

**CHANGING THE SCHOOL YEAR: THE TEXAS EXPERIENCE IN
MOVING TO A TWELVE-GRADE ACADEMIC PROGRAM**

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Today's American public school student begins schooling with the anticipation of kindergarten, and perhaps some preschool, followed by twelve grades. The senior year is the twelfth grade, the traditional exit year for most students in most states. However, in the state of Texas, this tradition is younger than that of other states because in Texas, before 1946, there were only eleven grades. While official adoption of the twelve-grade system occurred in 1946, the statewide transition from eleven to twelve grades took nearly 20 years, beginning in 1927. This qualitative study used explanatory history to answer the following research questions: What were the issues and conditions of the educational community in Texas between 1925 and 1950 that influenced the decision by school districts and eventually the State Department of Education to change from eleven to twelve grades? How did districts make the transition from eleven to twelve grades when they adopted the twelve-grade program?

Under the leadership of Superintendent George Sims, Port Arthur, Texas, acted upon a recommendation from a school survey conducted by George Strayer, making Port Arthur the first Texas school district to move to a twelve-grade system. From there, the movement spread slowly across individual districts throughout the state. As discussion and debate over the change grew, the educators on the ground in the state of Texas—teachers, administrators, superintendents, and educational researchers, not state level authorities or the legislature—were the ones who eventually called for statewide change. The Texas State Teachers Association officially supported the twelve-grade

system and requested that the State Department of Education supply firm instructions for implementation. When the State Department of Education finally addressed the change to twelve grades, it did so gradually; after over five years of developing guidelines and encouraging state schools to make the change, the State Department of Education made twelve grades a requirement of Texas schools in order to receive accreditation. With the twelve-grade tradition currently undergoing national challenge, a review of the history of adding the twelfth grade seems to be a relevant issue to investigate.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my parents, Buddy and Patsy Phend. Their encouragement and confidence inspired me to begin my degree, and their account of their own transitions from eleven to twelve grades sparked my interest in this topic.

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I would like to thank my best friend and husband, Chris, for his constant support no matter what was going on in our lives. He listened to me talk about my dissertation more than anyone should ever have to. I appreciate his selfless generosity that empowered me to finish this degree.

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NOMENCLATURE

CETE	Committee on the Economy of Time in Education
CRSE	Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education
<i>DMN</i>	<i>Dallas Morning News</i>
NEA	National Education Association
SDE	State Department of Education
TASA	Texas Association of School Administrators
TSTA	Texas State Teachers Association

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Do high schools really need the senior year? This question has recently been asked by lawmakers, school superintendents, and journalists across the United States.

Background

In South Carolina, two state senators introduced plans to cut the twelfth grade in an effort to alleviate an \$829 million budget shortfall. Their reasoning: most twelfth-graders do not take a full load of classes, and students could take their senior year courses in summer school after their junior year (Crider, 2011). In Utah, a state experiencing a \$700 million budgetary deficit in 2010, Senator Chris Buttars proposed making the twelfth grade optional because, in his opinion, the state is “spending a whole lot of money on a whole bunch of kids who aren’t getting anything out of that grade” (Magloff, 2010). In Ohio, Superintendent Joseph Regano suggested that students graduate after the eleventh grade, while Superintendent Stan Heffner said that the twelfth grade is a “wasteland in need of an overhaul” (Plain Dealer Editorial Board, 2012). Former Superintendent Linus Wright from Dallas, Texas, said that the senior year is the most wasted year of school and that Texas should eliminate the twelfth grade (Golsan, 2011; Haag, 2011). Journalists offer their opinions as well. Some have said that seniors do not need to try for good grades during senior year because they have

already been accepted into college (Kirn, 2010), or that most seniors have already completed their requirements for graduation after the eleventh grade (New, 2011).

Early Graduation Programs

Early graduation from high school (and the subsequent avoidance of the twelfth or even eleventh grade) is encouraged in several states. A pilot program being conducted in eight states (Connecticut, Kentucky, Maine, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont) allows tenth-graders to test out of high school courses, earn diplomas, and advance to community colleges (Ruiz, 2010). This system is based on a “move-on-when-ready” idea (Dillon, 2010) that allows students to take subject area exams when the students feel they have mastered the material. This program is organized by the National Center on Education and Economy and is called “Excellence for All” (National Center on Education and Economy, 2014). While Texas does not currently participate in the Excellence for All program, the state is piloting its own program called “Early Readiness High School Graduation Option” (Texas A&M University, 2013; University of Texas, 2013). Beginning with the 2012-2013 school year, Texas high school students participating in the program have the option of graduating in less than twelve years. An increasing number of students consider early graduation, and those students who accomplish it have been rewarded monetarily with scholarships (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2012).

Such an emphasis on early graduation in Texas is historically ironic: the state powers that encourage early graduation today are the ones that ordered a statewide addition of the twelfth grade in 1944 (Woods, 1944a). In Texas, before 1926, generally

there was no twelfth grade. Once a student finished the eleventh grade, he or she could be a graduate of the Texas school system. In 1926, however, the school system in Port Arthur added a twelfth grade. Over the next two decades, schools across the state began adding a twelfth grade, with the superintendent of each school system choosing his or her own method of implementing the twelve-grade program. The move was hastened in 1941 when State Superintendent L.A. Woods officially announced that schools in Texas should have twelve grades, and published a plan of procedure in the State Department of Education Bulletin (Woods, 1941a).

Need for Review

For over two decades in the first half of the twentieth century, school administrators and educational thinkers in the state of Texas grappled with the issue of whether or not the state's school children should attend twelve years of schooling. After all the debate, the actual decision came from the bottom up, with the state board ultimately agreeing with the superintendents and principals who felt that the "modern world" required more education. Few people know or understand the issues surrounding this move from eleven to twelve grades or the process by which the change took place. This study provides an examination of these issues amid the current discussion in Texas and elsewhere about the possibility of eliminating the twelfth grade.

Literature Review

Public education certainly looks different now than it did in the 1940s when Texas schools were changing from eleven to twelve grades. The intent of this literature

review, therefore, is to place this study of Texas schooling within historical context. I will first cite literature that gives an overview of how schools are organized today. Next, I will address the history and development of grouping students in grades based on age. Then, I will look at literature concerning how grades were organized and grouped within schools, including a description of Texas's eleven-grade system before the 1940s.

Overview of Schools Today

Currently, the public school system in the United States includes early childhood education, primary education, and secondary education. According to the United States Department of Education, early childhood education can include nursery schools, prekindergarten, and/or kindergarten. The Department of Health and Human Services provides funding for Head Start, another source of early childhood education. Primary education in the United States is offered in elementary schools, intermediate schools, middle schools, or junior high schools, and secondary education typically refers to high schools or senior high schools (United States Department of Education, 2008a).

A commonality among all schools in the United States, be they early childhood, primary, or secondary, is that students are classified into year groups called grades. When students are promoted, they advance together from one grade to the next (United States Department of Education, 2008b).

History of Age-Grading

Even though the current system of age/grade advancement is standard in public schools, this format has not always been the case. Students have not always been classified according to a grade-level system. Authors Angus, Mirel, and Vinovskis (1988) traced the development of age-grading within schools. The following summary of their description explains that development.

During early colonial times, most children were taught by their parents or neighbors. Those who did attend school were either grouped according to individual intellectual and physical differences (not by age) or were all placed together in one room. By the nineteenth century, the number of public and private schools had rapidly increased and with the creation of public high schools, students, especially in rural areas, could be anywhere between the ages of 3 and 20 all grouped together. Then, in 1847, John Philbrick came up with a type of organization of schools called the “graded school.” In this system, the material and curriculum were arranged in sequence of increasing difficulty and students were placed into this sequence according to their level of past accomplishment. At this point, age was still irrelevant.

Under Philbrick’s system, students were promoted yearly based on their performance. With the passing of time, it became obvious that many students failed each year and left school in their teens, having only completed a few grades. In the early 1900s, school superintendents along with educational researchers such as Edward Thorndike and George Strayer began collecting data

concerning what age students were in specific grades. The result was the age/grade table, which, when compiled, typically showed high numbers of students who were over age for their grade. This age/grade table soon became a routine measure for judging the success of a school during the school efficiency era of the early twentieth century. School administrators were left with the challenge of finding the best way to organize their schools so that a majority of their students were at the appropriate grade level. A variety of techniques was used (e.g. special classes, ability grouping within classes, IQ testing, tracking, and curriculum changes), and eventually, with the Progressive movement's influence around the 1940s, schools began promoting students based on attendance and chronological age instead of academic performance. What began as Philbrick's idea of grouping students according to ability ended up separating them by age (Angus, Mirel, & Vinovskis, 1988, p. 211-236).

This system of grouping students in grades based on age is the foundation of school organization today.

Organization and Number of Grades

Students are grouped in grade levels based on age, but how are these grades organized in schools? Currently, public schools in the United States follow a twelve-grade system, and the majority of schools consider the last three or four years to be "high school" years. Such has not always been the case. By the end of the nineteenth century, United States schools with eight years of elementary and four years of high school did exist (Manning, 2000); however, in 1918, the Commission on the

Reorganization of Secondary Education (CRSE) recommended that schools change to a 6-6 plan with six years of elementary school and six years of secondary school. The committee thought that the eight years spent in elementary school under the 8-4 configuration were not effectively utilized, and that the last two years of these eight years were not well-suited for the needs of adolescent learners. The committee also stated that four years of high school was not enough time to cover its newly reorganized curriculum. The CRSE recommended that the six years of secondary education be further divided into two different three-year groups: three years of junior high school and three years of high school (CRSE, 1918).

The 1918 CRSE recommendations were based on the assumption that schools had twelve grades. In 1925, approximately 80% of schools in the United States had a twelve-grade program (Strayer, 1926a). Some schools had the 8-4 system, and some had taken the CRSE suggestion and moved to a 6-6 program. However, in parts of the southern United States especially, the prevailing plan was an eleven-grade system. While the rest of the country was discussing and planning how to organize twelve grades of education, schools in southern states such as Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, and Texas did not have twelve grades (Strayer, 1926a; Townsend, 1942).

Grades and Distribution in Texas Schools

On a national level, the United States educational system was not consistent since some states had twelve grades while others had eleven. Texas's organizational system also lacked internal consistency. Its eleven-grade distribution was not uniform across the state, as different districts grouped the grades in a variety of ways. For

example, some schools in Texas followed a 7-4 plan with seven years of elementary school and four years of high school. Table 1 shows this configuration and others found in Texas schools. The decision to follow one of these configurations was made by individual districts.

Table 1. Texas's Eleven-Grade Plans

7-4	5-3-3	6-5	5-6
7 yrs elem 4 yrs hs	5 yrs elem 3 yrs jh 3 yrs hs	6 yrs elem 5 yrs hs	5 yrs elem 6 yrs hs

Note: yrs = years, elem = elementary school, jh = junior high school, and hs = high school (adapted from Woods, 1936, p. 9)

Consistent with the idea of local control, the Port Arthur school system led by progressive Superintendent George Sims commissioned a district-wide survey, a common school improvement practice. The district invited George Strayer, a professor of education at Teachers College of Columbia University, to lead the wide-ranging survey. In his 1926 *Report of the Survey of Schools of Port Arthur*, Strayer suggested that Port Arthur adopt a twelve-grade system (Strayer, 1926a). Port Arthur followed Strayer's recommendation and thus became the first Texas school district to move to a twelve-grade system. Port Arthur students were introduced to a twelve-grade school system that would eventually become the standard throughout the state.

It would take Texas about 20 years to embrace fully this standard. Gradually, other districts followed Port Arthur's lead and began offering twelve grades of instruction. By the 1937-1938 school year, 13 other Texas schools had changed to twelve grades. These schools were located throughout Texas: Carthage, El Paso, Goose Creek, Iraan, Jefferson, Kermit, Lefors, Mercedes, Montgomery, Rankin,

Sheffield, Stinnett, and Saltillo (Parker, 1939). These 13 schools, along with Port Arthur, would become pioneers of that change.

Statement of the Problem

In the United States during the time period between 1925 and 1945, some states offered twelve grades of instruction to students and some offered eleven. The majority of Texas school systems only offered eleven grades of education to students. However, in 1926, Port Arthur schools added a twelfth grade, and according to a 1939 *Texas Outlook* journal article, at least 13 school districts in the state of Texas had recently changed to twelve grades (Parker, 1939). Since Texas schools presently offer twelve grades of instruction, we know that all schools in Texas eventually moved to twelve grades. So, what happened? What is the story? No comprehensive review or analysis of this change has been done by curriculum scholars or educational historians.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to tell the story of how Texas public schools changed from eleven grades to twelve. This study explains the events leading to, relating to, and resulting from the transition from an eleven-grade system to a twelve-grade system in Texas.

Research Questions

This study is historical in nature. The goal is to trace the events in Texas leading up to the State Department of Education's mandate that public schools require twelve grades. The move from eleven to twelve grades will be described in a

chronological manner. The following two research questions guided the study and will be addressed individually in Chapter V, Conclusion and Discussion:

- 1) What were the issues and conditions of the educational community in Texas between 1925 and 1950 that influenced the decision by school districts, and eventually the State Department of Education, to change from eleven to twelve grades?
- 2) How did districts make the transition from eleven to twelve grades when they adopted the twelve-grade program?

Limitations

The period of this study is limited to the years between 1925 and 1950, with the main focus on the 1930s and 1940s. The gathered documents focus around this time period as well. Because the change from eleven to twelve grades was not initially an “official” or organized event, but occurred individually in some districts, many decisions surrounding the change were not recorded. Therefore the literature, while spanning almost three decades, is limited and does not contain a thorough record of the change.

Another limitation of this study involves the availability of individuals who participated in the decision-making process of changing from eleven to twelve grades. The likelihood that these individuals are still alive is very slim given that they would have been in mid-career in the 1930s or 1940s which would place them over 100 years of age today. However, there are still people living who were students during this time who have memories of the event.

Theoretical Perspective Used for Research

The intent of this theoretical perspective section is to present and describe the type of research used in the study. Qualitative research, specifically explanatory history, was used in this study to address specific questions related to historical development of the twelve-grade system in Texas. First, I give a brief description of qualitative research. Then I explain historical research, the type of qualitative research most applicable to this study of Texas schooling, and establish why historical research should be used in this study. Finally, I present the attributes of explanatory history, a specific type of historical research that was chosen for this study.

