him necessary, to be made by school officers and teachers, which shall be printed and distributed by the secretary of state to the superintending school committees on the *first day of October*, annually.

SECT. 66. He shall annually, prior to the session of the legislature, make a report to the governor and council of the result of his inquiries and investigations, and of the facts obtained from the school returns, with such suggestions and recommendations as in his judgment will best promote the improvement of common schools.

Section 68 of the same chapter made it his duty to "hold annually a Teacher's Convention in each county." By the Normal School act of March 20, 1860, these County Conventions were abolished; a fact which seems to have escaped the attention of the

gentleman who moved the order under consideration. The Conventions, which have since been held in various parts of the State, have been sustained by voluntary efforts of teachers and friends of education, with the co-operation of the State Superintendent.

The Normal School act of 1860, which was in operation two years, required the Superintendent to visit the eighteen institutions with which these schools were connected, during each term of the Normal Schools—to make examination of the course and character of the instruction, and to make such rules and regulations for the management of the schools as he might deem necessary—to prescribe the course of instruction, and notify the Governor and Council of any failure of the institutions to fulfill the conditions of this act. By an amendment of this act, approved February 28, 1861, it was provided as follows:

“SECT. 5. Should the institution designated as the Normal School for any county, fail to fulfill the provisions of this act, and should no other school in the county be selected in its place, the Superintendent is hereby authorized to hold a Normal Institute, not exceeding ten days, at any suitable place in said county; *provided*, he shall receive satisfactory assurances that not less than one hundred students desire to attend the same; and he may draw the amount appropriated for the Normal School of such county, to defray the expenses of said Institute.”

In accordance with the provisions of this act, Institutes were held in the counties of Franklin, Pitcataquis and Lincoln. This fact, in connection with the holding of the voluntary conventions, before mentioned, probably gave rise to the impression that the County Conventions of former years are still in existence.

By the act of February 10, 1862, abolishing the Normal Schools connected with the eighteen Academies, it was provided as follows:

“SECT. 2. It shall be the duty of the Superintendent of Common Schools to visit the academic institutions in the several counties, so far as it may be consistent with his other duties, and by lectures and other instructions to assist the teachers' classes there organized, in acquiring a familiarity with the best methods of instruction and school management.”

In the following section it was made his further duty to institute inquiries looking to the future establishment of Normal Schools. The results of his inquiries are embodied in his report just issued.

The labors thus assigned to the Superintendent by the original act and by subsequent legislation, appear to your Committee to be very important, and sufficient to occupy very profitably his entire time.

We find in his report of last year the following remarks, in answer to the inquiry, "*What has the Superintendent to do?*" He says: "I should prefer, for obvious reasons, to make no mention of my official labors. But these inquiries are so often made, either in the spirit of a laudable curiosity, or from a worthy sense of responsibility to guard well the public interests, that I am disposed to furnish the desired information, so far as may seem necessary, for the enlightenment of persons not conversant with educational affairs." After referring to the subsequent acts, enumerated above, he remarks:

"The duties, thus set forth, might well occupy the whole time and strength of three men instead of one. The corresponding duties in Massachusetts employ at least four times the number of persons, at six or eight times the expense. It is safe to suppose that the time of one man in our larger territory must be fully occupied, and much work be left undone which ought to be performed. Such has been my experience. My labors have known no cessation from the year's beginning to its end, save the occasional respite of a few days, to gather strength for their renewal. Three-fourths of this time have been spent away from home in visiting schools, conducting institutes, and lecturing upon topics of education, or in examining the returns made to the Secretary's office and preparing an epitome of the same for my report. The preparation of the statistical tables, in itself the work of several weeks for one person, has been done by my own hand or by clerks paid from my own pocket.

The examination, sifting, revising and arranging of the town reports is no inconsiderable labor; and the preparation of my own report proper, involves a larger expenditure of time than persons unacquainted with such labors might at first suppose. The remaining time has been given to the constant correspondence already alluded to, and the other writing necessarily appertaining to my position.

In the lectures and addresses required before various popular audiences, institutes and schools, it has been necessary to present a great variety of topics, really requiring much more time for preparation than it has been possible to find.

In the further "endeavor to disseminate the information acquired, and to awaken a more general interest in public education," I have made such use as I might of the public press; communicating many articles upon educational topics to the "Maine Teacher" and various weekly journals; thus hoping to reach and possibly to stimulate by means of the pen some persons whom I could not reach by the living voice."

So much for the statement of the Superintendent. Let us examine some of these points more fully.

During the first two years of the present incumbent's service, we learn that he visited the institutions designated as Normal Schools twice in each year, while in operation as such, discharging toward them the duties required by law. To do this involved a circuitous and indirect travel of many hundreds of miles, across the length and breadth of our large territory. Since the discontinuance of the Normal Schools by the act of last year, his special labors have been somewhat modified; many of these academic institutions receiving his visits, as required by the provisions of the new statute. His general labors, as designated in the original act, have constantly increased. For example: the last year, in compliance with an amendment of the school law, the town committees are required to send their reports to the Superintendent for his examination, whether those reports are printed or not. As a consequence, a much larger number than ever before, and very many of them in manuscript, have been received at his office. To examine all these reports, and to draw from them such statements and suggestions as would be useful to circulate through the State in his own report, and to classify and arrange them under their appropriate heads, with the necessity of shaping many of them for publication, must be the labor of several weeks. The examination of the *returns* made to the office of Secretary of State, and the preparation of the statistical tables, is a different labor, requiring still more time to perform it.

