

Solving America's 'Teacher Problem'



by Roscoe L. West

President of the College from 1930–57

Editor's Note: In recognition of our 150th, we thought it useful to recall why the College was established in the first place, and what it meant for the development of public education in America. This essay is a chapter titled "The Teacher Problem" from Elementary Education in New Jersey: A History, authored by West and published in 1964 under the authority of the New Jersey Tercentenary Commission. It is reprinted with the permission of West's estate.

It has already been noted that in the colonial days, in addition to the schools maintained by the religious sects, two other kinds of schools developed—the "Dame school" in a home and the district school maintained in a building, often contributed by a group or by an individual and made available for school uses. Parents had to pay tuition in the "Dame school," which was really a private school. In the district school, maintained by the voters, fees were also paid, sometimes supplemented by money voted by the citizens. The teacher in the Dame school was the matron of the household who had enough education to teach the pupils the rudiments offered. The district school had great difficulty in finding teachers and would often advertise in the newspapers for a suitable instructor. The following, which appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on December 11, 1755, is typical:

Wanted—A sober person that is capable of teaching a School; such an one, coming well recommended, may find

encouragement by applying to David Stratton of Evesham in the County of Burlington, West New Jersey.

The Trustees hired the teachers who, without examination or license, started on the appointed day to "keep school" as their work was called. The schools that could pay the largest compensation got the best teachers, and the poorer districts had to take what came to them.

Teachers would often stay for a single quarter and then leave for a better position or some other kind of work, so that a given school might have several teachers in a year. No marked changes occurred in this general scheme through the entire eighteenth century except that a few teachers educated in New England came into the schools of New Jersey. These men had sometimes had part or all of a college education but had had no special training for teaching.

Another type of school, known as the Lancasterian school, made its appearance in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. It derived its name from Joseph Lancaster, an Englishman who invented and promoted the idea of having a large number of pupils under one teacher, with older, brighter boys being assigned as "monitors" to hear groups of about ten younger children recite their lessons. The teacher would instruct the monitors and then a monitor would instruct a group according to what he had learned. Such a method obviously depended on rote recitations of facts that could be recorded and given to the monitor to check. Classes were inexpensive and thus appealed to the taxpayer.

Lancaster came to Mount Holly in 1818 and in the following year several teachers trained in New York came to the schools of Mount Holly. Other schools

in southern New Jersey as well as in New Brunswick and Newark adopted the plan. Although it did not have the merits of an efficient school program, the Lancasterian system did increase the growing appeal of free schools and it demonstrated the need for improvement in the education of teachers.

It has already been noted that the campaign for professional education of teachers was a companion of that for the free public school. As early as 1828, John Maclean of Princeton, in a *Lecture on a School System for New Jersey*, urged the creation of a school "to educate young men for the business of teaching." After the establishment of the State School Fund, the required reports of the town superintendents constantly reiterate the difficulties of securing decently prepared teachers and the urgency of having a normal school. Such demands grew more insistent during the 1840s.

Horace Mann had been elected secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education and within two years (1839) he was successful in having established the first state normal school in Lexington, Massachusetts. With him and with many of his followers in New England as well as New Jersey, the campaign for proper education of teachers was a spiritual crusade. They saw the cause of public education as a sacred cause, a grand campaign for democracy and humanity.

Said Horace Mann at the dedication of the Bridgewater Normal School in Massachusetts in 1846:

It has already been noted that the campaign for professional education of teachers was a companion of that for the free public school.

I believe Normal Schools to be a new instrumentality in the advancement of the race. Neither the art of printing, nor the trial by jury, nor a free press, nor free suffrage can long exist, to any beneficial and salutary purpose, without schools for the training of teachers. Coiled up in this institution, as in a spring, there is a vigor, whose uncoiling may wheel the spheres.

In New Jersey complaints about the lack of preparation of teachers were epitomized by Christopher Hoagland of Hillsboro in Somerset County in this report to the state superintendent in 1849:

From the examination of nearly 500 teachers, we had occasion to observe that while many were extremely defective in elemental knowledge, and depended, in their attempts to instruct, upon the textbook in their own hands, a far greater number were almost unaware that there is any such thing as tact in teaching, supposing that to keep tolerable order in school by a salutary fear of the rod, to hear a class read a given number of times in a day, to help a pupil do a sum in arithmetic, to hear a lesson imperfectly recited in geography, and to keep a writing book passably clean of blots, make up the sum total of a man's claim to be considered a good

teacher. Not one in fifty had read any book or treatise on the art and science of teaching, and many had never heard that there were any such works in existence.