Qualitative Research

What is qualitative research? Creswell (2002) defines qualitative research as “an inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon” (p. 58). In qualitative research, the researcher asks the participants general questions, receives detailed answers, and looks at these answers for evidence of themes (Creswell, 2002). While many qualitative studies involve interviews or observations to collect data, one type of qualitative research—historical research—collects artifacts, articles, and cultural materials as data as well as interviews or observations.

Historical Research

Historical research is defined as “the attempt to establish facts and arrive at conclusions concerning the past” (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1979, p. 312). Researchers use historical research to reconstruct “as accurately as possible the events of the past

regarding some specific situation or institution” (Cook, 1965, p. 15). This reconstruction of the past helps accomplish the main purpose of historical research, which according to Chandra and Sharma (2007) is to “arrive at an accurate account of the past so as to gain a clearer perspective of the present” (p. 343).

Conducting historical research involves searching for, locating, and evaluating evidence from the past. This qualitative method of collecting and preserving recorded and unrecorded information about the past fills in gaps that may exist in written records. Historians can then reconstruct the past and gain insights not normally found in more traditional reviews or summaries (Russell, 2007).

Historical research was chosen for this study because it is the most relevant method for conducting qualitative research grounded in the study of history. A variety of reasons support the decision to use historical research. First, an important concept in historical research is to understand that everything happens in context—nothing operates or exists in a vacuum. Historical research gives us perspective. Furay and Salevouris (2000) consider perspective to be important and that a “distinguishing mark of the good historian is the ability to avoid judging past ages by the standards of the present, and to see former societies (to the greatest extent possible) as those societies saw themselves” (p. 64). Cubberley, in 1920, also wrote of the value of perspective. He claims that “any adequate understanding of world practices and of present-day world problems in education calls for some tracing of development to give proper background and perspective” (Cubberley, 1920, p. ix). A look at the issues and conditions of society between 1925 and 1950 that resulted in the decision by school districts and the

State Department of Education (SDE) to change the length of schooling from eleven to twelve grades provides perspective and context for Texas's curricular change.

Another rationale for choosing historical research for this study is that this type of research provides a way of looking for answers to present-day problems. Tyack and Cuban (1995) say that "many educational problems have deep roots in the past, and many solutions have been tried before. If some 'new' ideas have already been tried, and many have, why not see how they fared in the past?" (p. 6). Historical research helps us understand the past by gaining perspective and helps us find possible answers for problems in the present. Perhaps Ravitch (2000) explains this best:

We cannot understand where we are and where we are headed without knowing where we have been. We live now with decisions and policies that were made long ago. Before we attempt to reform present practices, we must try to learn why those decisions were made and to understand the consequences of past policies. History doesn't tell us the answers to our questions, but it helps to inform us so that we might make better decisions in the future. (p. 14)

A historical study that explores past decisions and their results can be beneficial to those making decisions today. Knowing why Texas moved from eleven grades to twelve grades in an age when many are calling for a return to eleven grades is important and may influence present and future decision-makers of curriculum.

Explanatory History

Historical research can take many forms: from some of the more widely recognized methods (such as biographies and autobiographies) to less commonly known methods (such as life-course studies or evaluative histories). The form or type of historical research used in this study is explanatory history. In explanatory history, the

researcher is “especially interested in the causes of events. Thus, the question of why things happened in a particular way is the historian’s central concern, and that concern guides the choice of episodes, of people, and of significant environmental circumstances to include” (Thomas, 2003, p. 20). Explanatory histories usually include a researcher’s selection of material organized in a chronological sequence with some theory of causation that determines choice of contents. An advantage of choosing to use explanatory history for a study is that it provides “what many readers highly value—not just a description of happenings but also a way to account for why episodes occurred as they did” (Thomas, 2003, p. 21). A disadvantage of explanatory histories is that since the researcher selects which material to include in the chronological description of the event, the explanatory history is “inevitably an edited, biased view of the past” (Thomas, 2003, p. 22). In this study, triangulation was used to address this disadvantage.

Description and Collection of Data

Historical research is different from research in other fields in that the data are limited to existing documents and memories of witnesses. These existing documents can either be primary or secondary sources. Primary sources are original documents or “the direct outcomes of events or the records of eyewitnesses” (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1979, p. 313). Primary sources are documents that come from the time period being studied and give the researcher first-hand knowledge of the event (McCulloch & Richardson, 2000). In contrast, secondary sources are “removed from the historical event in time and place and often they interpret the primary sources”

(Rousmaniere, 2004, p. 43). Secondary sources are created after the event or time period being studied by those not party to it. Additionally, secondary sources are interpretations of historical events and are influenced by the author's assumptions (McCulloch & Richardson, 2000). Whether a source is primary or secondary is also dependent on the relationship of the author to the event. Because of this, primary sources are desirable over secondary sources whenever possible.

Most of the data collected for this study were gathered from a variety of primary sources. Annual and biennial published policy reports from the Texas State Board of Education were examined to piece together and document the history of the change from eleven to twelve grades. These records are housed in the Texas State Library in Austin as well as university libraries around the state. These policy reports, in general, are “not only extensive and revealing in their own right, but also include lengthy appendices containing statistical evidence” (McCulloch & Richardson, 2000, p. 88), which is helpful in establishing when individual districts in Texas moved from eleven grades to twelve. Another source of data was journals and newspapers dating from a range of years between 1910 and 1950, some of which are available electronically and others are found in the stacks or on microfiche in libraries. Articles from journals such as *Texas Outlook* and letters to the editor in newspapers such as *The Dallas Morning News* help tell the story of Texas's educational change while placing this change in context with what was going on in the rest of the state at that time. Other documents were accessed as well, including annuals, self-published materials, photos, and student report cards.

Secondary source data came from editorials in journals such as *Texas Outlook* and newspapers such as *The Dallas Morning News*, and books written by authors who were not involved with the issue either at the time or wrote after the events occurred, and reprints of events in other states that were used by authors in Texas to support particular positions on the change. Other secondary sources included biographies, encyclopedia entries, textbooks, and compiled histories of cities (Port Arthur) and organizations (Texas Association of Superintendents and Administrators).

Analysis of Data

The data for this study came primarily from written documents. The authenticity of these documents is important, and historical researchers use external and internal criticism checks as a means of evaluation. External criticism checks to see if the evidence is what it appears to be and internal criticism is an evaluation of the worth of the evidence (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1979). Whenever possible, written documents analyzed for this study were checked for authenticity (external criticism) and accuracy (internal criticism).

Content analysis, a “process of examining content and themes in written documents” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 314), was also used in analyzing the data for this study. The written documents pieced together a chronological account of Texas’s change from eleven to twelve grades and compiled information to help answer the research questions of the study. In addition, I searched for patterns in writing and any statements contrary to what others were saying during the same time period.

As part of data analysis, issues such as validity and reliability need to be addressed to ensure the rigor of any study. Researchers present different perspectives to describe the goodness of qualitative research. For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) use the word “trustworthiness” and refer to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Wolcott (1994) uses the word “understand” in an attempt to give a broader perspective to validation. I choose to follow Creswell’s (2007) suggestion that “authors need to choose the types and terms in which they are comfortable” (p. 207) and choose accepted strategies to assess accuracy of their studies. Some of these “accepted” strategies (Creswell, 2007) that I used in my study to demonstrate validity are:

- 1) Triangulation: Triangulation involves checking evidence from different sources to confirm a theme, perspective, or conclusion. I compared documents gathered from different sources in order to give a more detailed and balanced view of the topic.
- 2) Rich, thick description: Writing using thick, rich description means writing “detailed, context-sensitive and locally informed fieldnotes” (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995, p. 10). I wrote in this manner in an attempt to locate the reader to the time period being described, i.e., the state of education between 1925 and 1950.
- 3) Peer review: In a peer review, the researcher lets a knowledgeable person look at both the process and the written report to determine if the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data. I asked

individuals outside the study to review my methods and interpretations.

This enabled me to provide readers with more evidence of credibility.

These considerations increase the validity and reliability of the study, which in turn increases the likelihood that the reader can rely on my conclusions.

Organization of this Dissertation

This dissertation has five chapters. Chapter I covers an introduction to the study, which addresses current opinions on the twelve-grade public school system. Chapter I also includes the literature review, the purpose and problem statements, the research questions addressed in the study, and limitations to the study. Chapter II is titled “Below the Radar” and describes the first schools in Texas to change to the twelve-grade program and what their transitions looked like. Chapter III is titled “Ferment” and details the debate over eleven grades versus twelve that played out in journals, newspapers, and other written documents. “Resolution” is the title of Chapter IV, which shows when and why the State Department of Education finally took charge of the transition and what that transition ultimately looked like. Chapter V presents conclusions and discussion and includes a summary relating to the findings of the literature review, the significance of the findings, recommendations for further study, and concluding thoughts.

CHAPTER II

BELOW THE RADAR

Today, an American child enrolling in public schools can generally expect at least 13 years of schooling, beginning with kindergarten and culminating with the senior year at age 18. Although any number of variables could affect a student's progress—the possibility of repeating or skipping a grade, credit issues arising from transferring from one school to another, the differing requirements of public and private schools, problems that could arise from entering public school after a period of home schooling—the basic template of twelve grades of schooling has been a recognized sequence in much of the country for more than a century. This chapter traces the background of the existing twelve-grade system and gives a brief description of school surveys and their proponents. Finally, the first schools in Texas to move to twelve-grade programs are addressed.

Background of the Existing Twelve-Grade System

In 1899, Seely described the organizational structure of schools of several nations, and his description of the United States included an “elementary school having an eight years’ course which should be completed at fourteen” and a “secondary school with a four years’ course that fits for college or its equivalent training” (Seely, 1899, p. 312). This twelve-grade sequence that Seely described was the basic experience for most students throughout the twentieth century. Though generally accepted, beginning

in the late 1800s and continuing throughout the early 1900s there was much conversation about what schools should teach and how they should teach it during those twelve grades. Inspired by the philosophies guiding efficiency in business and in city governance, committees of experts conducted surveys in which they collected data and made recommendations for American schools. Watras (2008) noted that educational reformers such as Philbrick, Draper, and Rice “called for consolidation of the control of schools and subsequent increases in the preparation of administrators and teachers, the use of surveys to determine what changes to make, and the widening of the curriculums” (p. 172).

Late nineteenth century entities like The 1892 National Education Association Committee of Ten (which focused on secondary schooling) and the 1893 National Education Association Committee of Fifteen (which focused on elementary schooling), along with the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, did much to set the standards for twentieth century schooling, especially in the rapidly growing urban areas of the United States. As a rule, these commissions were chaired by university professors rather than public school leaders and were focused on preparing students for higher education or civic participation.

In 1902, President of the University of Chicago, William Rainey Harper, addressed a group of officials from public schools that cooperated with the university. In this meeting, Harper discussed the organization of grade levels in these schools. Among other issues, he hoped that since high school students passed through twelve grades, some of the curriculum in those later grades might cover material from the first

two years of college study (Watras, 2008). Eleven years later, in 1913, the University of Colorado president, James Baker, chaired the Committee on the Economy of Time in Education (CETE). Appointed by the National Education Association (NEA) to study both the appropriate length of time and the best sequence of instruction for American students (Baker, 1913), the committee recommended that elementary education should be for children ages 6 to 12 and secondary education should be for students ages 12 to 18 (Baker, 1913; Uhl, 1932). Though the committee studied how many years should be spent in elementary school versus secondary school, the twelve-grade structure itself was already in place (Baker, 1913).

Texas Schools

During the late 1800s, population changes increased the demand for education in general; in an approximate 30-year period, the total number of school-age children in the United States (i.e., children 5 to 18 years old) grew from 12,055,000 in 1870 to 24,263,000 in 1906 (United States Bureau of Education, 1908). As the number of secondary-age students increased, so did the need for secondary education in both public and private sectors. However, the southern United States lagged behind other areas of the country in terms of percent of school-age children actually enrolled in common schools (see Figure 1). The table in Figure 1 shows the percent of school-age population enrolled according to geographical divisions each year in the period from 1870 to 1907. According to the table, in 1870 the southern divisions (South Central, which included Texas, and South Atlantic) were averaging about 32% enrollment but the northern divisions (North Atlantic and North Central) had about 77% enrollment.

By 1907, enrollment in the southern divisions had increased to 65%, coming closer to the percentage enrollment in the northern divisions.

Figure 1. Percentages of school population enrolled, 1870-1907

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TABLE 6.—*Per cent of the school population (i. e., children 5 to 18 years of age) enrolled in the public schools, for a period of years.*

Year.	United States.	North Atlantic Division.	South Atlantic Division.	South Central Division.	North Central Division.	Western Division.
1870-71	61.45	77.95	30.51	34.17	76.87	54.77
1871-72	62.20	77.33	32.27	37.94	77.04	54.43
1872-73	62.36	76.79	35.86	38.67	75.97	57.52
1873-74	64.40	77.77	42.10	40.82	76.98	61.04
1874-75	65.54	78.59	44.61	42.47	77.54	64.39
1875-76	64.70	78.55	46.72	37.36	77.05	66.37
1876-77	63.92	76.83	47.02	38.51	75.60	66.12
1877-78	65.75	77.09	48.85	43.50	77.38	66.26
1878-79	64.64	76.18	46.72	44.71	75.28	65.63
1879-80	65.50	75.17	50.74	46.43	75.84	64.96
1880-81	65.03	74.28	51.49	47.03	74.59	64.82
1881-82	65.03	74.56	51.90	47.02	74.15	65.93
1882-83	66.39	74.15	54.30	50.68	75.13	67.05
1883-84	66.96	72.83	56.25	53.59	75.06	68.01
1884-85	67.96	73.23	57.17	56.57	75.46	68.53
1885-86	68.14	72.63	57.68	56.82	76.08	68.03
1886-87	67.98	72.23	58.98	56.21	75.77	67.97
1887-88	68.33	71.60	58.68	58.67	75.96	68.53
1888-89	68.20	70.60	58.40	58.28	76.63	69.39
1889-90	68.61	70.45	59.22	60.14	76.46	70.01
1890-91	69.40	70.04	60.15	63.01	76.25	75.49
1891-92	69.51	69.78	59.50	63.72	75.30	77.98
1892-93	69.70	68.99	61.94	63.92	76.23	77.16
1893-94	71.32	70.45	63.08	66.00	78.04	77.45
1894-95	71.54	71.53	62.21	65.83	78.17	79.32
1895-96	71.80	71.57	62.46	66.75	78.16	79.72
1896-97	72.36	72.12	64.49	67.75	78.06	78.27
1897-98	72.68	71.78	66.25	67.36	78.66	78.00
1898-99	71.96	71.69	64.93	66.54	77.75	77.85
1899-1900	72.43	70.86	65.73	67.28	78.65	79.51
1900-1901	71.67	70.71	66.65	65.22	77.36	80.69
1901-2	71.45	70.31	66.55	65.12	76.85	82.49
1902-3 a	70.67	69.84	65.99	64.60	75.49	82.46
1903-4 a	70.59	69.89	66.01	64.66	74.82	84.95
1904-5 a	70.35	69.88	65.02	65.15	74.04	86.41
1905-6 a	70.43	69.39	65.40	64.70	74.19	88.31
1906-7 a	69.88	68.70	65.27	65.48	72.86	88.69

a Subject to correction.

