

THE  
STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE  
OF COLORADO

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The  
Consolidation of Rural  
Schools

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THE PRESENT STATUS OF THE  
MOVEMENT

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**In all publications of this Institution the spelling recommended by the  
Simplified Spelling Board is employed.**

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**D. D. HUGH,  
Dean of the Training Department**

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# THE PRESENT STATUS OF THE MOVEMENT FOR THE CONSOLIDATION OF RURAL SCHOOLS.

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## THE PROBLEM.

That this is a time of special interest and unrest in regard to matters educational most intelligent persons are willing to admit. The prophets of education, with their generous visions of the future, sees emerging from what they are pleased to designate the present "educational chaos" a new type of school which will minister in the broadest sense to the educational needs of the people.

That some modification of our present educational machinery is needed is also generally conceded by the more conservative critics of our present system, but in some parts of this system the change is more imperative than in others. Nowhere, however, is this reorganization more pressing than in the case of the rural school. For various reasons the little red school house has been left largely untouched by the march of modern educational progress, and we are now awakening to the fact that it must undergo radical changes if it is to be made an efficient agency for the education of the young people of rural communities.

The necessity of this reorganization may be recognized more readily from a brief consideration of the changes that are taking place in rural life. The era of the sythe, the flail, and the ox-cart has long since past away. Improved farm machinery, facilitating the more speedy performance of farm work; better means for the transportation of crops, opening up larger and more remote markets and making the farmer cognizant of the larger commercial affairs of the world; increased facilities for travel and communication including the Twentieth Century Flyer, the motor car, daily rural mail delivery and the telephone, with their broadening effects upon the intelligence of the people; the need of more specialized skill and greater technical knowledge in various branches of farm work, inciting an interest in vocational training; the stimulus of a larger social life inci-

dent to the growth of neighboring cities and the more dense population of rural districts,—all these tendencies are helping to make rural life different from what it was even a generation ago. If the school, as is generally admitted, is not to imitate the cloister in its seclusion from the life of the community but is rather to be an organic part of that life, helping to stimulate and to vitalize its various activities, then surely the school must at least keep pace with the general trend of social progress.

To lift the rural school to its true place in the community no such effective means have been found as the plan of consolidation. The purpose of this bulletin, however, is not so much to discuss the merits of this plan, which are generally conceded, as to give some account of the progress of the movement and especially to indicate some of the means that have been found most effective in furthering the process of consolidation. The material here presented grew in the main out of a letter of inquiry sent to the departments of Education of the various states in order to secure material for a report on this subject to a local educational gathering. This material was supplemented by later correspondence with the same departments. The questions asked in the original letter, which largely determined the sequence of topics in this discussion, were as follows:

1. To what extent are the rural schools consolidated in your State?
2. How far is the plan proving satisfactory?
3. What are the chief objections on the part of rural school patrons to consolidation?
4. What means, legislative and otherwise, have been found most effective in securing consolidation?

Replies to these inquiries were received from almost all the States in the Union. Much additional information has also been generously furnished by a number of the State Departments most intimately connected with this work. To all persons who have kindly contributed to the collection of this data the thanks of the writer are most cordially given. Much of the material is printed in the hope that it may be a stimulus to this movement both in our own and other states.

## THE EXTENT OF THE MOVEMENT.

Thirty-four states report more or less consolidation already undertaken, and in a number of others an educational campaign for this purpose is being planned. Consolidation is now widely spread over the country. Starting in Massachusetts, the movement first covered the New England states and then spread west and south. Indiana is at present the state in which the greatest work has been done. Activity along these lines, however, is by no means confined to the eastern portion of the country. Northern states, such as Minnesota and the Dakotas, have made commendable progress; upon the western coast, especially in Washington, the work is being actively pushed; and many Southern educators are among the most enthusiastic advocates of the plan. It is especially interesting to note the activity that is being manifested in many states where no consolidation has as yet been effected. The following statements\* will indicate in a more concrete way the present status of the movement:

Alabama—We have barely begun, tho we are talking about it and preparing the minds of the people for it.

Arkansas—An adequate law has just been enacted, and the subject is being thoroly agitated.

Illinois—We have twelv consolidated schools.

Indiana—We have consolidated schools in more than one-half of the townships of the state.

Iowa—According to the school reports available from this State considerable progress has been made in the consolidation of rural schools.

Kansas—There are about seventy consolidated districts in this State and over forty of them are graded schools.

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\*These statements are copied in the main from the correspondence of some member of the Educational Department of the various States. Occasionally they are taken from the publications of these departments or are based upon facts supplied by them.

Louisiana.—The school officials of this State have been giving a great deal of attention to the consolidation of rural schools, and much progress has been made. Several hundred wagnettes are in use, and many thousand country children are being transported to central schools. We never let the interest flag but are constantly urging the country people to abandon the small schools and to place their children in consolidated schools.