Town superintendents in the forties and fifties constantly complained of the inadequate preparation of teachers and of the need of a normal school. From Clinton came this pungent statement: "There is but little attention paid to the qualification of a teacher, provided he is a clever fellow, and will work cheap."

Said the superintendent of Perth Amboy:

"Give us," the parents say, "abler teachers and we will support them." ... But where shall we get teachers, is a question of no easy solution. Our state needs an efficient normal school, to meet the growing demands for teachers of a higher order.

From Rockaway: "I almost despair of being able to bring about the very desirable result of having every school supplied with a thoroughly competent teacher."

The Belvidere superintendent wrote eloquently concerning the ability of the state to support a normal school. "Who shall establish such an institution?" he asked, and then answered his question:

None more worthy than New Jersey herself. New Jersey, FREE FROM DEBT, relieved from taxation, rich in agricultural resources, situated between two of the best markets in these United States, and perfectly easy of access—what is there to hinder her from adding another wreath to her already immortal fame?

Why was it 'Normal'?

Ever wonder about the origin of the phrase "normal school"—as in our original name of The New Jersey State Normal School?

Was it a subtle way to suggest that other types of schools were strange, or subnormal perhaps?

Dictionaries suggest a French connection. The first use of the term in American English is said to be in 1839 when Horace Mann, then secretary of the brand-new Massachusetts State Board of Education, was promoting a new type of school designed specifically to instruct young men and women in the skills required to teach, especially the elementary grades. The two first "normal schools" opened in Lexington and Westfield, MA, that year.

Mann, who had studied European educational systems, certainly was aware that France and Germany already had, for many years, state-supported schools to prepare their teachers. The first government-sponsored school appeared in France in 1794 and was known as the "école (school) normale." The second word derived from the Latin *norma*, meaning a carpenter's or mason's square. The French thus named their school to suggest it as a pattern or standard for other schools yet to come.

Bruce VanDusen

In many of the counties, the freeholders neglected to appoint examiners, as the law provided, and when the district trustees hired teachers, several weeks would often elapse before the teacher went to the town superintendent to be licensed. Obviously, the latter could hardly refuse, except in very unusual cases.

As a substitute for an institution for the education of teachers, associations of teachers were formed and county institutes organized. The first meeting was held in Somerville in the fall of 1851 with speakers from Connecticut and Massachusetts as well as local people. It was attended by 62 teachers and was said by the state superintendent to have been a "glorious meeting." Specific instruction was given concerning teaching methods and there were general lectures on duties of teachers, how to handle problems of discipline, and accomplishments which should be expected of pupils.

Christopher Columbus Hoagland had been primarily responsible for this institute and in 1855 he was appointed the first agent of the State Teachers Association. Dr. Hoagland was to visit all parts of the state and "in every practical way to labor for the establishment of a normal school." Prominent men who were very influential in the campaign for a normal school were Principal John T. Clark of New Brunswick, editor David Naar of Trenton, State Superintendent John H. Phillips, Richard S. Field of Princeton, and Governor Rodman M. Price.

The State Teachers Association awarded a prize of twenty dollars to Principal Clark for his essay on education in the state. In it he said:

Surely, if anyone needs professional preparation before entering upon his duty, it is the teacher. We must have a State Normal School, with



a Model School attached, wherein our young men and women shall be fitted for teaching, in the same manner as persons are fitted for other professions—viz. by an apprenticeship, as a business for life.

After the establishment of the first state normal school in Lexington, Massachusetts, in 1839, three others were opened in Massachusetts, one in Providence, Rhode Island, one in New Britain, Connecticut, one in Albany, New York, and one in Ypsilanti, Michigan. The New Jersey campaigners used letters praising the work of these institutions and worked on the pride of their fellow citizens not to lag behind their sister states. Teachers from New England who came to New Jersey schools were also influential in the establishment of such a school.

Between 1850 and 1855, several conventions were held of both laymen

and teachers for the promotion of a normal school. Resolutions were passed and petitions sent to the Legislature. Finally, in February, 1855, a bill was passed and signed by Governor Price. Several communities made bids for the school site, but it was finally located in Trenton, and opened October 1, 1855, in a temporary building with 15 students registered. The permanent building on North Clinton Avenue, financed by citizens of Trenton, was occupied in 1856.