(United States Bureau of Education, 1908, p. 551)

By 1913, when CETE met, American education featured a twelve-grade system quickly evolving from the forces of consolidation and corporate efficiency. Such was not the reality in Texas schools. Before 1927, the year that Port Arthur would develop

the first twelve-grade school district, the question of eleven versus twelve grades was a relatively new one in the state. Early American secondary schools arose due to varying circumstances, but by 1883 there were only seven of them in the state of Texas (Eby, 1927, p. 835). Some secondary schools, such as Brenham High School (the first municipal high school in Texas, established in Brenham in 1875) (Manuel, 1927), were planned as campuses separate from cities' elementary schools. Later, larger districts such as Houston and Galveston opened high schools (Manuel, 1927). In other areas, secondary schools simply grew out of the elementary schools: "...only in a few instances were the high schools launched as independent units of organizations as in Brenham and Houston. In other cases they burgeoned by more natural process of growth out of the lower grades as an extension upward of the elementary course of study" (Eby, 1925, p. 25).

In smaller communities, high schools were difficult to establish. To inform its readers of changes, the *Texas School Journal* often reprinted articles from other journals in the field. One article, reprinted in 1883 from the *National Normal*, addressed the difficulties that smaller schools faced when trying to cover more than an eight-year course of study:

He [the country teacher] will see that, whereas, in a fully graded school, twelve grades corresponding to as many years can easily be provided for, in a country school of one room and one teacher, about eight years only can be accomplished. In other words, a country school, either of one or two rooms, should not attempt more than the primary or grammar work. ("Grading a country...", 1883, p. 208)

In his 1927 study of the eleven-grade system, H.T. Manuel relied on the *Texas School Journal* to trace the contrasting histories of urban and rural schools. The *Texas*

School Journal showed that the number of grades in school districts throughout the state varied widely. Manuel noted that in June 1884, W.J. Crocker (1884) wrote an article titled “A Course of Study for Country Schools” that outlined work for only eight grades. As late as 1892, the *Texas School Journal* published a proposal for a system of study in Limestone County providing for only eight years in a school that met only five months per year. Students were to be issued a graduation certificate after eighth grade (Manuel, 1927, p. 19).

Manuel also noted that just two years later, in the August 1886 edition of the *Texas School Journal*, he found questions from a high school entrance exam given to eighth graders in San Antonio—evidence that high schools existed in some urban environments. Manuel quoted another writer in the *Texas School Journal*, defining a high school as “that distinct department of public education in which four years of study beyond the grammar school is pursued, with higher mathematics, science and literature, for the purpose of rounding and completing the work of the public schools, or preparing the student for admission to the university” (Manuel, 1927, p. 18). The numbers of grades as well as the standards for those grades seemed to be reflective of the size of the community that a school served.

The variation in number of grades during the late nineteenth century is reflected in the *Biennial Reports of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Texas* authored by State Superintendent Oscar Cooper. The 1888 (Cooper) *Biennial Report* advocated an eleven-year system dividing schools into primary, intermediate, and high school levels with the high school consisting of three years. The next *Biennial Report*

(Cooper, 1890), just two years later, outlined a primary division from the first to fourth year, a grammar division from the fifth to sixth, and a graduation division from seventh to eighth (p. xlv). No provision for years nine through eleven was included. In 1888, eleven grades were recommended. In 1890, the plan outlined only eight years of schooling.

Cooper wrote in the 1888 *Biennial Report* that good instruction in primary grades should be sufficient for the equipping of students with skills necessary for good citizenship. He noted that because of variations in population and physical size, the inclusion of a high school in every town was not practical. He suggested that every county needed one high school for the education of school-aged students who were academically gifted and motivated enough to continue their studies further (Cooper, 1888). Furthermore, he argued that there was historical precedent for such a school:

The County Academy, for which provision was made by the Republic of Texas in 1839, was intended to supply this necessity. Provisions should be made for these schools, and children who are properly prepared should be admitted into them from any portion of the county in which the school is located. (Cooper, 1888, p. 6)

Despite the fluctuating standards, and despite the existence of only a few secondary schools, the State Superintendent had suggested a standardized format for Texas high schools.

Cooper's stance was not embraced by everyone. State Superintendent Benjamin Baker (1887), Cooper's predecessor, had argued against the public support of high schools: "Is the high school necessary to mould the character of citizenship mentioned? I believe not.... A knowledge of the branches taught in the high school may better

prepare one for advanced thought and exalted position, but they are not necessary to the performance of the simple duties appertaining to the citizen” (p. 11). Despite the opposition of people like Baker, during his tenure State Superintendent Cooper continued his support for public high schools.

As the population grew and shifted, making secondary education more necessary, every element of high school—from curriculum to physical plant—would evolve quickly but largely independently. Cooper (1888, 1890) indicated as much in the biennial reports, arguing that officials of local schools should erect and properly equip school houses, establish within limits the courses of study, and formulate the rules and regulations of the school’s organization and management. Through the next decades, local control created a patchwork quilt of Texas school systems.

Texas Moves to Twelve Grades

So how did the twelfth grade come about? In Texas, the “modern” era of the twelfth grade began with a recommendation from George Strayer (Strayer, 1926a). In his 1926 *Report of the Survey of Schools of Port Arthur, Texas*, Strayer made this definitive recommendation:

Port Arthur, in common with other cities in Texas, has an eleven-year school system. In recent years civilization has expanded by leaps and bounds and by doing so has placed such an additional responsibility upon the schools for offering wider and richer training that it is becoming increasingly difficult to complete a satisfactory task in eleven years. Already approximately 80 percent of the children in America are attending twelve-year rather than eleven-year schools.... Such a plan not only provides a more nearly proper amount of time for enriching the child’s school life but also makes possible a flexibility of program which is difficult to realize in the eleven year system; therefore, it is recommended that the twelve-year system be adopted in Port Arthur. (p. 239)

Under the leadership of Superintendent George Sims, Port Arthur acted on Strayer's recommendation, making Port Arthur the first Texas school district to move to a twelve-grade system. A document printed in 1913, *Course of Study for the Public Schools of Port Arthur Independent School District*, stated that "the course of study in the Public Schools of Port Arthur extends over a course of twelve years" (np). Whether Sims was aware of this document or not, he still relied on Strayer's survey and recommendation to move the district to a twelve-grade model in 1926.

Four years after his survey, during a meeting of the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) held in November of 1930 at the First Methodist Church in Houston, Strayer spoke to the state's administrators concerning school finance. Preceding him on the program was Beaumont School Superintendent, M. E. Moore, whose city was only about 15 miles from Port Arthur and whose school district was firmly entrenched in the eleven-grade system. The Beaumont district had commissioned its own school survey (Strayer, 1927), but Strayer's recommendation for Beaumont and the eleven- versus twelve-grade issue was that "certain problems arising from the eleven-grade system be given careful attention" (Strayer, 1927, p. 247). As such, Superintendent Moore kept Beaumont in an eleven-grade program. Though Strayer was at the meeting to talk school finance, after Moore's presentation, Strayer's speech drifted away from finance to the issue of twelve-grade schools, so much so that N. S. Holland (1953), author of *A Brief History: First Quarter Century of TASA*, wrote that "school administrators could hardly have sat around without wondering whether Dr. Strayer's mind was on his subject, or whether he followed Superintendent Moore"

(p. 39). Holland (1953) reported that a spirited conversation arose between Strayer and Moore. According to Holland (1953), “the uppermost question got down to this simple consideration: Why should Beaumont pupils spend more than eleven years in school just because Port Arthur wants a twelve year school system?” (p. 39).

Why should they indeed? The question at the heart of Strayer and Moore’s argument at that 1930 meeting would also find itself at the center of a long, slow conversion of Texas schools from an eleven-grade system to the twelve-grade system that currently exists. Port Arthur began the transition in 1926; by the 1937-1938 school year at least 13 other Texas schools had made the change. The advantages of the twelve-grade system that seemed self-evident to Strayer were obviously not as clear to the Texas school community. (George Strayer had earned his reputation as an educational reformer while on the faculty at Teachers College of Columbia University in New York.) Of the 40 states which had already embraced the twelve-grade system, almost none of them were in the South (Strayer, 1926a; Townsend, 1942).

Surveys and Efficiency

Successful change in any endeavor requires a set of fortunate circumstances; in the American South of the early twentieth century, change was challenging (Knight, 1922). For significant change to occur in something as basic to a community as its schools, those circumstances would have to be fortunate indeed. As mentioned previously, the change to a twelve-grade system in Texas began in Port Arthur as a result of a recommendation from a school survey. A little background of the survey movement highlights the importance of these surveys and their conclusions.

The school surveys came at a time when schools, and especially school administrators, were facing severe criticism from the general public. The public felt that schools were inefficient (Callahan, 1962). The Taylor system of scientific management—the system of factory efficiency governed by analysis of a job’s requirements and the equipping of a worker to fulfill such requirements, all evaluated by a stopwatch to eliminate unnecessary effort (Taylor, 1911)—had been applied to education, and proponents of scientific management such as Frank Spaulding led the way in embracing its principles (Callahan, 1962).

Spaulding, superintendent of schools in Cleveland, Ohio, had been influenced by a survey conducted by the Survey Committee of the Cleveland Foundation in 1916. In this survey, Leonard P. Ayres described the problem of inefficiency that was causing public outrage: “Superintendents, principals, supervisors, and teachers are never sure under this system that it is safe to exercise responsibility for anything. If they do so, the results may be unfortunate, so the surer way is always to refer the matter to someone else” (Ayres, 1916). Spaulding was brought to Cleveland with a then-unprecedented \$12,000 salary to implement the recommendations of the survey. He combined educational principles with efficient business practices, including creation of a junior high program and development of vocational programs (“Spaulding,” 1997).

Spaulding’s work was considered successful (Callahan, 1962, p. 180). He would soon leave Cleveland to head the Army Education Commission in France during World War I and would return after the war to create the education department at Yale University and serve as its first chair (“Spaulding,” 1997). Despite his relatively brief

time as a school superintendent, Spaulding was given accolades for implementing the efficiency model into education; he and other leaders in educational administration such as Strayer, Ayers, Bobbitt, and Cubberley represented a “new type of school administrator” (Callahan, 1962, p. 180) who leaned toward the “business” side of education. Spaulding’s success came at a time when other superintendents were losing their jobs. All school officials were aware of the following opinion: “This is an age of efficiency. In the eyes of the public no indictment of a school can be more severe than to say it is inefficient” (McConaughy, 1918, p. 191-92).

Reports such as the one from Ayres in Cleveland were the delivery systems for the changes to education brought about by the efficiency movement. The National Council of the National Education Agency formed the Committee on Tests and Standards of Efficiency in Schools and School Systems (Strayer & Whipple, 1916), and this committee, under the leadership of Strayer, recommended tests and measures to rate schools and teachers on their levels of efficiency. These tests and measures were developed by university education professors and by “educational efficiency experts” who worked full time in “efficiency bureaus” (quotation marks in original, Callahan, 1962, p. 101). These ratings were rather influential. Callahan (1962) quoted Don C. Bliss, a superintendent in 1912, as saying, “the results of a few well-planned tests would carry more weight with the business man and the parent than all the psychology in the world” (p. 100).

The surveys were conducted by bringing in an outside “expert” who would study the schools and then make a report to the board of education (Tyack & Hansot,

1982). These “experts” were professors of education from leading universities and specialists in administration. They spent anywhere from one week to a year studying the school. Some were completed by one or two men and others by a team of five or six. Superintendents at first were hesitant about the school surveys being performed in their schools since “the opinions of experts in some cases became the law of educational administration” (Glass, 2004, p. 137). Some superintendents considered the school survey to be a way to combat the criticism they were facing from the public; one school superintendent said that he could “take the initiative in arranging for a survey and by doing this beat his critics to the punch” (Callahan, 1962, p. 113). The first school survey was conducted in Boise, Idaho, in 1910 (Elliot, Judd, & Strayer, 1913); Callahan wrote that Superintendent Meek of Boise, at a meeting of the Committee on Tests and Standards of Efficiency in Schools and School Systems, had this to say about the function of the school survey:

As a protection to competent school administrators, as an effective device to convince the public that the enormous sums the schools are each year exacting are being wisely and economically expended and are yielding commensurate returns in educational units, and as a means of educating the patrons to an appreciation of the newer phases and modern trend of education, the work of a school-inquiry committee is invaluable. (Meek in Callahan, 1962, p. 114-115)

The number of school surveys increased over subsequent years, and in 1927 more city school surveys were conducted than in any previous year (Caswell, 1929). It was the hope of the schools at the center of the surveys that these “experts” would help the schools create plans for improvement. One such

survey of the Port Arthur schools provided the catalyst for the twelve-grade system in Texas (Holland, 1953).

Strayer and Sims

Two very influential figures who played crucial but differing roles in Texas's adoption of the twelve-grade system were George Strayer and George Sims. The chairman of the Committee on Tests and Standards of Efficiency in Schools and School Systems—the committee that initially recommended the tests and measures for the rating of school efficiency—was George Strayer, the person who would head the *Report of the Survey of Schools of Port Arthur, Texas* (1926a), which ultimately was responsible for Port Arthur's move to twelve grades. In a climate in which school officials were feeling pressure from the forces of efficiency, George Strayer's voice was influential. Strayer, a professor at Teachers College, Columbia University from 1905 to 1943, focused on educational administration and wrote more than one hundred articles on school management ("Strayer," 2011). One of his contributions to the field of education was his application of statistical methods to school administration (Watras, 2008). A search of the online catalog for the Hathi Trust Digital Library (<http://catalog.hathitrust.org>) returned over 70 citations indicating that Strayer was first author, co-author, or participant in school surveys. Other authors who collaborated with Strayer were N. L. Englehardt, Charles Prosser, and Charles Eliot. Examples of surveys for which Strayer was first author include Tampa (Strayer, 1926b), Beaumont (Strayer, 1927), and Fort Worth (Strayer, 1931). These surveys were often major undertakings; for example, the survey of Chicago schools (Strayer, 1932) involved 17 faculty

members from Teachers College, 10 faculty members from other universities, and more than 70 other people including field workers, clerks, and statisticians (Reavis, 1933).