Maryland.—In certain of our counties there has been considerable consolidation. Other counties have consolidated a few schools, while still others have done nothing along this line.

Massachusetts.—About three hundred thousand dollars are being spent annually in this State upon the transportation of children to consolidated schools.

Minnesota.—About a dozen consolidated rural schools are now organized in this State.

Mississippi.—According to a recent bulletin issued by the State Department of Education a very promising movement for the consolidation of the rural schools is well under way.

Missouri.—Only about a dozen schools have as yet been formed, but consolidation is the thing that we are agitating seriously now for rural schools.

Nebraska.—A successful beginning of consolidation has been made.

Neveda.—No consolidations have yet been actually made, but several are pending.

New Jersey.—There is some consolidation in every county.

North Dakota.—There are a number of successful consolidated schools in operation in this State, about thirty-five in all.

Ohio.—A recent report from the State Education Department gives 131 consolidated schools. Ohio earlier showed much enthusiasm for consolidation, but the work has not been so active in recent years. The cause assigned for this decline is lack of public sentiment and local leadership.

Oklahoma.—Some progress has been made, though compar-



atively few consolidated school districts have been organized. The outlook for consolidation, however, is very bright.

Oregon.—We have now several counties that have consolidated school districts.

Rhode Island.—Consolidation of schools began a long time ago in Rhode Island and has nearly reached its limit.

Texas.—In some counties much consolidation has been effected.

Vermont.—The rural schools of this State are slowly but gradually being consolidated.

Virginia.—The last school report at hand from this State gives 239 schools of three rooms or more formed by consolidation.

Washington.—We have 102 consolidated districts in this State, about 90 of which are consolidations of rural schools and the others are consolidations of rural and town schools.

West Virginia.—About ten consolidated schools have been established. The sentiment for such work is growing rapidly in this State.

Wisconsin.—There are about twenty consolidated schools.

## THE SUCCESS OF THE PLAN

More important than the number of consolidated schools is the markt favor with which they are being receivd in almost all parts of the country. Rural districts that give the new school a fair trial invariably refuse to go back to the old one. According to the extensiv investigations of Mr. George W. Knorr of the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., 95 per cent of the patrons of consolidated schools are enthusiastic supporters of the plan. In view of the fact that this school is now being tried in a great variety of situations—among the mountains and on the plains, in the colder regions of the North and in parts that have almost a tropical climate, in the arid portions of the West where the roads are usually dry and in the muddiest sections of the Middle and Southern States—there seems to be sufficient accumulation of evidence in its favor to demand for it serious consideration in many sections of our own State. The success of the school can no doubt best be gleand from the statements of persons intimately acquainted with its work.

Georgia.—In the main, it is satisfactory.

Idaho.—We are optimistic as to the outcome. We feel that consolidation of rural schools will do much to make country life broader and better and more desirable, not only to the young people who attend the school but to the parents as well.

Indiana.—The plan proves to be satisfactory in all communities where reasonable effort is made to have conditions satisfactory.

Iowa.—While Iowa has but few consolidated schools they are constantly growing in favor with parents and pupils. So far as I am aware no consolidated school in this State once establisht and put into operation has ever been abandond.

Kansas.—The plan is entirely satisfactory in every way.

Louisiana.—The plan is universally successful.

Maine.—According to an investigation made in this State a few years ago the local superintendents were almost unanimous in the belief that better educational results were secured by the consolidated school.



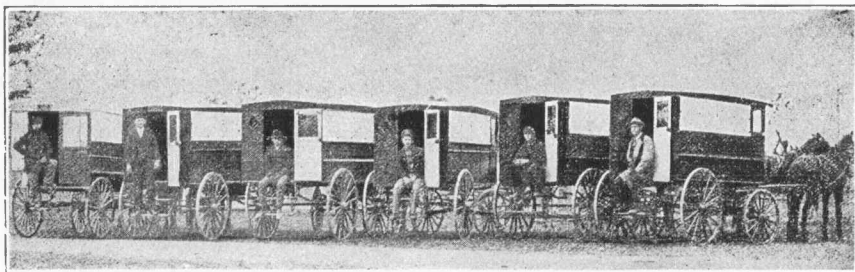
Loma Consolidated School Bilding, Mesa County, Colorado.



Unity Consolidated School Bilding, Pueblo County, Colorado.



Transportation of Children in Mesa County, Colorado.



Waiting for the Children.



Redy to Start Home.

Michigan.—The consolidated plan where tried is very satisfactory.

Mississippi.—Every experiment with consolidation and transportation in Mississippi this year has been successful, and there is now a widespread interest in the movement throughout the State.

Missouri.—In every instance, as far as we can determine, the schools are doing finely and pleasing the people of their communities.

New Jersey.—The plan is being extended more every year.

North Dakota.—In this northern climate consolidation may be carried on successfully where it will not be necessary to transport the pupils too great a distance.

Oregon.—Very little complaint is made, and some counties are more than enthusiastic about it.