In his report for 1855, State Superintendent John H. Phillips, commenting on the establishment of the State Normal School, had this to say about its meaning for education in the State:

It is a remarkable fact that no state in the union, nor nation of the old world, has perfected its system of public instruction

without schools for the training and education of teachers, established and maintained by public authority; and it is no less remarkable that with nearly three hundred such schools now in successful operation in this country and in Europe, there is not on record a single instance, where the experiment has been tried under liberal legislative patronage, of the abandonment of this agency in providing good teachers for the public schools.

William F. Phelps was appointed principal. He had graduated from the New York State Normal School in Albany and had taught there for several years. The tradition of "selective admission" was established in the first year, as entrance examinations were given on November fourth (which was also Thanksgiving Day) to those who had reported on October first. Tests were given in arithmetic, geography, English grammar, reading, spelling, and penmanship. Some of the questions are recorded in the diary Mary Jane (Sergeant) Larison kept from October 1, 1855 to April 2, 1856, and they indicate how much emphasis was put on exact knowledge and how little on application of this knowledge to social situations. Many of our present-day high school graduates would find it difficult to answer the arithmetic and geography questions. All of the 15 students who had been in the school since October first and the date of this examination were allowed to remain.

Phelps believed that those who were admitted to the school should possess a good academic education, and he visualized the school as one which would train teachers in the theory of teaching and give them initial experience in the

classroom. It was not possible to operate within this framework, because the students who had been admitted were scholastically deficient in elementary subjects and much time had to be spent in teaching them the subject matter they were going to teach.

Some idea of what was being taught in the elementary schools of that era is gained by studying the curriculum of the Normal School. Under "English" was listed work in Sounds, Spelling, Reading, and Elocution, Grammar, Composition, and the Art of Debate. As "Graphics" were listed Penmanship and Bookkeeping; Object, Map, and Mechanical Drawing. As "Mathematics" the following were studied: Oral and Mental Arithmetic, Written Arithmetic, Practical Mathematics, Mathematical Geography, and Elements of Algebra and Geometry. "Natural Science" was composed of Descriptive and Physical

Geography, Human and Comparative Physiology, Elements of Natural Philosophy and Chemistry. The students, under the heading of "Ethics," studied Moral Philosophy, Natural Theology, the Constitutions of the United States and New Jersey, School Law of New Jersey, and the History of the United States. The "Theory and Practice of Teaching" consisted of Intellectual Philosophy, Study of School Systems, Lectures on Education and Details of Teaching and Practice in the Model School. Vocal music was given throughout the course.

Apparently no attention was paid to ancient or European history, not much to science as we know it, very little to psychology or child study except as it came into practice teaching. Art is not mentioned except in relation to drawing maps and objects. In her diary, Mary Jane Larison put down the program of

one of the classes in the Model School for a forenoon. The entire time was devoted to arithmetic, spelling, writing, reading, and geography.

One of the strong elements of the program introduced into the Normal School was observation of good teaching and practice with pupils in a typical classroom. During the first year, a so-called Model School was opened on the first floor of the Normal School. Later, having proved its usefulness, the Model School occupied a building of its own adjacent to the Normal School. This was the beginning of a policy which has grown in importance to the present day. The schools used for the purpose of giving actual experience to the teacher-trainees have been called "Training Schools," and later "Demonstration Schools," and sometimes "Laboratory Schools." Whatever they were called, observation and study of good teaching in such a school, and practice in the school or in cooperating schools of the State, have been keystones of the teacher education program in New Jersey in all its normal schools and in the development of the teachers colleges.

The period from 1855 to 1865 was one of slow advance in some fields and of difficulties caused by the Civil War. The original act had authorized the Normal School for a period of five years. Despite some opposition to it, the act was renewed in 1859 for another five years. A class of 32 (21 "ladies" and 11 "gentlemen") was graduated in 1858 and enrollment grew so that in 1860 there were 58 students (32 women and 26 men); but in 1861 there were only 18 women and 13 men because of the Civil War and attendant financial difficulties. As a matter of fact, many students left and went into teaching without completing the course. The state superintendent reported that by

the end of 1858, 264 pupils had been "admitted and instructed" at the normal school, of whom 32 had received the diploma and 114 had stayed for longer or shorter periods and had left the school without graduating. Most of those who left before graduating were teaching.