Strayer served as a member of the Educational Policies Commission, which played an important role in the educational network and in the eyes of the public: “Anything these people had to say would undoubtedly have been of interest, but their formulations as members of the Commission took on added weight because of the high prestige that body had come to command in the councils of American teachers” (Cremin, 1961, p. 329).

Perhaps because of Strayer’s status and that of his committee, Port Arthur schools embraced the recommendations made in the 1926 *Report of the Survey of Schools of Port Arthur, Texas* (Strayer, 1926a). When comparing the issues of the 1926 and 1927 *Seagull*, the Port Arthur High School annual, one finds evidence of the impact of the survey’s suggestions (Port Arthur High School, 1926, 1927). Strayer suggested that Port Arthur’s high school should provide more clubs and activities and listed its present offerings as “meager” (Strayer, 1926a, p. 239). In the 1926 annual, there were 12 clubs and activities available for students (Port Arthur High School, 1926); in the 1927 annual, there were over 45 clubs (Port Arthur High School, 1927), and several of the clubs had been specifically recommended in the survey (Strayer, 1926a, p. 239).

The 1927 *Seagull* referred to the changes being made to the Port Arthur school library as junior high students began to use library resources: “Differences in schedules have made necessary two library systems—one for the senior high school and one for the junior” (Port Arthur High School, 1927, p. 11). The change in library resources

would not have been necessary if not for Strayer's suggestions concerning junior high programs in the 1926 survey: "...an additional year would not only make possible a better standard of achievement but would also give time for the pupil to participate more fully in the broadening and finding activities of the junior high school" (Strayer, 1926a, p. 172).

In addition, student comments in the 1927 *Seagull* referenced a new style of teaching. One student wrote that "increased enrollment and changes in teaching methods have this year taxed to the utmost the book supply" (Port Arthur High School, 1927, p. 11), while another noted that "the History Department, under the supervision of Miss Texie Smyth, has become very interesting this year, due to the new method of teaching" (p. 13). These changes in pedagogy may have come from Strayer's insistence in the survey that there be a "careful selection and reorganization of the teaching materials" and teaching practices (Strayer, 1926a, p. 288). He recommended a "continuous curriculum reconstruction program" carried out during a period of 3 to 5 years (p. 297). Other changes recommended by Strayer were a better teachers' salary schedule, reorganization of the staff, creation of a research bureau, reorganization of the elementary school curriculum, plant construction, and an increase in the tax rate, all of which were implemented as a result of Strayer's survey (Strayer, 1926a; Port Arthur High School, 1927). Strayer's influence was pervasive.

Just as Cleveland schools were fortunate to have Superintendent Spaulding to implement the changes proposed by Ayres in the Cleveland Education Survey *School Organization and Administration* (Ayres, 1916), Port Arthur had George Sims, a

progressive-minded administrator who embraced Strayer's ideas. Unlike Spaulding, who went from Cleveland schools to national service and ultimately to Yale University, Sims made Port Arthur schools his life work, serving as superintendent for 30 years. Sims was suited to be the person to bring educational change to Port Arthur. He graduated from Baylor University in 1904, was principal at Texas schools in Burleson and then Hico, was superintendent at San Marcos (Sims, 1963), served as Assistant State Superintendent of Instruction under State Superintendent W. F. Doughty (United States Bureau of Education, 1913), served a one-year term as president of Texas State Teachers Association, and completed graduate work at several universities: The University of Texas, the University of California, the University of Chicago, the University of Minnesota, Harvard University, and Columbia University (Sims, 1963). (Although no record exists, one might conclude that during his studies at Columbia University Sims as an educational administrator would have taken one or more classes from Strayer. Since Strayer's doctoral students were required to participate in school surveys [Caswell in Burlbaw, 1989, p. 87-90], Sims would have known about Strayer's work in the survey field.)

For the challenge of bringing progressive change to Texas schooling, Sims was uniquely suited. He was a native Texan with ideas garnered from graduate level education in institutions all over the country, he understood Texas politics through service at the state level, and he became committed to this one Texas community. With his cosmopolitan education and experience, in Port Arthur he became part of the local culture, serving as Sunday school superintendent and Rotary Club president. He felt

that he could “further the progress of the schools by getting acquainted with the various segments of the community” (Sims, 1963, p. 5), and he paid many visits to various businesses around town in an effort to get to know the people.

Sims is recognized as the man who introduced the first twelve-grade school to Texas (Sims, 1963; Cate, 1997), but there were many other changes he helped to implement as well. When Sims arrived in Port Arthur, the school and its facilities were badly in need of improvement. The original makeshift classrooms of Port Arthur schools were designed for small student populations; in 1896, there were 12 students and they met in the unfinished attic of a residence (Cate, 1997). Port Arthur was not incorporated as a town until 1898 with a population of 1,000. Cate writes that in 1914, when Sims became superintendent, Sims described the condition of one of Port Arthur’s early school facilities upon his arrival to the district:

...a rented story and a half residence, with one teacher teaching upstairs in a little cubby-hole of a bedroom. The downstairs rooms consisted of a front or living room, which one teacher used; the other room was formerly a kitchen and a small pantry. The first time I visited this kitchen classroom I remember distinctly how two boys sat on two old broken-down chairs back in the pantry. (Cate, 1997, p. 279-280)

Sims was able to persuade Port Arthur’s citizens to pass his first proposed bond of \$450,000 in 1915 for broad-scale enhancements to multiple buildings and for an elementary school. During his years as superintendent he saw the district’s enrollment increase from 2,194 in 1914 to nearly 10,000 at the end of World War II. Throughout his long term, Sims guided Port Arthur through many changes. He was a progressive educator who, having only heard of the platoon system being used in Gary, Indiana, implemented this system in an attempt to help deal with the growing population in his

schools and include work-study-play opportunities for the students (Cate, 1997). The platoon system was a philosophy instituted by William Wirt that rotated students through academic, recreational, and vocational opportunities during the school day (“Wirt,” 2013).

Sims built several school buildings, including the aforementioned elementary school with a swimming pool and a library, since he “believed children living on the Gulf Coast should know how to swim and that a library was as important in an elementary school as it was in a high school” (Cate, 1997, p. 280). Sims began in-service training programs and summer workshops for teachers and provided free kindergarten for students (Sims, 1963). During his tenure, he greatly altered the way Port Arthur schools functioned, implementing many changes that other schools later adopted.

Strayer and Sims were the original catalysts for Texas’s journey toward twelve grades. Through his survey of the entire Port Arthur system, Strayer made the initial recommendation of the twelve-grade system as part of an extensive analysis of the school and the direction it needed to go. And, through his dedicated long-term leadership, supported by his broad education, prior service, and community involvement, Sims guided his school through the systemic changes necessary to create the twelve-grade system in Port Arthur.

From Eleven to Twelve Grades: Port Arthur

None of Sims’s changes to the Port Arthur school system would be as controversial—locally and statewide—as the decision to move to twelve grades.

Though some critics of Sims believed his support for the twelve-grade system stemmed from his desire to prolong eligibility of Port Arthur's football players (Cate, 1997), such a progressive and aggressive change as the shift to twelve grades was consistent with Sims's other actions during his 30-year tenure as Port Arthur superintendent of schools. The undertaking affected every level of schooling; it was not simply a decision to add a year of school.

As previously mentioned, Sims based the decision to add a grade on a recommendation from the survey committee headed by George Strayer (Holland, 1953; Sims, 1963). The recommendation was not so much addressing a problem at the exit level of high school but responding to problems at the transitional middle school level. The survey committee found that the average achievement of students in the seventh grade in Port Arthur schools was approximately two grades below the national norm (Strayer, 1926a), and recommended that an added year between the seventh grade and the first year of high school would give a better foundation and added maturity before beginning the high school curriculum (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Scores of Port Arthur elementary students as reported by Strayer (Strayer, 1926a, p. 163)

TABLE 42

GRADE SCORES OF PORT ARTHUR SCHOOLS IN INTELLIGENCE, READING, FUNDAMENTALS IN ARITHMETIC (ADDITION, SUBTRACTION, MULTIPLICATION, DIVISION), SPELLING, NATURE STUDY AND SCIENCE, HISTORY AND LITERATURE, AND LANGUAGE USAGE

Seven-Year Elementary School Standards

Standard for the Grade	MEDIAN GRADE SCORE							
	4 L	4 H	5 L	5 H	6 L	6 H	7 L	7 H
	4.4	4.9	5.4	5.9	6.4	6.9	7.4	7.9
Intelligence (8-Year Standard Pupils)	4.1	4.3	4.7	5.3	5.5	6.3	6.7	6.5
Reading	4.05	4.4	4.7	5.3	5.6	5.4	6.3	5.9
Fundamentals in Arithmetic	4.1	4.7	4.3	4.5	5.1	5.2	5.3	5.9
Spelling	3.7	4.0	4.3	4.6	5.1	5.5	6.0	6.9
Nature Study and Science			4.3				6.0	
History and Literature ...			4.3				6.25	
Language Usage			4.6				6.3	

All standings on this table are expressed as Grade Scores. A class having a grade score of 5.2 has a standing equal to an average class in the second month of the fifth grade.

According to Sims (1963), Strayer's reorganizational idea was followed as suggested. Strayer's recommendations were:

It is therefore recommended that, in the reorganization of the Port Arthur schools for the improvement of classification, the first seven grades be made to result in an eight-grade system. The abler and older pupils should be allowed to pass on into the first high school grade. The others should be given the eighth grade work as recommended in another chapter. The present Grades 8 to 11 should become Grades 9 to 12. Pupils now in Grade 7 should become seventh and eighth grade pupils. Grades 1 to 6 should be considered the elementary grades, Grades 7 to 9, the junior high school grades; and Grades 10 to 12, the senior high school grades. (Strayer, 1926a, p. 173)

An extra year of subject matter and material was placed in the seventh and eighth grades and the high school became grades nine through twelve. If a student had

already finished the eighth grade (which was considered the first year of high school when the plan was adopted), the student finished his or her schooling in eleven grades. Those students at eighth grade or below finished their schooling in twelve grades and could begin receiving credits for graduation beginning in the ninth grade. Reorganization was complex and the adjustment period continued for several years, resulting in “hours of conferences with parents and pupils and the evaluation of each individual case” (Sims, 1963, p. 49).

Sims had the support of his principals and teachers for the changeover. The principals in the Port Arthur school system responded positively to the move to twelve grades. They thought that the twelve-grade system suited the development of the students academically, physically, and socially and that the twelve-grade system provided more opportunities and exposure to curriculum for all levels of students. The principals pointed out that high school textbooks were published for the twelve-grade system. The teachers in Sims’s district gave reasons to favor the twelve-grade system over the eleven-grade system. In their overall opinion, the twelve-grade system provided more time for weaker students to prepare for advanced work, more time for development (both physically and mentally), more time for vocational training, more opportunities for enrichment, and more time for guidance. All of the teachers polled preferred the twelve-grade system (Sims, 1963).

At the same time, the move to twelve grades was not without its challenges. One such challenge involved finances (Sims, 1930). Superintendents from other school districts did not want to change to twelve grades because they thought that

adding another year to the school requirements would be too expensive (Sims, 1963). Sims thought that it was not too expensive; that “the cost of introducing another year would be small, or perhaps nothing, when spread over a period of years” (Sims, 1963, p. 48). He therefore devised a plan to allow for a period of adjustment, which included four ideas:

- 1) Class sizes might be increased slightly during the period of introduction.
- 2) The teacher’s teaching time could be lengthened.
- 3) Near eradication of pupils repeating a grade through better teaching, better guidance, and better grouping.
- 4) Six years could be used to reorganize administrative detail. (Sims, 1963, p. 49)

Sims had the financial support of school board members and taxpayers, as seen in this quote from the Port Arthur School Board:

We appreciate the fact that it is the business of school board members to be vitally interested in the educational achievement of the children entrusted to their care. We also appreciate the fact that board members carry a very active responsibility in their official relationship to the taxpayers. The board here is so thoroughly sold on the idea of the 12th grade in relation to the achievement of the children that we feel that other board members will be interested in the way we have solved our 12th grade introduction and operation. Candor leads us to state that there is enthusiastic support of our 12th grade set-up on the part of the taxpayers. (Sims, 1963, p. 49)

Of particular difficulty was the issue of high school students transferring to Port Arthur from an eleven-grade school system. Transfer students were younger, less mature, and had trouble keeping up with their counterparts, and the parents of transfer students complained that their children were being placed in too low a grade (Sims, 1963). Thus, Port Arthur created a plan to guide the placement of transfer students within grades:

- 1) When children come from other schools, the number of years of their school experience determined their grade placement in Port Arthur. For example, if a child had been in school six years in the system from which he came, he was placed in the seventh grade and went on to finish in six more years.
- 2) If a child had earned high school credits, he was placed in the grade corresponding to the number of credits he had earned. (Sims, 1963)

This period of adjustment for transfer students continued for about 15 years until Texas officially adopted the twelve-grade plan.

Despite the challenges of undertaking such a major change, Sims prevailed. He had the support of his board, his principals, and his teachers (Sims, 1930). He left a legacy that was recognized as stellar by many; one such admirer, Arvin Donner, was a principal of Port Arthur schools and eventually became Dean of the College of Education at the University of Houston. Donner had this to say of Sims: “I remember when the Port Arthur Schools were pointed to with professional pride by school superintendents throughout the state as the only twelve-grade system in the State of Texas. Superintendent Sims was called upon at numerous state meetings to describe this twelve-year system which he inaugurated” (Donner in Sims, 1963, p. 51).

From Eleven to Twelve Grades: Pioneer Schools

One school, Port Arthur, a coastal city in southeast Texas near the Louisiana state line, had embraced the twelve-year system; from there, the spread of the twelve-grade system throughout the state was slow. Superintendent Sims spent much time traveling around the state talking about Port Arthur’s change to twelve grades (Sims, 1930; Sims, 1963; Cate, 1997), and perhaps his trips influenced other schools. A Galveston newspaper article indicated that in 1936 only two schools in Texas had

twelve grades: "...the annual reports of city superintendents for 1936-1937 showed that there were two 12-grade school systems in operation during the past year. One of these is the Port Arthur school, the other is the Iraan school" (Reese, 1937, p. 8).