South Carolina.—Where tried it is satisfactory.

Tennessee.—The plan so far as we have been able to work it has proved eminently satisfactory.

Texas.—Consolidation has proved entirely satisfactory.

Vermont.—Thus far the system has proved satisfactory.

Washington.—The plan of consolidation has proved exceedingly satisfactory.

West Virginia.—As far as I have made investigations this system is a great improvement over the work done in the single room schools, affording the advantages usually attributed to consolidation.

Wisconsin.—As a rule the plan proves satisfactory. It is rare that there is any market disposition on the part of any persons residing in a district that has provided for transporting the children of the entire district to return to the old system.

## OBJECTIONS TO CONSOLIDATION

The following are typical replies to the inquiry in regard to the objections to consolidation on the part of rural school patrons:

Alabama.—Some hold the erroneous view that a poor school near home is more to be desired than a good school out of the community.

Georgia.—The roads are frequently not good. Long walks for children are undesirable.

Idaho.—The only serious objection that I have heard has been the increased distances from the more remote homes in the district to the school building.

Illinois.—Some do not like to give up the little school close to their door; others object to having their children carried in a wagon with other children; but the main objection is the added expense.

Indiana.—The distance children are sometimes hauled is too great, or the team is driven too slowly, or immoral persons are permitted to act as drivers of wagons.

Kansas.—The objections to consolidation are usually fanciful and are due to inertia and a satisfaction, in a way, with the traditional system.

Louisiana.—The main objection has been bad roads; now, however, the people of the state are thoroughly awake to the necessity of good roads and are building them every day. This helps the consolidation movement.

Michigan.—The chief objection to consolidation is that the children are obliged to leave home so early and to return so late.

Missouri.—There are no well defined objections to consolidation. The natural conservatism of country people, especially in communities that have been settled for years and have become accustomed to the existing order of things, and the fact that we have as yet no law allowing the use of public funds for the transportation of pupils, account for the smallness of the number of consolidated schools in this state.



North Dakota.—In this climate, the distance which must be traversed is a very material factor.

Nevada.—Loss of identity and of local convenience and control.

Tennessee.—If the school has been in the community for many years, there is a sentiment in favor of its continuance that is hard to overcome.

Utah.—Opposition usually comes from school trustees who are loath to give up their office and surrender the school of the district to the supervision of those who live elsewhere.

Wisconsin.—The chief objections on the part of rural school districts to consolidation is that portions of the territory united may suffer at the hands of the stronger central portion of the district.

While a number of objections to consolidation exist it must not be supposed that people who have tried the plan are dissatisfied with it. On the contrary, as has already been pointed out, the patrons of consolidated schools are almost unanimous in their favor. The objections come from the small minority of patrons or from those who have had no experience with such schools. Taking these objections, however, as they stand, we find upon closer analysis that they resolve themselves for the most part into the following:

1. Bad roads.
2. Long hours for children to be absent from home.
3. Local pride and fear of loss of prestige through removal of school.
4. Dislike of trying something new.
5. Increased expenditure.

It is significant to note that no objection is raised to the educational efficiency of the consolidated school. There seems to be an almost universal agreement that it is a better agency for the education of children. This at the outset is a great argument in its favor. All the objections urged against it have reference to physical or economic considerations or to the inertia of human nature.

Among the most serious obstacles, however, in the way of effecting the consolidation of rural schools are undoubtedly bad roads and difficulties of transporting children from the remoter parts of the districts. These difficulties will be somewhat lessened in time as better roads and better conveyances are provided. The automobile may yet solve the transportation problem for many communities. "But even if the roads are sometimes muddy," as an enthusiastic Southern state superintendent facetiously remarks, "which can stand it better, the child or the mule?" Moreover, muddy roads are not usually a serious handicap in Colorado. If children can be successfully conveyed to consolidated schools under such a wide variety of conditions as regards climate and roads as is to be found between the Canadian Provinces on the north and the Gulf of Mexico on the south, there should be no serious question about transportation in the more favorably situated portions of Colorado.

The additional time children have to be away from home under the consolidated school system cannot be considered a very serious consideration. We are learning in our city schools that half-day sessions, at least for the younger children, are almost as valuable as whole-day sessions, and it would seem that a slightly shorter day in a well-organized school ought to be of greater benefit than longer hours in an inferior school. As many consolidated schools make provision that a child that is taken ill shall be conveyed home at any time during the day when it may be necessary, any anxiety of the parents on this account is obviated.

Perhaps the greatest difficulties in the way of effecting consolidation arise from local pride and prejudice and from the dislike of changing existing arrangements. Once a school is established, or even projected, it is very difficult to get the patrons to give up the plan and combine with some other district. We are all more or less creatures of habit and do not take kindly to new ways of doing things.

"It throws light on a situation of this sort to reverse conditions. Suppose that consolidation had been the plan up to date, and that good graded schools doing high school work were

established in the country everywhere, to which children were transported regularly and landed warm and dry every day, requiring six to eight wagons for each school.