But the reports of the town superintendents indicate that a very large majority of them had high hopes that the normal school would in time provide them with well-prepared teachers. Several said that they could get some good teachers from those who showed up with training in other states or with some kind of advanced education. Many, however, echoed John Ford of Hanover who wrote, "We are still suffering from a scarcity of teachers of the right kind and from the still more frequent changes of those we had. It is becoming a more and more serious question: What are our schools to do?"

Ephraim Bateman of Fairfield said:

The teachers employed, I regret to say, are too many of them young and inexperienced; they resort to teaching as a temporary expedient, intending to abandon it as soon as a more lucrative situation shall offer. They are, alas! often lamentably deficient in much that goes to constitute a good teacher.

The campaign for the establishment of a state normal school gave an impetus to efforts in some cities to give professional training to their teachers, even if it had to be on a part-time basis. Newark started Saturday classes for its teachers in 1855. This was the foundation for what in 1878 became a one-year training school and a two-year school in 1888. It continued as a city normal school until 1913 when it became a state normal school. Paterson

In 1900, a two-year curriculum was established which continued until the state built the Jersey City Normal School in 1929.

started evening and Saturday classes in 1855. In 1882 this school had its first class of high school graduates; in 1897 it went on to a two-year course and continued as a city normal school until taken over by the state in 1923. Jersey City in 1856 began Saturday classes which lasted until 1879 when training classes were held in the high school. In 1900, a two-year curriculum was established which continued until the state built the Jersey City Normal School in 1929.

Although these early teacher-training classes were rudimentary, they served the purpose of establishing the case for professional training, they encouraged teachers to continue studying while they were teaching, and thus they kept their curricula close to the actual needs of the persons who attended.

In 1867, rules were set up by the recently created State Board of Education for teacher certification, in both county and state. Apparently impressed with past laxity, the state superintendent and the state board decided on rigid requirements as a means for improvement of teaching. Three certificates were set up for the counties: First, Second, and Third. The Second and Third were good only in the county where issued, but the First was good for the entire state. Candidates for the lowest or Third Grade Certificate had to be 16 years of age and pass examinations in orthography, reading, writing, geography, practical arithmetic, and English grammar. For a Second Grade Certificate, a candidate had to be 17 years old, have taught for one year, and have passed the examinations



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prescribed for the Third Grade Certificate with the addition of History of the United States, Bookkeeping, and Theory and Practice of Teaching. For the First Grade Certificate, candidates had to be 18 years of age, with two years of teaching experience, and have passed the examinations prescribed for Third and Second Grade Certificates plus examinations in Physiology, English Composition, Algebra, The Constitution of the United States, and the School Law of New Jersey. Ten questions were prescribed for each test. That these examinations were difficult is attested to the fact that even after ten years (1876), 25 percent of the 2,122 candidates who took the tests failed to qualify.

In addition to the county certificates, the State Board of Examiners also granted First, Second, and Third Grade State Certificates, for teaching anywhere in the state. Candidates for the Third Grade Certificate had to be 19 years old, with three years of teaching experience, and take examinations in Spelling, Reading, Penmanship, Bookkeeping, Geography, English Grammar, Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry, History and Constitution of the United States, General



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One of the strong elements of the program introduced into the Normal School was observation of good teaching and practice with pupils in a typical classroom.

History, Rhetoric, Mental Philosophy, English and American Literature, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Geology, Botany, Physiology, Theory and Practice of Teaching, and the School Law of New Jersey. Now, in 1867, for the first time since its establishment in 1855, the graduates of the Normal School were given this certificate without examination and non-graduates were given a temporary license good for one year.

Candidates for the Second Grade Certificate had to be 21 years of age, with four years of experience, and take the same examination as for the Third Grade Certificate, but the certificate granted was for five years instead of four. Candidates for the First Grade Certificate had to be 25 years old, with five years of experience. The same examinations as for Second and Third Grade Certificates had to be taken with the addition of examination in any three of 16 pedagogical texts offered. Each candidate also had "to deliver a lecture to a class on some subject previously assigned by the examiners, and to draw up a plan for organizing the schools of some large city." This license was good for life, and one might say that anyone passing all these hurdles deserved it.