By the 1937-1938 school year, at least 13 other Texas schools had changed to twelve grades. These schools were located throughout Texas: Carthage, El Paso, Goose Creek, Iraan, Jefferson, Kermit, Lefors, Mercedes, Montgomery, Rankin, Sheffield, Stinnett, and Saltillo (Parker, 1939; Woods, 1938). These 13 schools, along with Port Arthur, became pioneers of the changeover to a twelve-grade system.

How did the school districts implement this major change? With different school districts adopting differing plans around the state, the approaches varied. Superintendent Parker of Jefferson, one of the original 13 schools to make the change to twelve grades, sent a series of questions to the administrators of the other 12 schools (Parker, 1939). He was interested in the strategies they had used as they made the transition. One of the considerations was the rate of adoption: when to make the change from eleven to twelve grades. Some schools decided to change to twelve grades and made that change effective the next school year while others delayed a year or even several years. For example, Mercedes designed a gradual introduction of the twelve-grade system over the span of 10 years (Parker, 1939).

Another issue Parker addressed in his questionnaire was the challenge of how to organize the grades and where to place the extra grade. This proved complicated and each district came up with its own plan of action. El Paso—since its schools already had an unnumbered year preceding the first grade—simply began numbering this

pre-primary year (Parker, 1939). Kermit public schools added a grade at the beginning and reorganized the first three grades while changing the numbers of all grades. Iraan schools, near Kermit, renumbered grades eight, nine, ten, and eleven to become grades nine, ten, eleven, and twelve, respectively, and the first through seventh grades were changed to become the first through eighth grades (Parker, 1939). Lefors public schools described their method as:

We began with a kindergarten that became a pre-first grade for six-year-olds during their first semester. This was changed to the first grade in our numbering and the subject matter of seven years spread over eight years. In general our plan adds one-half year at the beginning of the child's school life what we call 'readiness development' period, and another half-year of 'exploratory and finding courses' in seventh and eighth grades. (Parker, 1939, p. 21)

In Jefferson, the first five grades were divided into six grades based on twelve-year placement tests, standardized achievement tests, and individual teacher reports (Parker, 1939). In the Munday schools, the goals and demands were lowered at all levels, but especially in grades one through three, which, essentially, resulted in an extra year being absorbed within the program (Crouch, 1942).

These school districts all decided to add a grade to their programs by altering the lower grades in some form or fashion. Though these districts acted independently, they do seem motivated by a similar urge, one described in a 1941 discussion of the specific techniques used for making the transition and expansion from eleven to twelve grades. Two educators and researchers of the time, Gray and Votaw, considered the chronological age and statewide achievement test score averages of students and determined that "not fewer than three grades should be used for expansion into four" (1941, p. 27) and that there would be the "least disturbance to the total curriculum if the

grades used are third, fourth, and fifth” (p. 27). Along with curriculum changes in the third, fourth, and fifth grades, they emphasized that “the thought which is being stressed is that changing from the eleven-grade plan to the twelve-grade plan is not a matter of inserting a fictitious grade but is a matter of expanding a series of grades into a new series containing one more grade” (p. 28).

In addition to the rate of adoption and organization chosen for the different grades, each of the 13 schools had to address several other critical issues. Parker grouped his questions into four other core categories: cost issues, classification of transfers from eleven-grade systems, textbook supply, and local approval/disapproval of the change (Parker, 1939).

Each of the original 13 districts was concerned about the cost of making the change. As part of his survey, Parker wanted to know if a twelve-grade system was more expensive than an eleven-grade system and if so, to what degree. He queried whether additional expenditures would be required for instructional and/or maintenance costs and if additional faculty would be required to facilitate the change. Four of the 13 schools reported that the twelve-grade system was more expensive for them than the eleven-grade system. They cited increased instructional cost of 5% to 10%. All four of these schools added faculty to facilitate the change to twelve grades. Two of the four schools reported a slight increase in maintenance costs (Parker, 1939).

Parker (1939) was also interested in how each school dealt with transfer students from schools that did not have twelve grades. He asked how the schools would classify elementary students and high school students from eleven-grade systems. The answers

were varied for the placement of elementary students, with responses ranging from “place them in same grade...try them out...advance them one number” (p. 22). Parker noted that, in his school (Jefferson), the student was placed in the same grade that he came from for a trial period and either continued in the same grade or was placed according to his determined level of development. With reference to the placement of high school students, Parker reported that “practically all schools” (p. 22) placed high school students according to credits previously earned. Parker asked the participating school districts how they advised eleven-grade schools to classify their students if they transferred from the twelve-grade to the eleven-grade system. Most of the responses called for the elementary students transferring to an eleven-grade school to be placed on a trial basis and then either be retained or dropped a grade; high school students transferring from a twelve-grade school to an eleven-grade school were received in the eleven-grade schools based on credits (Parker, 1939).

Because the grade added by these 13 schools was not officially recognized statewide, the State of Texas did not supply the necessary free textbooks. Parker asked his fellow superintendents how they “solved the textbook problem” (p. 21). Two of the schools were in the process of trying to solve the problem; two schools bought books with their own funds for the extra grade; and five schools used previously issued state textbooks in addition to other references such as library books and mimeographed materials. Parker shared the strategy used in his school as well. He said “the unit method of teaching is used exclusively. Thus, any textbook, reference book, or any material is used according to the level of the pupils in the particular grade” (Parker,

1939, p. 22). He quoted a disgruntled superintendent's viewpoint of the textbook situation in general:

Frankly, the free textbooks furnished by the state are not worth their cost to us. We should be very glad to have about one-fourth of our quota of each kind and the other three-fourths in funds to be allotted to purchase of different titles. Better still would be an allotment of funds instead of books. (Parker, 1939, p. 22)

Parker asked his fellow superintendents several questions concerning approval from their communities. Did the respective Boards of Education approve of the twelve-year plan? Did the parent/teacher associations approve? Was the change embraced by taxpayers and by students? He was interested in how the districts attempted to “sell the plan to the above groups” (Parker, 1939, p. 21). Though the experience of each school was different in most categories, there was surprising unanimity in the category of local acceptance. Of the 11 schools that responded to this question, all agreed that their communities supported the efforts made by the districts to propose and defend the change. “The twelve-year plan was sold to the public in most all schools through newspapers, talks and discussions in various organizations, employment of outstanding corps of teachers, and organizing school systems which commanded the respect and confidence of the public. No school reported even considering the change back to the eleven-year plan” (Parker, 1939, p. 21).

Parker's article described the situation of the 13 districts that were listed in the 1937-38 SDE *Bulletin* as having 12 grades (Woods, 1938). Rogers, in a 1941 *Texas Outlook* article, stated that the Amarillo school district also had twelve grades during the 1937-38 school year although this information was not recorded in the SDE

Division of Information and Statistics documentation. Amarillo schools adopted a gradual plan of introduction, taking six years before the first group of students had twelve years of schooling (McCuan, 1939; Rogers, 1941). The school system started with a certain year (1937) and made a cutoff point at the sixth grade level. There were no changes in the seventh grade and above, and those students graduated in 11 years. The sixth graders in the 1937-1938 school year were the first group to have 12 years. All grades were reorganized with some of the material usually covered at the end of one year being moved up to the beginning of the next year (Rogers, 1941).

Another school district, Kaufman, used yet another plan of implementation. Though Kaufman's transition to twelve grades came later than that of the original 13 schools mentioned in Parker's 1939 article, the strategy used was an interesting one:

...place the new grade between what had been the first and second grade or in other words, to extend the work of the low and high first into a first and second grade. The course of study for all grades above the first grade was automatically lifted one grade. Those pupils who were strong pupils at the close of the 1940-41 term were promoted to the third grade and so on up the line were children lifted. The second grade was made up of pupils of the first grade who would have ordinarily have been placed in the high first grade. It was definitely decided that the beginning class for 1941-42 would not have pupils placed with them who had been in school the year before. (Carrell, 1943, p. 20)

Summary

The implementation of the twelve-grade system—a significant change for any district that attempted it—began in Texas in Port Arthur in 1927 with a recommendation from a survey. Over the next 13 years, at least 13 schools independently changed to twelve grades, finding their own way with no statewide coordination. The schools were not unified by geography, school size, demographics,

district wealth, or implementation strategy. Just as there was no common approach to the implementation, there was no unified call to action motivating these disparate schools. In assessing the situation, Parker addressed “the need of uniformity in the methods, standards, and definite periods of time in the reorganization of the Texas public school system” (1939, p. 22). Despite their differences, the districts were united by the approval their plans met from the people their schools served. Parker noted that “the data do show that all schools having the twelve-year plan favor it unanimously over the eleven-year plan” (Parker, 1939, p. 22).

Even though these early adopters were spread across Texas, the entire state of Texas was not ready to embrace the twelve-grade system. In regard to the nation as a whole, by 1939, 40 of the 48 states already had twelve grades and seven of the remaining eight were in transition to twelve grades (Parker, 1939). The Texas system was the only state which had no existing or developing statewide twelve-grade system. Parker summed up the situation with a call to action:

Since the majority of states favor the twelve-year plan, why are we Texas schoolmen hesitant to adopt the plan? Why is there no uniformity in methods, standards, and periods of time for the change? The writer has attended every meeting in which the new curriculum and the twelve-year plan has been discussed, yet no definite methods of standards have been set up, only theories. We thirteen twelve-year schools have had to be pioneers in the field, working singly and without encouragement. If the twelve-year plan is to be successful in this state, there must be a prescribed course to follow. Why should the great Texas public schools fall behind the other states of the nation? (Parker, 1939, p. 22)

CHAPTER III

FERMENT

In 1939, Superintendent G.P. Parker was calling for statewide adoption and coordination of the move to twelve grades (Parker, 1939). But his call came from his background as superintendent of a twelve-grade school and reflected his studies of those few schools which had adopted such a system. These schools had already embraced the idea of a twelve-grade school and had agreed that such a system was beneficial.

Even though the Texas Department of Education would call for statewide change in just four years, in 1939 there was no overall demand for the change. After 1939, the change would come quickly, but to that point there had been little overarching interest in twelve grades. Why did the state of Texas wait for a decade before embracing the change? While the other 47 states had either changed or were changing to a twelve-grade system (Strayer, 1926a; Parker, 1939) what forces kept Texas in an eleven-grade system?

The Debate

Parker had concluded that Texas' failure to conform to the twelve-grade plan was causing it to "fall behind the other states of the nation" (Parker, 1939, p. 22). Many Texans did not share Parker's view that Texas public schools were falling behind or that the twelve-grade model would prevent them from doing so; Parker mentioned that he had "attended every meeting in which the new curriculum and the twelve-year plan has

been discussed, yet no definite methods of standards have been set up, only theories” (p. 22). While the rest of the country adopted the twelve-grade system, Texas educators debated its merits throughout the 1930s.

Southern Connections

The hesitation to embrace educational change had roots in the Reconstruction South, and Texas’s schools were similar to many turn of the century southern schools. When Seely (1899) wrote in 1899 that the schools of the United States commonly had eight grades of elementary school and four grades of secondary school, he was not referring to the Southern states that were just emerging from Reconstruction. Edgar W. Knight of North Carolina University questioned the South’s ability to close the education gap created by the Civil War and the resulting four decades of Reconstruction. In his 1929 article, “Can the South Attain to National Standards in Education,” Knight asserted that the South had been physically and economically devastated by the war and that Reconstruction had “robbed the region of the little that war had spared” (p. 47). Though the quality of a school system cannot be measured by counting the number of grades in that system, the change to twelve grades was one of the many developments that would come to the South many years after it came to Northern states. As Knight pointed out:

...the result [of Reconstruction] was that education in the South remained in a sad plight for nearly four decades after Appomattox. Not one of these states, as late as 1900, had established a public school system at all adequate to its needs. Teachers were paid less than was allowed for the hire of convicts. In some of these States the annual school term was only sixty days. School administration was marked by mediocrity and incompetency. County and often even city superintendents were briefless lawyers, broken-down country editors, and State

superintendents were generally politicians, soldiers, patriots, or patrioteers—pitiably political appendages. (p. 47)

As the twentieth century dawned and progressed, the South began to recover its economic power. As industry in the South began to rebound, its educational institutions, though better than they were at the turn of the century, did not keep pace with the rest of the nation (Knight, 1929). In light of this disparity, Knight asked “why are these States so far behind their sisters when measured by accepted tests of educational effectiveness?” (p. 48) then immediately dismissed the old excuse of poverty arguing that the “South has the wealth to support schools adequately for all its children. Poverty is not the answer” (p. 48).

According to Knight, the answer was complacency, arguing that it was “perhaps the South’s deadliest affliction at the present time” (p. 48). In his article, he concluded that “it would be unreasonable to criticise the South for being commercial. [But] unless the South uses more fully its much boasted material resources to increase and strengthen its spiritual powers, it must remain the Rip Van Winkle of American education” (p. 49). Knight’s article (which originally appeared in the *Virginia Journal of Education*) appeared in the *Texas Outlook* in December 1929, at a time when the move to twelve grades was just beginning in Texas.

The complacency Knight observed in the South as a whole was evident in Texas’s move to twelve grades. By 1940, every state in the country—including the South—had either adopted a twelve-grade system or was in the process of adopting one. In Texas itself, at least 14 schools had adopted the system enthusiastically. Despite the nationwide presence of twelve grades in the ten years after Port Arthur added the

twelfth grade in Texas, there was little recorded statewide discussion or debate about altering the system in Texas. It was not until the end of the 1930s that the dialogue began; change came quickly thereafter. In her biography of Superintendent George Sims, Vilda Barker Sims (1963) noted that when Sims's twelve-grade experiment in Port Arthur "was first talked about, it was adopted slowly; then it was like a forest fire, spreading rapidly" (p 50).

Complacency versus Advocacy

Of course, it would be unrealistic to suggest that in the years before "the forest fire," there was no dialogue about the matter. As previously mentioned, some of that dialogue came from Superintendent Sims, after Port Arthur's transition. In the years after Port Arthur began the twelve-grade system, Sims traveled around the state advocating the addition of the twelfth grade. He was challenged to defend the system, showing that it was economically affordable and educationally beneficial (Sims, 1963). In addition, he also called for changes at the middle school level. He listed the addition of the junior high school as "one of the greatest achievements resulting from the [Strayer] survey" (Sims, 1930, p. 36). Port Arthur backed up this "great achievement" with a \$700,000 building exclusively for the junior high program. Sims argued, as Strayer had, that effective junior high schooling necessitated an extra grade at that level in order to "determine aptitude" (p. 36). The twelfth grade would not be added at the end of the eleventh grade, but rather in the middle school years (Sims, 1930). When Sims retired from Port Arthur, the Education Board President E. R. Moxon paid tribute to Sims's advocacy of the twelve-grade system when he noted "the contribution for

which you have received the greatest recognition is the installation of the twelve-grade system in Port Arthur and the leadership you furnished in its installation in the State of Texas. You are recognized as the ‘father’ of the twelve-grade program in Texas” (Sims, 1963, p 58).