“Suppose then the proposition should come up to dissolve these schools; to build eight houses instead of one or two; to hire eight teachers instead of three or four; that each teacher should try to teach everything; that the children, even little girls, should walk thru mud and slush and in zero weather even as far as two miles or go without education; that under the new system all high school work should be abandoned. What then would be thought of the present system if it came up as a new proposition for the consideration of sensible men?

“The arguments for such a change could not be many. It might sound well to advocate the putting of these horses and drivers to useful work, letting the children walk, but to build eight houses instead of one and to hire eight teachers instead of three or four, all that a half dozen drivers and teams may earn something in other ways, would not seem economy. The schools would certainly suffer as would the health of the little children. Let him who has a lively imagination tell us what the mothers would say whose children had always been transported warm and dry, when it should be seriously proposed that hereafter the little ones should wade while horses and mules spoiling for exercise stand in the barns and kick the boards off for sheer amusement or lack of exercise” \*

As to which would seem the saner of these two propositions, no one need hesitate for a moment. But we have to recognize the fact that the small ungraded school usually occupies a position of advantage in any community by virtue of the fact that it was organized first. The people get to feel that this is the natural way to educate their children. Consolidation consequently has to work against the inertia of human nature, and it needs strong, enthusiastic supporters as well as the backing of an enlightened state educational policy to overcome this handicap.

That consolidated schools as such are more expensive than small district schools does not appear to be a fact. The con-

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\* E. Davenport, in University of Illinois Bulletin.

sensus of opinion seems to be that where the conditions are reasonably favorable to the plan, a consolidated school of at least equal grade of efficiency can be maintained without additional cost, and in many cases at less expense. It is undoubtedly true, however, that the great purpose of consolidation is to secure **better** rather than **cheaper** schools. The better class of schools usually cost more but it is because they furnish a type of education which the small rural school cannot supply. When we measure the value of such education to the young people of our country there can be no doubt that it is worth any increase of expenditure it may require.

## ADVANTAGES OF CONSOLIDATION

No questions were asked in the letter sent to the state superintendents in regard to the advantage of consolidation, as the purpose of the inquiry was rather to determine the growth of the movement and to discover what conditions were tending to promote or impede its progress. It may, however, be desirable in this connection to say something about the merits of the consolidated school as gleaned from incidental remarks in the correspondence and from the literature of the subject. Among the chief advantages claimed for consolidation are the following:

1. Better grading, and consequently fewer classes for each teacher with more time for each recitation. This is most important. So long as the rural teacher has thirty classes or more a day in all subjects and all grades there can be no real educational work.

2. A higher per cent of attendance.

3. Less tardiness.

4. The retention in the school until the completion of the course of a larger number of children.

5. A more comfortable schoolhouse and more ample grounds.

6. Better equipment.

7. Better trained teachers.

8. More careful supervision of the teaching.

9. Less danger of evil associations on the way to and from school. Occasional complaints are made about the lack of proper supervision on the part of drivers under the consolidated plan **but this can be remedied by a more careful selection.**

10. Better social spirit in the school owing to the larger number of children in the classes.

11. Possibility of a larger usefulness of school buildings as a center for the social activities of the community.

12. Opportunity for a broader curriculum, including the introduction of elementary agriculture and the manual and household arts.

13. Provision for suitable high school education within the reach of the children's homes.

The last three points are especially worthy of amplification as indicative of the newer spirit of rural education. The consolidated school is capable of becoming the rallying center of the social life of the community. There is a well-marked and steadily growing movement in our cities in the direction of greater usefulness for our school buildings. They are being utilized for entertainments, lectures, meeting places for clubs, and various social functions. It is still more important that rural districts utilize their school buildings in this way. The erection of a commodious school house makes this possible. By such means the social impulses of young people, which are apt to find expression in less desirable ways, may be diverted into better channels.

A still more direct result of consolidation is the enrichment of the work of the school thru the broadening of the curriculum and the stimulus of a larger social life for the children. One of the most characteristic features of the modern city school is the enlargement of the curriculum. For the old-fashioned course of study, consisting largely of the three R's, there has been substituted a more nutritious diet, including such subjects as literature, history, nature-study, art, music, etc. So long, however, as the ungraded school compels the teacher to fritter away her time in hearing daily a score or more of classes with a very few pupils in each, we must be content with a very meager pabulum for country children. The better grading of the consolidated school permits fewer classes, and the introduction of additional subjects as well as the more adequate treatment of what is taught. In the larger schools, at least, provision can be made for the introduction of vocational subjects, such as some form of handicraft, domestic science, and elementary agriculture. The school no longer maintains its monastic seclusion from the life of the community but becomes the organ for the expression and direction of the industrial and social activities of the neighborhood.