Take another item of duty required by the statute. "*He shall inquire into the most approved modes of teaching, and the best means of training and qualifying teachers for their duties;*" "*and in general procure information from every available source for the improvement of Common Schools.*" To meet this requirement the Superintendent should devote a portion of his time to reading the various educational publications of other States, periodicals, reports,

and essays upon the art and science of teaching. He should also visit the Normal and other schools of best reputation, to learn their methods of school training. This, we find upon inquiry, he has done, as far as his time and the means at his disposal would allow ; having visited the Normal Schools in the other New England States and in the British Provinces, to learn from them any new methods of teaching and of training teachers.

The next Section, 64, requires that he shall endeavor to disseminate the information thus acquired, by correspondence with school officers, by public addresses, &c. The correspondence with school officers is a very considerable item of his duties. Something of the nature of this correspondence is indicated in a section of his last year's report, under the head of "*Queries and Replies*," commencing with page 48. It will there be seen that questions of school management—interpretation of school laws—proper use of school money—duties of agents—causes for which a teacher may be expelled—and the authority of committees in managing school affairs—are among the inquiries directed to the Superintendent ; some of which require time to investigate, in order that the advice given may be in accordance with law.

#### PUBLIC ADDRESSES

are named in the statute as among the means by which the Superintendent "shall endeavor to awaken a more general interest in public education." We have thought it proper in this investigation to inquire of the Superintendent in regard to the occasions on which he has been called to make such addresses. We learn that in addition to the many familiar addresses made in schools and at evening gatherings of the people, he has had occasion to prepare special lectures for more formal occasions, such as school conventions, the dedication of school-houses, the State Teachers' Association, the medical school at Brunswick, &c. The preparation of new and different lectures for many of these occasions must have occupied several weeks of time. We find the Superintendent has devoted still another portion of his time to the preparation of numerous articles for the press. He has thought it wise to aid in sustaining a monthly publication for teachers, which serves as an excellent medium of communication between himself and teachers and school officers throughout the State.



Your committee are aware that these services are not such as attract public attention, and make a marked impression on the public mind. We regret to say that all questions of education fail to interest the community as they should. Our business men generally, traders, lawyers, lumbermen and politicians, scarcely give any heed to schools, or teachers, or lectures on education. What may be done, or left undone, on these subjects they do not often concern themselves to know. But the fact that such labors escape their notice, does not disprove their importance and value.

The office of State Superintendent is the only proper expression of the State's connection with, and authority over the school affairs of the towns. The State has enacted laws for the regulation of school affairs. The State annually distributes a large bounty among the schools, and requires annual returns of the expenditure of its money, and the condition and progress of the schools, with certain penalties attached for failure to make these returns. By the feeling of responsibility to the State something more of promptness and efficiency in school management is doubtless felt among town officers.

Your committee regard as a prime condition of highest success in our schools, a more watchful supervision of their interests, by both state and town authorities. The expenditure of money, and the employment of labor, in schools as in all other business, requires oversight and accountability ; and we do not hesitate to say that a large fraction of our school money is squandered every year, from this very want of care, or from incompetency, in those who have the direction of its expenditure. For abundant proof of this point we refer you to the section of the Superintendent's recent Report, entitled "*Our Glory and our Shame.*"

We need then most assuredly some officer who shall represent and enforce the State's supervision over the schools which exist by its laws, and receive its annual bounty.

Your committee would take the liberty here to suggest whether the supervisory powers of the Superintendent should not be still further enlarged, thus rendering his services to the State more efficient and valuable.

In regard to the value of the Superintendent's Reports we have no need to speak to those who have examined them with care. They seem to us very carefully prepared, able and instructive documents ; doing credit, alike to that officer himself, and to the department of education which he represents. We do not deem it

improper under the circumstances to say, that in our investigation, in our necessary conferences with the Superintendent, we have had opportunity to examine several letters and notices from the best judges at home and abroad, which are in a high degree complimentary to the skill and ability with which these Reports are drawn up.

We learn also that these Reports are eagerly sought for by the teachers and active friends of education throughout the State; the number printed never being sufficient to supply the demand.

Not less kindly appreciated and highly valued have been his services in the conventions and schools where he has labored, as we have occasion to know from various testimony. And the only complaint from any quarter seems to be that services so important cannot be rendered in many places at the same time. We have reason to believe, however, that in this respect he has done what he could with the time and means at his disposal.

In reviewing the whole subject, considering the large amount of money annually distributed by the State to the several towns, amounting, the past year, to nearly \$88,000, and the necessity of some proper connection between the State and the sharers of its bounty, and the necessity also of a proper supervision of all our educational affairs, your committee can only come to the conclusion that the office of Superintendent of Common Schools, cannot be dispensed with, without injury to the educational interests of the State, too great to justify the measure.

We therefore report upon the Order referred to us, "Legislation inexpedient."

For the Committee.

GEORGE B. BARROWS,  
CORNELIUS STONE,  
OSGOOD N. BRADBURY.

## STATE OF MAINE.

IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, }  
February 20, 1863. }

Presented by Mr. STONE of Jay, and on motion of Mr. KINGSBURY of Portland, laid upon the table and 350 copies ordered to be printed for the use of the Legislature.

CHARLES A. MILLER, *Clerk.*