Despite Sims’s arguments and the favorable response from the few schools that created their own twelve-grade systems, there was statewide complacency (Parker, 1939). School districts reluctant to move to twelve grades could align themselves with Dr. Herschel T. Manuel, a professor of educational psychology at The University of Texas. After the 1926 Port Arthur school survey and its resulting changes, one of Manuel’s studies was used to defend a contrasting opinion in a 1928 *Texas Outlook*. In Manuel’s 1927 study, tests from eight-year elementary schools were given to students in seven-year elementary schools. He found that the scores of the students in the seven-year schools were, on average, much higher than their counterparts in the eight-year schools and that most of the students tested were doing eight year’s worth of school work in seven years of elementary school. Manuel concluded, therefore, that the adoption of a twelve-grade system should be postponed for further study (“Shall we have”, 1928). He also spoke against the affordability of the twelve-grade system.

Historical evidence shows that the seven-year elementary school and the eleven-year period of elementary and secondary education became a prevailing one in Texas after considerable trial of other plans, and any change in the system which would necessarily increase the tax burden should only be undertaken after conclusive proof has been made of the bettering of the state school system through such a change. In the judgment of the writer, the eleven year school systems of Texas should not be expanded into twelve-year systems by the addition of an eighth grade. This is not the remedy for our difficulties. Until contrary evidence is more convincing, this great experiment, referring to the eleven-year system, should be allowed to stand. (“Shall we have”, 1928. p. 22)

While determining whether individual school officials across the state were influenced by Manuel's arguments is impossible to know now, the "great experiment" of eleven-year schooling would stand for more than a decade.

The Catalyst: The 1930 Reduction in School Starting Age

Two years after the *Texas Outlook* summarized Manuel's study, a seemingly unrelated event occurred that would incidentally influence the developing twelve-grade movement: the Texas legislature passed a law allowing six-year-old Texas children to enter school (McCuan, 1939). The law read:

All children, without regard to color, over six years of age and under eighteen years of age at the beginning of any scholastic year, shall be included in the scholastic census and shall be entitled to the benefit of the public school fund for that year.... This Act shall take effect and be in force on and after September 1, 1930. (Texas Gen. Laws ch. 97, §1, 1929)

The law reduced the legal starting age for school children from seven to six years of age. Mayme Crouch, a teacher in the Munday Public Schools, reflected, post-hoc, on the effect of the state's decision. She wrote, that immediately after the 1930 law,

teachers of the public schools noticed a drop in the ability of these [younger] pupils to grasp and retain the work prescribed by the state; especially was this true in the beginning years, and thus there was a deplorable number of so-called 'failures' in school. These premature beginners were expected to carry the burden of reading other academic work gauged to the strength of an older child before they were developed physically, mentally and socially. (Crouch, 1942, p. 28)

A former teacher and reader of the *Dallas Morning News* recalled her opinion of having six-year-olds enter school:

I taught school for ten years and was teaching at the time the law was passed admitting 6-year-old children to the public schools. Our superintendent saw the problem that would result from such a change and, with his leadership, we carried on a campaign against it. We wrote letters to our representatives in Austin and asked our families and friends to do likewise. In spite of our efforts, the bill was passed. That was my last year of real teaching. From that time on, school became a glorified picnic. Fundamentals that were easily grasped by the 7-year-olds had to be simplified for the younger children. Every lesson started with the words, 'let's play a game.' With the lowering of the school age, discipline flew out of the window. A rebuke to Johnnie brought forth a flood of tears. If he went home with tears on his chubby little face, an irate mother descended on the school. Any explanation by the teacher brought these words from the mother, 'But he's only a baby.' True, he was a baby: but babies should be at home and not in a schoolroom. (Landrum, 1941a, p. 6)

Despite the protests described in the above quote, the law passed and six-year-olds began school in 1930. They would have finished their eleven years of schooling in the 1940-1941 school year as they were turning either 16 or 17 years of age, based on when in the calendar year their birthdays occurred. An early focus on this change in the age of graduates appears in a report in the 1934-35, 1935-36 *Biennial Report of the State Department of Education* (Woods, 1937). The report gave a "state-of-the-union" type overview of education in Texas at the beginning of 1937. One section stressed the importance of the junior high school. At the time, there was ongoing debate as to whether the 7-4 model of organization was preferable to the 5-3-3 model. The report by State Superintendent Woods concluded the 7-4 model had advantages in larger schools but mentioned that support for this form of eleven-grade model was "disturbed, however, by the feeling that since children are now admitted to the first grade at the age of six, they are too immature on reaching the sixth grade for

standard junior school work” (p. 15). State Superintendent Woods went on to note that “thoughtful attention is therefore being given to a twelve year school system for Texas thus bringing opportunity for a 6-3-3 organization, which has promise of a better and more logical development of the public schools of Texas” (Woods, 1937, p. 15). This report, published in January 1937, when the previously mentioned class of six-year-olds was in the middle of their seventh grade year, showed that the twelve-grade model was at least being considered in state-level discourse.

Shifting Gears: Preparing for the Class of 1941

With the issue of too-young graduates getting closer with each passing school year, educational theorists and planners began preparations for these graduates. In January 1937—the same year as the *Biennial Report*—the twelve-grade idea was discussed at the Third Annual School Administrators Conference in Austin. In his report on that conference in the *Texas Outlook*, J.C. Walker (1937) indicated that the success of Superintendent Sims’s Port Arthur initiative had made an impression on Texas school officials at last. The conference attendees had 10 years of data from Port Arthur to consider, enough information to reflect the system’s effects on a generation of students. In the *Texas Outlook*, Walker summarized the advantages reported by the administrators and teachers of the Port Arthur system:

- 1) Children have a broader knowledge and are thus better equipped to enter college;
- 2) Children who cannot go to college have a more complete education than under the eleven-grade plan and are better fitted to enter some field of work;
- 3) Actual reports from colleges show that graduates of the twelve-year school systems achieve higher marks in college than do graduates of the

eleven-grade systems, which indicates that they would likewise do better in the vocations. These reports show that 13.5 percent of eleven-grade school graduates fail in college as compared with 11.0 percent of the twelve-graders. (Walker, 1937, p. 37)

Walker reported that the teachers of the Port Arthur system felt that the twelve-grade system “offers opportunity for more pupil guidance, postpones high school work until pupils are more mature, gives more extensive vocational training, and affords more time for physical, mental, and moral development” (p. 37). He noted that the Port Arthur principals thought that the twelve-grade system provided more curriculum and material for slow, average, and above-average students. He reported that the cost of adding the twelfth grade was small and that the stakeholders in Port Arthur—principals, teachers, and alumni—all endorsed the twelve-grade plan (p. 37).

The same year, a Young County teacher and contributor to the *Texas Outlook*, James R. Emanuel (1937), made an argument about middle schools that seemed to echo at least part of Sims’s earlier contention from a decade before: that there should be eight grades in the grammar school so as to give a child more time to become grounded in reading, math, and citizenship. He argued that the extra year of reading would enable students to better perform in high school work, thereby reducing the “great group of poor readers who are annually graduated from high school, [heaping] ridicule upon the school system for inefficiency” (p. 36). Concerning math, Emanuel thought that the extra year of grammar school would help reinforce basic skills and fundamental processes. Concerning the general success of students, Emanuel argued “it is in the grammar school that citizenship is made or marred. Why be niggardly with the time and money given to the grades when citizenship is the state’s fundamental purpose in

having a public school?” (p. 36). By 1937, both of Sims’s arguments for the addition of a twelfth grade—the overall effectiveness for the graduate and the importance of the extra time in junior high—appeared to be meeting with approval in state journals.

Shifting Perceptions

The year 1937 seemed to be a tipping point in the change from eleven to twelve grades. In addition to the theoretical discussions taking place in journal articles, there was growing frustration with the inconsistency of a system featuring schools with a differing number of years. A report of the 1937 Texas State Teachers Association convention held in Houston described a resolution from the Committee on Resolutions concerning this inconsistency:

As a grave irregularity resulting in disorganization is being produced by the adoption of a twelve grade system in some schools and the retention of the eleven grade system in others, we believe that the best interests of the state can be served only through action on the part of the State Board of Education, and we recommend that that body define a definite policy relative to the number of grades included in the curriculum. (Committee on Resolutions, 1938, p. 20)

This call to action was significant: a body of teachers at the state level officially requested the State Board to “define a definite [statewide] policy” concerning the number of grades.

By the end of the 1937-1938 school year, the original class of six-year-olds from 1930 would have just finished the eighth grade. In July of the 1938 summer vacation after the students’ eighth grade year, the *Dallas Morning News* had this as the front page headline of section two: “Twelve-Year School System Advocated.” A section of the article read:

Claiming children under the present Dallas school system get out of public school too young, Dr. J.H. Ray, 803 North Oak Cliff Boulevard, said the twelve-grade system should be adopted. Dr. Ray said girls usually are graduates at 16 and boys at 17. He expressed belief this was too young and suggested another year be added to the school course. ("Twelve-year," 1938, p. 1)

In a 1939 issue of the *Texas Outlook*, by the time those first six-year-olds had reached their ninth grade year, McCuan echoed the sentiments of the Dallas officials.

He argued that the addition of a twelfth year of school was:

especially needed in Texas since by a law inaugurated for the first time in 1930, six-year-old students were allowed to enter school. These students have not yet reached the eleventh year of school, but when they do, they will lower the present graduating age one year more, making it sixteen years approximately. These students will be much too young to enter into any phase of professional work. (McCuan, 1939, p. 38)

He concluded that "there appears to be only one remedy for the situation: the addition of the extra year of training" (p. 38).

By 1941, when those original students were entering their last year of school in the eleven-grade system, the dialogue increased considerably. In a 1941 *Texas Outlook*, W.B. Irvin of the Amarillo School District noted that in that school year "there will be a noticeable drop in the average age of high school graduates in Texas. This will result from the lowering in 1930 of the legal age of beginners from seven to six years" (Irvin, 1941, p. 37). While he acknowledged the reduction in age, he did not agree with McCuan (1939). Irvin continued, "On the other hand, a change to an inflexible twelve-grade system would work a hardship on many of our best students if provision is not made for their rapid progress through the schools" (Irvin, 1941, p. 37).

Opposition to the addition of the twelfth grade also came from parents whose attitudes reflected contemporary agrarian concerns of Texans. Rogers (1941) reported

that one parent wrote that “before a child can get a job, he must have a high school education, and the sooner he finishes high school, the sooner he can get him a job and help support the family” (p. 43). Another parent wrote “I believe the child can be efficiently schooled with the eleven grades, and by that time, they should be able to earn something for themselves in the world and learn to work and thrive” (p. 43). Still another parent wrote “for the children whose parents are able to send them to school, the twelve grades are fine, but for the less fortunate, some do not know how they can continue to do so. It costs enough to send them to school now without extra cost” (p. 43).

In the April 19, 1941, edition of the *Dallas Morning News*, opinion columnist Landrum argued against the addition of a twelfth grade. He wrote that a twelve-grade system was the wrong solution for the twelve-year “mistake of introducing six year olds into the public system” (Landrum, 1941a, p. 1). In the same article, he wrote of his opinion that the reduction in the starting age was motivated by the desire for parents to get their children out of the house earlier. He went so far as to suggest that mothers wanted their six-year-olds in school so they (the mothers) might play bridge (Landrum, 1941a).

The reaction to Landrum’s article covered the spectrum. One week later in the April 26 issue, Landrum shared some of the responses. “But [my readers]—some of them—say the columnator knows nothing about education. They are probably right about that. It is mighty hard to know anything about education” (Landrum, 1941b, p. 6). Later in the article, he included the indignant response of one lady who wrote “how

could you say the Dallas parents raised a commotion to get them started younger so the mothers could have more time for bridge?” (p. 6). One educator from Frost, Texas, responded that “I think [Mr. Landrum] you got out of your special field when you commented on the twelve grade school system in Texas” (p. 6). However, an Austin reader wrote “three cheers for this morning’s column on the public schools. The way they are run, they ruin the good minds and give conceited ideas to the poor ones. In both cases, they ruin the children for effective lives” (p. 6). One lady from Paris, Texas, put the discussion into a more national perspective:

Forty years ago I ran off to school at the age of five, not because my mother was playing bridge, but because being motherless, I missed the companionship of my older sister and other playmates. That was in Illinois, where there was a twelve-year school system. Later I finished my education in New Jersey, which also had a twelve-year school system. In fact, I don’t know of any other state, except Texas, which has only eleven years. (Landrum, 1941b, p. 6)

After sharing his reader comments, Landrum gave his opinion: Texas students were graduating too young; that they were “too young by exactly one year”; and that “it got that way by starting in exactly one year too young” (p. 6). In that one article, Landrum presented the range of views of Texas’s change from eleven to twelve grades.

Neither For nor Against

With a change of this size, multiple reactions might be expected. Among the voices supporting or opposing were some that were ambivalent. McCuan’s 1939 article in the *Texas Outlook* included an opinion from Thomas Briggs, a professor of Secondary Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, stating that a student’s success had more to do with native ability and educational quality than the number of

years of schooling he or she attended. He concluded that “it stands to reason that twelve years of good education may make little difference” (Briggs in McCuan, 1939, p. 38). A similar opinion in the same article from Percival Symonds, a professor of education at Teachers College, Columbia University, attributed “success in college or in the workplace with the strength of [one’s] drives and ambitions” (p. 38) as well as his or her educational experiences. Symonds concluded that “it is my belief that the distinction between influences of the eleven and twelve year schools would be difficult to detect” (p. 38). J. Hooper Wise, a professor at University College, wrote in the same article that he believed that a college-bound student only needed eleven years, but since there were other roles for public schools to play for the non-college-bound student, he thought twelve years of school was ideal (McCuan, 1939).