Another important advantage of consolidation is the longer time the children are kept in school both for grade and high school work. Biologists tell us that human development has been rendered possible by the lengthening of the period of child-

hood, and we may safely take the number of years the children attend school as an index of the civilization of a people. We are learning to realize that it is an inalienable right of a child to be educated not merely until he is 14, but until he is 17 or 18 at least, and that this education shall include for all classes some preparation for the practical activities of life. That an education of at least the present high school rank but much better suited to the needs of various classes of children shall be placed within the reach of every growing child upon as nearly as possible equally favorable terms is the great educational proclamation of the twentieth century. From such an education no child shall be debarred by accident of birth, by the fact, for example, that his lot may be cast in a remote country district.

Now statistics support the verdict of common observation that the little country school house has little attraction for the older boys and girls. Hence their attendance is irregular and upon one pretext or another they frequently drop out of school even before the completion of the elementary school course. For secondary education the district school can usually make no provision. Hence it fails to perform one of the most important functions of a public school.

The consolidated school on the other hand has been found to secure a much better attendance during the elementary school period and has been able to make provision for high school education for country children without taking them away from their homes. This is a most important matter. The different states of the Union are trying various ways to bring a high school education within the reach of the children of rural districts, but it is doubtful whether even free tuition in neighboring city high schools secures the desired end. In the first place there are indications that the children do not avail themselves in sufficiently large numbers of the opportunity, and, even if they did, the city high school is frequently not the best type of school for the country child to attend. In certain townships of Ohio with free tuition in city high schools only 2.2 per cent of the country children completing the grades were enrolled in the high schools, while in otherwise similarly situated townships 12

per cent of such children were attending the consolidated high school. \* The last word on the subject of providing high school education for country children has probably not yet been said, but the consolidated rural high school offers one of the most hopeful solutions of the problem.

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\*U. S. Department of Agriculture Bulletin on Consolidated Rural Schools.





## MEANS FOUND EFFECTIV IN PROMOTING LEGISLATION

This topic opens up the most interesting phase of the subject. That consolidation in many parts of the country at least is practicable and desirable has been abundantly demonstrated. The vital issue now is how to bring it about. Thru many years of undisturbed possession of the field of rural education the district school has become thoroly establisht in its position. It has acquired certain vested rights in bildings and equipment; thru force of custom it has aroused strong prepossessions in its favor in the minds of the people. However defectiv the system may be, it cannot redily be changed without some vigorous policy being adopted in its favor. The following statements will show what some of our progressiv states are doing in this connection:

Alabama.—Our county board of education have entire charge of such matters as well as all other details governing the rural schools.

Arkansas.—The district is the administrativ unit for school purposes in our State but I think the county system is the better plan.

Georgia.—The county unit system of schools.

Idaho.—The most effectiv means in securing consolidation have been mass meetings of citizens, conducted by some of the leading educators of the State. At such meetings the advantages and disadvantages of consolidation are freely discust and patrons are made familiar with the possibilities of the consolidated school.

Indiana.—The only incentiv we have in legislativ form is a provision that when attendance for a year has been twelv pupils or fewer, the school must be abandoned and transportation furnisht to all pupils who live more than a mile from the school to which they will thereafter be attacht. In this State the township is the administrativ unit for school purposes in rural communities. From what I know of the management of schools in states having the district system as compared with

the township system I am of the opinion that the township system is very superior in results attained.

Kansas.—The progress of consolidation is slow compared with its merits. The county system of school organization would give it a greater impetus than any other change.

Louisiana.—Under our law the location of school houses is determined by the parish school board.\* This body has authority to abandon schools and to open new ones at will.

Maryland.—The county is the unit of administration in this State. We believe the county is the best unit, under the conditions here. This plan is especially advantageous to the rural districts since the entire county is made the basis for the collection of local school taxes and also for the distribution of the same. A smaller unit would give us very good schools in the wealthy districts of the counties and very poor schools in the poorer districts.

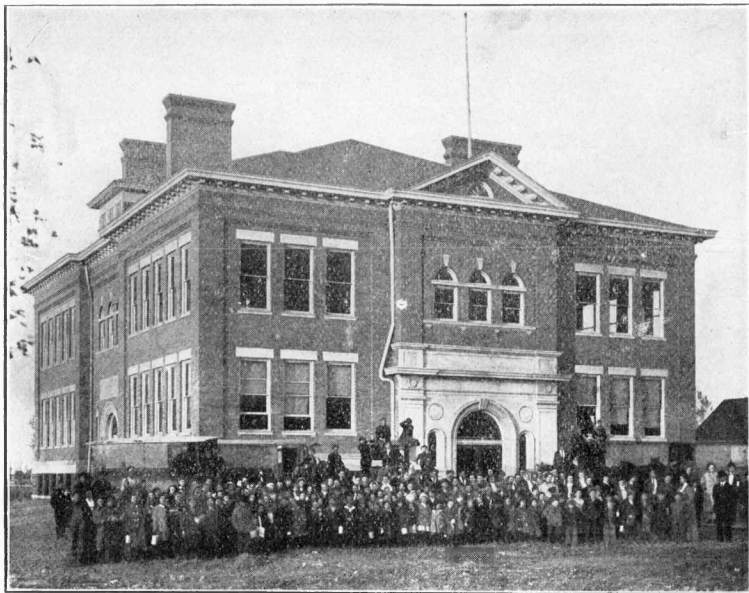
Minnesota.—Sufficient state subsidy to start and to maintain schools with a fixed minimum area and valuation for such districts. The last legislature passed an act making liberal provision in this respect. Three classes of schools are defined—those of four departments or more, those of three departments and those of two departments. The initial aid which the state has provided for schools of the respective classes are in amounts of \$1,500, \$1,000 and \$750. Aid is also granted by the state for new buildings, equal to 25 per cent of the cost, provided the sum to be paid does not exceed \$1,500. The experience in Minnesota tends to prove that consolidation must be financed and the movement acknowledged by the state, otherwise the communities are not willing to give up their small school units and to incur the expense incident to the change.