In the ensuing years, some districts conducted their own tests for teachers in addition to those required for certification. The examination below was used in Hamilton Township District



1, in 1877, and was recorded in the minutes of the trustees. Sixteen candidates took this examination for one vacancy. It would be interesting to find out how many seniors in the state colleges and schools of education in the state at the present time could answer the questions in arithmetic, geography, and grammar in this test. It is quite obvious that, in that day, specific knowledge was considered a prime necessity.

1. a. Have you a teacher's certificate, or diploma? b. From whom and what date? c. What were your averages?
2. a. What experience have you had in teaching? b. When? Where? Grade?
3. In what grade would you prefer to teach? Why in that grade?
4. Will you accept a position as a teacher in any room in our schools, commencing next Monday, April 30th?

5. Would you be likely to be often absent from school on account of ill health, or other causes?
6. What mode of punishment would you adopt for misconduct?
7. What incentives for study would you adopt?
8. How would you teach morals and good manners in school?
9. What special rules would you prefer to adopt in the government of your school?
10. How should a teacher spend her time out of school hours?
11. Give the principles of Roman Notation and express 1745 by this method.
12. What part of one dollar is one-fifteenth of thirteen and a quarter cents?
13. If a brick is 8 inches long, 4 inches wide, and 2 inches thick, how many bricks will there be in a pile 32 feet long, 4 feet high and 18 inches thick?
14. Write a Sight Draft.
15. Give the punctuation marks, their names and use.
16. Define Simple, Complex, Compound sentence, and give an example of each.
17. How it rains! Analyze the sentence and parse each word.

Each candidate also had "to deliver a lecture to a class on some subject previously assigned by the examiners, and to draw up a plan for organizing the schools of some large city."

18. By what states is Illinois bounded?
19. Name the states bordering on each side of the Mississippi River.
20. What waters lie between Turkey in Europe and Turkey in Asia?
21. Through what Lakes and Rivers would you pass in going from Chicago to the Atlantic Ocean?

By 1880, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Normal School at Trenton, distinct advances could be detected in the professional education of the teachers of the state, but much remained to be accomplished. Enrollment had grown from the 15 entrants of 1855 to 199 in 1880. But only 36 are recorded as graduating in that year, as many left and went to teaching before graduation. Several city training schools were in operation and the system of requiring either county or state examinations for certification was well established.

Although there were a few changes, this system of county and state certification remained in force until the reorganization of the State Department of Education in 1911. Cities were also given the right to issue certificates good within their school systems. The graduates of the

Normal School received a temporary certificate, which was good for life after the satisfactory completion of two years' teaching. In 1908 it was reported that of 10,602 teachers, 2,759 had county certificates of various grades, 3,566 state certificates, and 4,277 city certificates. That it was not easy to pass the examination is shown by the fact that, in the same year, out of 1,745 candidates for county certificates, 1,136 were granted certificates and 609 failed. The principles of certification had been advanced and the ground laid for new rules more in tune with the advancing standards of education and the increasing differentiation of school positions.

That much had to be done to provide well-trained teachers for the entire state is shown by the small number who completed the Normal School course in 1880. Although there was a total enrollment of 291, only 37 graduated from both the February and June classes. W. A. Whitehead, president of the Board of Trustees, said in his report of that year, "The demand for graduates is increasing as they generally not only give satisfaction but manifest superior abilities for work in the schoolroom

and make full returns for their obligations to the state." The 37 graduates came from 13 counties: Mercer (7), Burlington (3), Somerset (3), Essex (3), Bergen (3), Gloucester (2), Sussex (2), Hunterdon (2), Warren (2), Cumberland (2), Union (2), Middlesex (1), Salem (1), and four were listed as out of state. Eight counties were not represented at all.

It is evident from the reports of the superintendents that most of the graduates went to the cities and large towns and that the rural areas were still suffering from a lack of adequately trained teachers. In 1881 State Superintendent Apgar reported that out of 3,486 teachers in the state, 238 were graduates of the Normal School and 138 others had had some work there. This meant that approximately 7 percent of the teachers employed in that year were graduates and 4 percent had left to teach before graduating, thus making 11 percent in all who had had teacher preparation in the Normal School.

The principles of teacher education had been established and a certification method authorized to set up standards for those who did not attend a normal school. It took many more years to secure sufficient facilities to educate even for two years beyond the high school level the number of teachers needed by the state each year, and to establish a demand backed up by proper salary which would induce young people to become teachers and secure the proper training for this profession.