For

Despite the contrasting opinions, by 1939 the support for twelve years was beginning to grow. In McCuan’s 1939 article, he included many voices supporting the move to twelve grades. F.G. Livingood, a professor at Washington College, wrote:

With technological unemployment, the crowding of the curriculums, the need for more intensive guidance of the junior high school, etc., it appears to me that the twelve grade system is the more desirable type of system from the standpoint of efficiency, economic effectiveness and in real social values. (McCuan, 1939, p. 38)

Still in McCuan’s article, D. F. Votaw was cited as saying:

Texas schools have more severe promotional standards in the lower grades than do the schools of the North. Since the two are about together at the end of the seventh grade, the additional eighth grade of the North means practically a full year of additional school materials for northern pupils before entering high school. (McCuan, 1939, p. 38)

And A.S. Edwards added: “Achievement as shown by the registrar’s records shows superiority for the twelve-grade students on practically all grades reported. Clearly the twelve-year students get fewer undesirable and more desirable grades” (McCuan, 1939, p. 38). McCuan (1939) concluded in his article that the twelve-year plan allowed students more time to mature mentally and physically, and based on available materials, the twelve year plan showed superiority in all three levels of schooling (p. 38). Gray and Votaw (1941) later echoed this opinion by citing studies showing that among the schools which implemented the twelve-grade plan, “an exceptionally large number showed erratic increases in scores through the grades” (p. 27).

While McCuan’s 1939 article primarily referenced educational researchers and scholars, Rogers included testimonies from teachers and parents in his 1941 article in the *Texas Outlook*. One teacher had told him that she supported the change to twelve grades because children were older when they left the system. She felt they were therefore more mature when they entered the business world and would be more likely to be successful in their professional enterprises (Rogers, 1941, p. 42). Another teacher believed that students benefited from the extra year at home under parental supervision (p. 43). An English teacher stated that the “twelve grade plan saved the day” (p. 43) for teachers giving grammar instruction in the seventh and eighth grades. One teacher simply concluded that it was “much better to increase school cost than increase penal institution cost” (p. 43). One parent said that a sixteen-and-a-half-year-old graduate was too young to enter college or the workforce or to “make proper decisions for

himself” (p. 43). Another parent was enough in favor of the extra year to state “in my opinion, cost should be disregarded” (p. 43).

By 1941, the movement for twelve grades in Texas was gaining momentum from researchers, administrators, teachers, and parents. There were dissenting voices to be sure, but the graduation date of the 16- to 17-year-old students who began their educational journey as six-year-olds in 1930 seemed to be a major catalyst for the twelve-year change.

Practical Concerns – Textbooks

Some of the barriers to fully embracing the twelve-grade plan were not in the opinions of those affected, but in matters inherent to the existing system. One of those challenges concerned the new textbooks that would be needed for the addition of another grade. The Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) had learned through a questionnaire given to superintendents throughout the state that a large number of superintendents who already had the twelve-grade system, or who were planning on adopting the twelve-grade system in the near future, expressed the urgent need for different textbooks for the new system (Williams, 1940). TASA requested guidance from the SDE, and at its July 1940 meeting, the SDE responded by appointing a special committee to consider the textbook issue.

In the September 1940 *Texas Outlook*, Frank Williams, president of TASA, reported that the committee was comprised of “twenty-five prominent school people from widely spread points in Texas, including teachers, principals, superintendents, and college professors” (Williams, 1940, p. 16), along with other members of the State

Board of Education and Dr. L.A. Woods, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The committee recommended the adoption of a “pre-primer of the pre-reading level” (p. 16); getting textbooks for grades two through eight; texts for third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade math; additional books for seventh and eighth grade math; and an eighth grade community civics text. Williams described further committee action to address the issue of textbooks in the new twelve-grade system:

- 1) The adoption by the State Board of the fourth pre-primer which has already been authorized by state law, but which has not yet been purchased by the State Board.
- 2) A continuation of the policy of adopting writing and drawing textbooks to fit eight grades.
- 3) The adoption of spelling and arithmetic texts to cover eight years rather than seven.
- 4) The consideration of the matter of social science texts in the junior high school level, or for the eighth grade of the present senior high school, since the only choice of courses which is now provided with free textbooks is that of ancient history. (p. 16)

Williams noted that it was the “unanimous opinion of this committee” (p. 17) that schools would be able to get books regardless of the form of twelve-grade plan that they adopted: the 8-4, the 6-3-3, or any of the other various plans that schools were considering. As for schools remaining under the eleven-grade plan, they could approach the textbook issue by just leaving out the books for eighth grade spelling, writing, and drawing and choose as many as the arithmetic books that their grade level would suggest. The textbook issue was an important one and may have made a difference in whether a school system moved to twelve grades, as Williams pointed out that several superintendents indicated that they would not be changing to a twelve-grade system until textbooks were furnished. Williams concluded that the textbook plan was

necessary since it was “evident that the twelve-year plan [was] going to be the established plan in Texas in the near future” (p. 17) and that it did not make sense for teachers to create their own courses of study. The committee thus addressed one barrier to the twelve-grade plan and was confident that it would be solved.

Practical Concerns – Pedagogy

Another barrier to implementation of the twelve-grade system concerned the pedagogical adjustments due to adding the extra grade. Schools implemented the extra grade at many different levels, and each of them had their own practical and instructional challenges. Margaret Rouse (1942) of Mary Hardin-Baylor wrote about the challenges presented to elementary school teachers in districts adding the new year in the early grades. She explained that many of these schools used half of the extra year as a preparatory period before starting first grade work, and then the other half was absorbed by the other elementary school grades. Rouse (1942) contended that “this new plan makes use of two psychological principles that we recognize as important in the learning process; yet we have been violating both principles in our first grades in the past” (p. 16).

One principle Rouse (1942) identified was maturation; that it was important to account for the cognitive readiness of young students for their lessons. Rouse argued that too many first grade teachers rushed the reading lessons, harming the students’ development rather than helping:

Since these pupils were not ready to read, this drill too often proved tedious and resulted in the development of a dislike for reading; in many cases this dislike

for reading persisted all through the other years spent in school, often hindering in the mastery of other school subjects in later years. (p. 16)

A second principle Rouse identified was planning; she contended that first grade teachers needed to plan activities in order to develop reading readiness, while at the same time not designing activities for the activities' sake. She warned that such misguided focus would waste valuable time.

Rouse (1942) developed three questions to guide first grade curriculum during the change to twelve grades. Her first question: "First, what is being done to help the child develop socially?" (p. 16). Rouse wanted to make sure that students were given time for small group discussion in order to help develop self-confidence and social development. Her second question dealt with mental development and ensuring that additional time was provided for the students to explore the world around them, and she identified story-telling and problem-solving as curricular strategies that needed to be employed. Rouse's third question addressed the physical welfare of the students; she encouraged teachers to remember that young children required movement of large muscles and to use games when possible. Rouse hoped that teachers would implement strategies that addressed her three questions and she encouraged teachers to evaluate the results of their efforts, concluding that if teachers could see progress in the three aspects of growth, then they were taking good advantage of the preparatory period provided by the extra grade (p. 17).

At the end of her article, Rouse (1942) suggested that districts practice patience, that the initially slow progress in the first year would pay off down the road. She wrote, "since mastery of the ability to read is needed for success in the upper grades, we

should be able to see the benefits of the twelve-grade plan throughout the entire school career of the pupils who are fortunate enough to begin school in a system with twelve grades “ (p. 17). Such attention to instructional detail was intended for schools adding the twelfth grade early in a student’s school years. Regardless of where the grade was inserted, pedagogical issues of similar scope would have to be considered for all districts.

Moving toward Change

With all the discussion swirling around the Texas school system by the early 1940s, Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA) President W. B. Irvin perhaps summarized the educational climate best in his 1941 *Texas Outlook* article: “In the main, Texas still has an eleven-grade school system, but there is every indication that there will soon be a predominance of twelve-grade systems in our state, either with or without mandatory legislative action” (Irvin, 1941, p. 37). Financial arrangements were being debated, practical measures were being considered, curriculum matters were being evaluated, and popular opinions were being collected and weighed. For the case of the twelve-grade system in Texas—the last state to embrace it—the ferment, started by one superintendent changing his school, finally reached maturity and would change the system for the whole state.

CHAPTER IV

RESOLUTION

Statewide Attention

By the 1940s, the twelve-grade systems were getting underway—albeit in a haphazard way—and a unified plan from the state level was the next step. Irvin (1941), from TSTA, predicted the change from eleven to twelve grades “with or without mandatory legislative action” (p. 37), but to this point, the only mandates had come from local superintendents and school boards. A plan from an authority capable of coordinating the gigantic Texas school system would speed the previous random process. Two years before such a plan finally came, McCuan (1939) included a report of findings from a study done by Fred C. Ayer, a researcher who published several spelling books:

- 1) Less failure in four level grouping.
- 2) Better adapted to individual differences of pupils.
- 3) Greater flexibility in classifying pupils and promotion.
- 4) Takes advantage of research the country over now going on at a twelve-year basis.
- 5) Facilitates use of nationally published textbooks and tests.
- 6) Facilitates transfer of pupils from twelve graded systems.
- 7) Avoids the impression that Texas high schools are a year short of other states.
- 8) Takes advantage of the fact that a majority of Texas pupils now take twelve years to graduate.
- 9) Better adapted to the increasing percentage of six-year-old entrants.
- 10) Better adapted to the nation-wide tendency to move primary-grade learning materials to higher grade levels.
- 11) Allows increased time essential to activity teaching movement.

- 12) Brings first-year junior high school pupils in at the proper age of twelve instead of eleven.
- 13) Provides more time for exploratory organization and guidance objectives of junior high schools.
- 14) Tends to keep pupils in high school longer and to avoid too early entrance into the industrial world.
- 15) Many believe that the larger number of average pupils now going into secondary levels necessitate a longer school period. (McCuan, 1939, p. 39)

After listing the study's findings, McCuan summarized his article with an unequivocal endorsement of the twelve-year plan: "When all of this has been done, then the schools of Texas will have taken the first step toward higher educational rating" (p. 39). Such strong evidence demanded attention at the state level.

During the 1930s, the State Department of Education had remained largely silent on the matter. One of the first references to twelve grades is found in the SDE documents in 1938, under a section detailing a discussion of credits for junior high schools. The SDE had formulated a tentative plan of standardization of credits for junior high schools but added that there would be "deviation from the above plan when the twelve-grade system is adopted but for the time being we shall not go into the possible changes brought about by the teaching of twelve grades. Too few schools are yet affected by the change" (Woods, 1938, p. 109). Such a dismissive mention from the SDE appeared to indicate that it had yet to seriously consider the twelve-grade system by the time of this 1938 discussion, 11 years after Port Arthur made the initial change.

Texas districts' attention to the issue of twelve grades paralleled that of the state agencies. Therefore, I will follow the trajectory of the schools in one metropolitan area, Dallas, as they moved to consider and then implement the twelve-grade system, beginning in 1938 and ending with the acceptance of the new system.

Dr. J. H. Ray of Dallas focused attention on the issue in July, 1938, the same year as the first mention of the twelve-grade system in the SDE. He claimed that children under the present system were too young to graduate and recommended the addition of another year of training (“Twelve-year school system,” 1938). A year later, the twelve-grade momentum began to grow, prompting more attention from the SDE. In the 1938-1939 SDE *Standards and Activities of the Division of Supervision Bulletin* under the heading “A Twelve-Year School Program Approved for Texas,” State Superintendent L. A. Woods noted: “Beginning with the scholastic year 1939-1940 and thereafter the public school program of Texas may cover twelve years of work” (Woods, 1939, p. 27). Woods provided direction for “local school authorities choosing to inaugurate a twelve-grade system” (p. 27) but did not give specifics about implementation, saying that “each superintendent should choose the method he thinks most satisfactory in installing the twelve grades in his school system” (p. 27). The language used does not suggest a mandate, but rather a decision that schools could make.

Inconsistent Implementation

The state addressed the twelve-grade system again in the 1939-1940 *Standards*.

This bulletin noted:

The school people and the laymen of this State are showing an increased interest in a twelve-year program for the schools of Texas. Because of this increased interest, the State Department of Education is receiving many calls asking for information regarding the twelve-year plan. One of the most persistent questions is how the transfer may be made from the present program to the proposed twelve-year program. After a rather careful study of the methods that have been used and some study on the subject, we wish to recommend the

following plan: We suggest that the additional work be placed primarily in the first three grades, with a general extension upward of materials, which would allow for additional time on the junior high school level. We believe, however, that the first three grades need most revision. (Woods, 1940, p. 50)

The wording in this bulletin still implied that the state had not made a definitive recommendation that all schools move to the twelve-grade system, saying further that “this plan is merely suggested for those who wish to make the change and who are seeking the suggestions of the State Department of Education” (Woods, 1940, p. 51). However, Woods did propose a plan as to how districts choosing to adopt a twelve-year program might implement it. Woods included a chart showing the state’s suggested plan of action (see Figure 3).

In the Dallas public schools, administrative action moved along in step with what was being seen in the SDE. According to an article in the *Dallas Morning News (DMN)* in October of 1940, the Dallas Board of Education recommended that its schools, then operating with eleven grades, adopt a twelve-grade system (“12 grades urged,” 1940). To this point, the SDE had made no plan, only suggestions.

Figure 3. Plan for student placement

The accompanying chart shows the proposed relationship of the twelve-year plan to the eleven-year plan. Assuming that a school with an eleven-year plan is going to transfer to a twelve-year plan next fall, students should be placed as follows:

	1	—All students entering school for the first time
1	2	—Students retained in the first grade and others who show by test their ability to do the work
2	3	—Those promoted to the second grade
3	4	—Those promoted to the third grade
4	5	—Those promoted to the fourth grade
5	6	—Those promoted to the fifth grade
6	7	—Those promoted to the sixth grade
7	8	—Those promoted to the seventh grade
8	9	—Those promoted to the eighth grade
9	10	—Those promoted to the ninth grade
10	11	—Those promoted to the tenth grade
11	12	—Those promoted to the eleventh grade

(Woods, 1940, p. 50)

In Dallas, there was a decision to move forward with twelve grades with only thoughts as to how to proceed. The Dallas board hoped to accommodate the students who had been thriving under the old system, envisioning a system that would “be

flexible, depending upon the ability of the child” (“12 grades urged,” 1940) and the plan was to add the extra grade between first and fifth grades. The article in the *DMN* continued:

At least 70 per cent of the schools of Texas have gone to the twelve grade system, and the State Textbook Commission is now adopting most of its new books on the basis of a twelve grade program. During the depression years the swing throughout the nation was to the eleven grades, the pendulum now is going the other way. (“12 grades urged,” 1940)

This article in the *DMN* was published on October, 23, 1940, and in the next day’s issue, October 24, *DMN* writers elaborated on the decision to move to twelve grades and mentioned that the American Association of University Women endorsed the twelve-grade plan (“Twelve-grade schooling,” 1940). The article pointed out that defenders of the eleven-grade system thought that the twelve-grade system was wasteful, and these defenders argued that well-organized curriculum and instruction could do the same work in eleven years as in twelve (“Twelve-grade schooling,” 1940). But it was also noted that this “contention has been strongly debated” (p. 4), evidenced by the questionable validity of standardized tests which omitted certain sections for eleven-grade students who had not taken certain courses (“Twelve-grade schooling,” 1940). The article also argued that the twelve-grade system sent students away from public school at a later and better age: “In general, a boy or girl of eighteen is better prepared than one of seventeen to leave the parental roof and assume responsibility for his conduct in some distant city” (p. 4). Later in the article, it was emphasized that Texas schools “have been shifting gradually from the eleven-year system to that which requires twelve-years” (p. 4). In this discussion of the eleven- versus twelve-grade

issue, some of the same arguments that Superintendent Sims from Port Arthur had been making for over a decade were reaching the tipping point, increasingly becoming the opinion held by the majority.