New Jersey.—Our State encourages consolidation by direct appropriation. The sum of \$200 may under certain conditions be apportioned to the consolidated district.

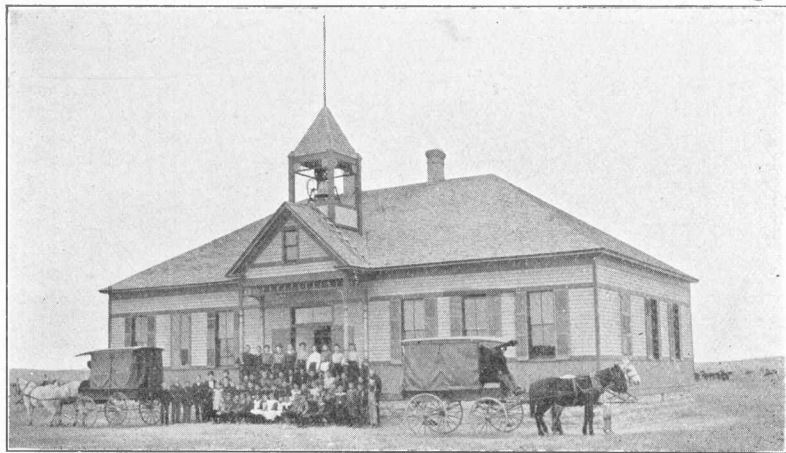
Oklahoma.—The Legislature now in session has a bill\*

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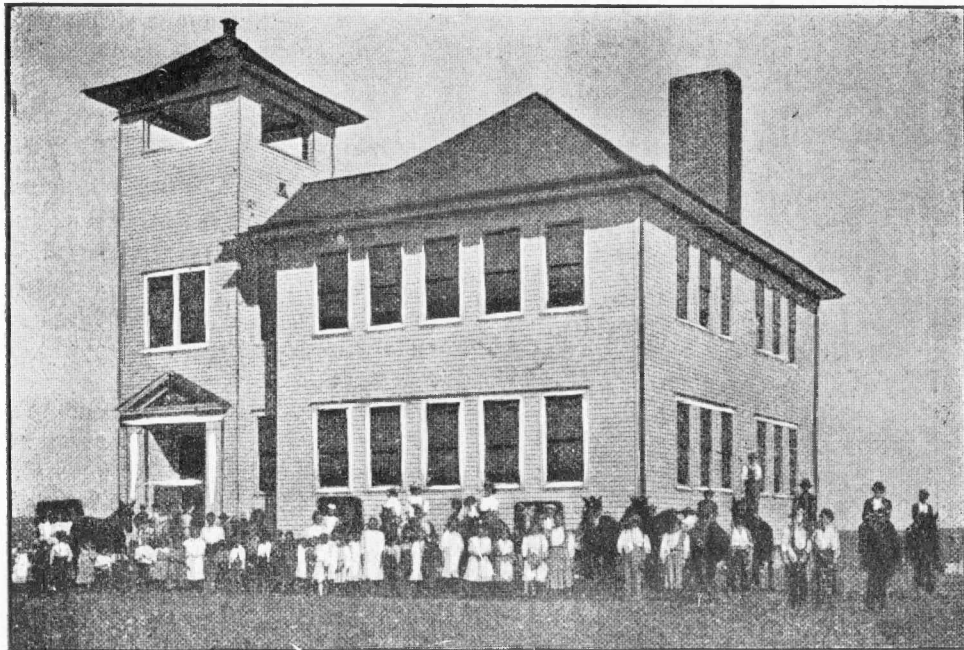
\*Similar to county boards elsewhere.



A Large Consolidated School Bilding in Indiana.



A Good Type of the Smaller Consolidated School Blding.



One of the Consolidated School Buildings of which Nebraska is Proud.



A Kansas Consolidated School Bilding.

pending giving state relief to consolidated schools. The House made an appropriation last evening of more than two million dollars for this purpose. If this bill should be ratified by the Senate and approved by the Governor consolidated schools will be the rule in this State, not the exception. In this State we have the unit in school matters in the small school districts. If I had my way, I would make the county the unit with one Board of Education, one member selected from each township and the County Superintendent as *ex officio* Chairman.

Rhode Island.—The unit of administration for school purposes in Rhode Island is the town or city. In my opinion the town system is far better for the administration of rural schools than the district system. In truth, in New England, if the district system had continued, many children would be out of school privileges on account of the decrease of population in some sections. Even a greater centralization may be necessary to insure a reasonable equality of education. I see little hope for the schools in some sections unless the state comes to their relief both in support and direction.

South Carolina.—State aid is granted to new buildings and to high schools.

South Dakota.—As the administrative unit for school purposes in this State, we have the small school districts. At the past legislative session a school code\*\* was introduced which made the county the administrative unit. We are strongly in favor of this both from the standpoint of economy and of efficiency.

Tennessee.—Our State has a law requiring that no school shall exist with fewer than a certain minimum number of pupils, provided the patrons served can reach another school. Another law providing for a county system of education instead of a district system has promoted consolidation very largely. Since the

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\*This bill did not become a law. The legislature, however, created a fund to assist in defraying the cost of consolidated school buildings.

\*\*This very comprehensive measure failed to pass.

county has become the unit, many of the small schools have been united into one strong school.

Texas.—Under our new County High School Law the county board of school trustees will have authority to consolidate any school districts either for general school purposes or for high school purposes. It is the opinion of friends of this measure that it will revolutionize the rural schools of this State. Liberal grants are made to these schools for the organization of departments of agriculture, domestic science or manual training.

Utah.—The organization of county school districts of the first class is effected in this State by the board of county commissioners under the provision of the law.

Vermont.—To a towns expending five mills or more of their valuation for school purposes and furnishing transportation, the State rebates about one-fifth of the amount paid for transportation.

Washington.—The legislature provides a bonus of approximately \$170 for each district consolidating less one. We have a county board of education as well as a district board. Personally, I feel that the graded schools of every county should be under the management of a single school board.

Wisconsin.—Special state aid is granted to state graded elementary schools. State graded schools of two departments receive \$200 per year special state aid; schools of three departments, \$300. A newly enacted law provides for the consolidation of districts by boards of supervisors and makes provision for transportation of persons of school age living more than two miles from school. The state is called upon to assist in the payment of the expenses for such transportation. Special state aid is granted to schools maintaining a department of manual training, domestic science, or agriculture. This may amount to \$1050 for all three departments in both the grades and high school.

These extracts are sufficient, I think, to indicate that we are entering upon a new era in the matter of the consolidation and the development of our rural schools. At first the problem



was to secure legislation to permit districts to consolidate their schools and to pay for the transportation of the children. A few states are not yet beyond this stage. In most cases, however, the problem is now to secure legislation to foster consolidation in various ways, to raise the standard of education in the rural schools, and particularly to introduce the teaching of subjects of a vocational character, such as agriculture, domestic science and the manual arts.

A brief survey of the legislation enacted by the various states to promote consolidation discloses the fact that four types of laws are employed for this purpose: first, laws abolishing schools having fewer than a certain minimum number of children in attendance; second, laws defraying in part the cost of the transportation of children or the erection of new buildings; third, laws increasing the area of the administrative unit for school purposes; and, fourth, laws granting special state aid to schools coming up to a prescribed standard of efficiency in regard to grading, curriculum, etc. The last two classes of laws are not designed solely, of course, to promote consolidation but they are a very great help in this direction.

The first type mentioned is the most drastic in its effects. Indiana is the most noticeable example of effective legislation of this kind. In that state several hundreds of small schools have been legislated out of existence. A number of other states have experimented with laws of this kind, or at least have made efforts to secure their adoption. While there are objections to such legislation, a state is no doubt justified, on the score of economy if no other, in refusing to grant aid to schools attended by a very few children when it is possible to transport them to a neighboring school. Statistics show that the very small schools are among the most expensive schools in the country, the cost per capita sometimes equaling that of college education. We not unfrequently hear of schools of three or four children for whose education the salary of a teacher and the incidental expenses of a school must be paid. It would be an interesting study to discover how much expensive education of this kind Colorado is paying for and to what extent it is unavoidable.

The second class of legislation favoring consolidation by means of grants of money to defray the cost of transportation of children and the erection of buildings is certainly a legitimate method of accomplishing the purpose in view. As will be noticed by the statements given above, several states have adopted this plan to the advantage of their rural schools.

The movement in favor of increasing the size of the administrative school unit is apparently growing markedly in favor. As has already been pointed out, one of the greatest obstacles in the way of consolidation is found in the fact that the people belonging to a small school district are apt to be averse to giving up their district school. There is a lack of solidarity of sentiment among the residents of the different districts on educational matters, and local prejudices stand in the way of an effective union. Moreover, it may not be desirable to have the boundaries of a consolidated school district coincide with the boundaries of any group of smaller districts. Could in any way these district lines be obliterated and all the small schools placed in charge of one administrative body the process of consolidation would be greatly facilitated. This desideratum is accomplished by any of the larger administrative unit schemes. There are several of these, each of which is capable of numerous variations: the township system of control, so common in New England and the Middle States; the county, or parish as in Louisiana, an administrative plan for school affairs that is found in many of the Southern States and which is gaining a foothold in the West; and the large combined school district, as is illustrated in Utah, formed by placing the control of a number of smaller districts in charge of one administrative body with powers similar to the boards of education in our large cities for the purpose of securing more adequate supervision and otherwise effective management of the schools of the united territory. The latter scheme, of course, does not necessarily include all the schools of a county.

It is not the purpose of this bulletin to offer any exhaustive discussion of the administrative unit problem, but in the opinion of the writer there is no doubt but that we need some modification of our present plan in Colorado. While methods that are

used successfully in one part of the country cannot always be relied upon to give equal satisfaction in another part owing to differences in local conditions—the size of the county, for example, in this case—there is no reason why a careful study of what is being done elsewhere should not be very illuminating to us in Colorado. After the results have been sifted out, perhaps some combination of the other methods would be found best for us here. Much of this investigation has already been made by the Educational Council of the State Teachers' Association. All that remains to push this work thru to completion, to see that the results are published so that they may be helpful in molding public sentiment in the right direction, and to endeavor to secure the legislation that is necessary to bring about the desired changes.

The fourth plan of fostering consolidation is one of the newest and most effective movements for the improvement of rural education. This consists in grants of special state aid to schools that reach certain standard in regard to the grading, curriculum, etc. This is now sometimes taking the form of grants of money for the inauguration or maintenance of departments of agriculture, domestic science, or manual training for work of high school grade. Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Texas offer good illustrations of this policy.

This plan is doubtless destined to do much for the improvement of our rural schools. There is much sound logic back of the effort. Many of the advance movements in education have needed to be fostered at first in some special way; and why should this not be true of improvements in our rural schools? We are apt to be too complacent about prevailing conditions. There is no good reason from the standpoint of educational efficiency at least why our system of pro rating all the state education funds among the children is necessarily the best. A judicious use of a part of this amount to encourage laudable educational undertakings might secure much more valuable results.

In concluding this discussion I feel that I cannot do better than to quote the words already italicised under the report on

this topic from Minnesota, "Consolidation must be financed and the movement acknowledged by the state, otherwise the communities are not willing to give up (at least to the extent demanded for the best interests of rural education) their small school units and to incur the expense incident to the change."



## CONSOLIDATION OF SCHOOLS IN COLORADO

It is doubtless appropriate that something should be said in regard to the status of consolidation in Colorado. While unfortunately not a great deal has been accomplished, a few schools of this type are in successful operation. The first case of consolidation known to the writer occurred at Fountain, El Paso County, a decade or more ago. This school is still being conducted on this plan with free transportation of children from the outlying districts. More recently consolidated schools have been established in the Unity District, at Vineland and at Rye, Pueblo County, and at Loma, Mesa County. In the latter county another proposition for consolidation has been favorably voted upon but the execution of the plan is unfortunately being delayed pending a decision of the courts relative to the legality of the election. In these two counties much interest in the movement has been developed under the enthusiastic leadership of the county superintendents, Miss Nellie Corkish and Mr. C. G. Sargent. Otero County is moving in the same direction with one school offering free transportation of pupils at Manzanola. In this county also, the County Superintendent, Mr. S. S. Phillips, is doing effective work.

Many parts of Colorado offer especially good opportunities for consolidation, and the movement should receive the sympathetic and hearty co-operation of all who have at heart the welfare of our rural schools. We do not have to encounter nearly such serious obstacles in the way of extremes of climate and bad roads as are to be found in a number of states where consolidation has made greater progress. Consolidation should be pushed with vigor in the counties adapted to it and should receive generous support from our state legislature. We need a revival of interest in the work of our rural schools. It will quicken our sympathies to keep in touch with what is being done in this direction by our more progressive states. Colorado, with its munificent system of public education should endeavor to keep in this respect as in others in the vanguard of educational progress.

### NOTE OF BIBLIOGRAPHY

The most exhaustiv treatment of this subject which has recently come to the attention of the writer is a pamflet on Consolidated Rural Schools and Organization of a County System, publisht by the United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Experiment Stations—Bulletin 232. The author is George W. Knorr. Many of the state education departments publish bulletins on the subject, copies of which can usually be secured free of cost thru the curtesy of the superintendents. These constitute a mass of valuable material on the subject. Those interested might write to the departments of education in the following states: Massachusetts, Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas and Mississippi. Numerous articles on the subject have also appeard in the leading educational journals.