On page 11 of the same issue (October 24, 1940), the *Dallas Morning News* reported on a conference of North Texas superintendents being held to discuss the problems inherent in making the change to twelve grades. The article highlighted just how complex the change would be, and scholars such as Dr. George Clough (Southern Methodist University), Dr. J. W. O'Bannion (SDE), Dr. J. C. Mathews (North Texas State), Dr. E. H. Hereford (SDE), and Dr. J. G. Umstadt (University of Texas) were to participate in an open forum discussion regarding the twelve-grade issue ("School issues," 1940).

In an article published three days later (October 27, 1940), the *Dallas Morning News* reported that the attendees at the North Texas superintendents' conference thought the following about the change to a twelve-grade system: it should be flexible, it would be expensive, especially in rural schools, and it would be most successful if the additional grade was placed somewhere before the fifth grade ("Twelve-grade plan's details," 1940). The most important development from the conference was Dr. Hereford's advisement that "all schools begin the adjustment to the twelve-grade system at the beginning of the next school year" ("Twelve-grade plan's details," 1940, p. 12), which would be the 1941-1942 school term. Hereford's statement foreshadowed the developments at the state level in the coming calendar year.

One week after the conference and Hereford's comment, Dallas County Superintendent Joe P. Harris announced that county schools outside of Dallas proper would likely change to twelve grades if the Dallas city schools made the change ("12-grade systems," 1940). Harris explained that the city schools' change would force the county schools to comply because of the annual interchange of students between the two systems (p. 1).

Increased Momentum

Similar conversations were going on in other parts of the state as well. In September of 1940, a group of superintendents from Brazos, Burleson, Grimes, Leon, Madison, Milam, Robertson, Walker, and Washington county schools met at Texas A&M University to discuss two matters, one of which was the twelve-year school movement ("District school heads," 1940). *The Houstonian*—the campus newspaper for what is now Sam Houston State University in Huntsville—printed an article of support for twelve grades. In a November piece, the paper argued that the extra year of school would make

a tremendous difference in the possibilities of [graduates] getting jobs at the completion of their college career. There are so many young people who do not have jobs today that would rather have stayed in school one more year, more adequately preparing themselves for their future jobs. ("Present trend," 1940)

Schools in the vicinity of Sam Houston State were making the non-mandated change during this time. On March 8, 1941, Superintendent Z. R. Robinson announced the Centerville schools had made the switch to the twelve-grade plan, the first school in Leon County to do so ("Twelfth grade," 1941).

In 1941, the Texas State Teachers Association called for the twelve-grade plan, with TSTA President W. B. Irvin arguing that Texas was falling behind the other states.

He said,

It is true that schools in nearly all other states operate on a twelve-grade plan and have been operating on such a plan for years. This may be the one reason why Texas, now that the opportunity has come, should do the thing that would put her ahead educationally rather than to be content to follow two generations behind the organizations for education in other states. (Irvin, 1941, p. 37)

One of the watershed moments of the movement occurred in 1941 during an April 10 statewide meeting of superintendents in Temple, Texas. Though L.A. Woods, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, was in attendance, the meeting had been called at the requests of local teachers and superintendents anxious for some clarity on the growing twelve-grade movement. The March 21 edition of the *Bartlett Tribune* carried the headline “Twelve Grade School System For Bartlett May Soon Become Reality” and the story included a segment calling for the SDE to fall in line with the twelve-grade movement in central Texas and beyond:

Central Texas teachers approved the adoption of the 12-grade system at a meeting held recently in Temple and petitioned State Supt. L.A. Woods to call a statewide meeting to discuss the system and to standardize it for all Texas Schools if it is adopted. East Texas teachers and other groups took similar action and the meeting has been called for April 10 in Temple. (“Twelve grade,” 1941)

The schools represented at the Temple meeting wanted more direction than the SDE had provided to that point; the general instructions given earlier were not enough for the schools serious about executing the transition to twelve grades.

The meeting did occur in Temple on Thursday, April 10, but no minutes of the meeting have been located. However, evidence of the effects of the meeting was easier

to locate. On the front page of the Friday, April 11 *Breckenridge American*, Superintendent J. F. Bailey of Breckenridge schools reported that “the twelve grade school system undoubtedly will be adopted in Texas. At the meeting this was unanimously voted and the wishes of this body will govern the state department, it was thought” (“Twelve grades in schools,” 1941). One month later, Woods (1941b) wrote in the *Texas Outlook* that the twelve-grade system was endorsed in that meeting “by an overwhelming majority” (p. 14) of the superintendents. He listed the results of this meeting as a major factor in the SDE’s eventual official announcement on the recognized pattern of the Texas twelve-grade schools (Woods, 1941b, p. 14).

News of the Temple meeting traveled quickly. Exactly one week after the meeting, an Associated Press wide-release article from Austin appeared in papers throughout the state. In the *Dallas Morning News*, it appeared under this headline: “Twelve-Grade School Plan Is Approved: Pattern Laid Out, Superintendents Asked To Adopt It” (1941). The article’s lead read:

Rapid adoption by Texas schools of the twelve-grade system brought announcement Wednesday from State Supt. L. A. Woods that a recognized pattern had been designated by the State Department of Education. Woods asked all county and local superintendents to put the new plan into operation as early as possible. (“Twelve-grade school plan,” 1941, p. 6)

The article described the accepted pattern of eight elementary grades followed by the standard four-year high school, but indicated that the arrangement could be changed to six-grade elementary, three-year junior high, and three-grade high school (p. 6). In the article, Woods was quoted as saying that by May schools would be supplied with minimum requirement outlines for the eight elementary grades. He further explained

that any student finishing seventh grade under an eleven-grade plan should be admitted into the ninth grade of a twelve-grade plan. He also noted that the SDE had officially recognized the legitimacy of the twelve-grade plan because of its adoption of textbooks for such a system. The article concluded with a definitive statement: “‘No school should be classified under the new plan as a seven-grade or as an eleven-grade school,’ State Superintendent Woods declared. ‘We can no longer operate efficiently and effectively a system of schools in which there exists two distinct types of organization’” (“Twelve-grade school plan,” 1941, p. 6). By April 17, then, the twelve-grade plan had been accepted, but districts were still being asked to reorganize “as early as possible” (p. 6) with official recommendations from the SDE still a month away.

Three days later, an opinion-piece in the *Dallas Morning News* put the Woods statement into perspective:

There can be little argument with the contention advanced by Superintendent of Schools L.A. Wood [*sic*] that it is impracticable to continue Texas state education on both a twelve-grade and eleven-grade basis. His request for uniform installation of the twelve-grade system as quickly as possible amounts, in fact, to a well-based ultimatum. (“Twelve-grade schools,” 1941, p. 8)

The *DMN* also pointed out that textbook adoptions and curricular planning for twelve-grade systems would quickly render the eleven-grade system obsolete. It also expressed hope that the change would address the “constant complaint of schools of higher learning that too many of their freshmen are unsuitably trained for the work” (p. 8). The *DMN* was particularly hopeful that the extra year might assist in the transition from high school level English and mathematics to their college-level

counterparts, the subjects “responsible for the heaviest percentage of the crop failure of first year college young folk” (p. 8).

Pressure to Change

The twelve-grade movement continued to accelerate. Two days later, the *Dallas Morning News* reported that Dallas Superintendent Julius Dorsey would present a plan to the Dallas Board of Education to change the Dallas schools from eleven to twelve grades (“Plans drawn,” 1941). In addition to the details of his plan, Dorsey stressed that the plan would be flexible, allowing accelerated students to finish in eleven grades if they were able. The next issue of the *DMN* covered the presentation of the actual plan, noting that “under the proposed system pupils now in school would be moved up a grade so that they would complete their school work in eleven years,” whereas “reorganization of the curriculum would be in the first three grades which would become known as the primaries” (“Twelve-grade school system,” 1941, p. 20).

Though he outlined the Dallas school plan, Dorsey still had some reservations. He insisted on the flexibility of the plan on largely practical grounds. He argued that his data showed that roughly 60% of their students currently made adequate yearly progress under the old eleven-grade system. He felt that if all the students entering first grade were required to follow the twelve-grade program, not only would this decision penalize the 60% who would be able to succeed without the extra grade, but it would require the hire of some 60 additional teachers with an estimated increase of salary of around \$90,000 (“Twelve-grade school system,” 1941).

Over the next few weeks, other schools came on board. Sherman ISD, a Dallas area school district, proposed changing to the twelve-grade system, and Superintendent R. L. Speer, who had been studying the issue over the previous months, recommended a method of introducing the system to the Sherman Board on April 25 (“Plan 12-grade,” 1941). In the May 5 issue, the *DMN* reported that the Dallas County School Board would consider the change to twelve grades for Dallas County’s 45 rural schools, effective that following September (“County board,” 1941). In his explanation of the issue to the *DMN*, Dallas County School Superintendent Joe P. Harris’ assessment of the problem differed from that of Julius Dorsey: “We have been trying to make 6-year olds in the first grade do the work cut out for those of 7. Fifty percent of all our first grade pupils fail annually” (“County board,” 1941, p. 10). Not only did this appraisal contrast to Dorsey’s 1941 claim that 60% make satisfactory progress, it also mirrored the claims of the first grade teachers who opposed the 1930 law allowing six-year-olds into the first grade, such as Munday’s Mayme Crouch (1942).

The Dallas County School plan was aimed at the early grades, creating a new first grade for chart work, pre-primers, and a part of the work done in the pre-change first grade. The second grade would cover the remainder of the pre-change first grade and a part of the second grade. Similarly, the new third grade would allow a student to complete the pre-change second grade and to begin the third grade (“County board,” 1941). The *DMN* also reported that the insertion of the extra grade at the bottom of the system would mean an increase in physical education and fine arts opportunities in the lower grades (“County board,” 1941). The addition of the grade in the primary schools

addressed the academic and social maturation concerns of thinkers like Margaret Rouse (1942) while seeming to side-step Dorsey's claims that a majority of the students progressed adequately.

Two days later, in a May 7 front page story, the *DMN* reported the approval of the twelve-grade system in Dallas County for all schools ("Twelve-grade system voted," 1941). The article discussed the details of the change, many of which had been described in the May 5 issue, and it allayed Dorsey's other fear about the increase in staff and salary: "Mr. Harris said he does not foresee an increase in the teaching staffs of twenty four common districts in the county, as the new grade will be absorbed by present instructors" ("Twelve-grade system voted," 1941, p. 1).

By the middle of May, 1941, Dallas city and county schools had decided on the transition and the work of implementation could begin. Other districts around the state prepared for their own transitions, such as the ones in Denison ("12-grade system in Texas," 1941) and Bartlett ("School promotion," 1941). Bartlett's implementation had the feature of creating a new second grade designed only for those first graders that did not earn promotion during the 1941-1942 school year. Those who did earn promotion would move to third grade ("School promotion," 1941). In Rusk, the plan featured a two grade jump at the fifth grade, with all students earning promotion advancing to seventh grade ("Texas adopts," 1941). A similar system was instituted in the Hamshire and Amelia school systems. All Hamshire and Amelia students earning promotion advanced two grades while their counterparts who did not earn promotion advanced just one grade (B. & P. Phend, personal communication, February 13, 2013).

Before the month of May ended, the Texas SDE finally made the twelve-grade system the officially recognized system in Texas. State Superintendent Woods sent an open letter to all schools in the May issue of the *Texas Outlook*:

To all County and Local School Superintendents:

Since a recent survey by the State Department of Education shows that the schools of this state are changing to the twelve-grade system in ever-increasing numbers; and since at a state-wide meeting of superintendents in the city of Temple on April 10, the twelve-grade system was indorsed [*sic*] by an overwhelming majority; and since we believe that this type of organization is for the best interest of the school children of Texas; and since we can no longer operate efficiently a system of schools in which there exists two distinct types of organizations; and since the State Board of Education has officially recognized the twelve-grade system by adopting textbooks for that type of organization, I hereby announce that the recognized pattern for Texas public schools is an elementary school of eight grades, followed by the standard four year high school. May I ask you to work with your school boards in putting this plan into execution in your respective districts as soon as possible? (Woods, 1941b, p. 14)

Woods's letter later described alternative possibilities in the arrangement of the grades and what to do with small rural schools with fewer than five teachers. Toward the end of the letter, he instructed eleven-grade schools making the transition to twelve-grade schools to classify students who had completed seventh grade as ninth graders in the fall of 1941. Woods advised any districts which might "desire to make the change without loss of time" to renumber all grades above the fifth

by simple announcement of the change in organization. This will not entail any change in work or in teacher assignments. Then the first five grades should be made into six grades by the use of tests, or a plan should be worked out by the faculty which will create the least amount of friction and result in the fewest changes of pupils from room to room. (Woods, 1941b, p. 14)

In that one letter, State Superintendent Woods made the twelve-grade plan official, but it still was not binding. His polite question "May I ask you to work with your school boards in putting this plan into execution" (p. 14) was not a mandate, and it

was clear that he understood that districts might struggle with immediate implementation: one of the paragraphs in his open letter assured that “helpful suggestions [would] appear in the *Texas Outlook* from time to time which will be of assistance to you as superintendents in perfecting your new organization with as little delay as possible” (p. 14). Even though the language in no way implied a mandate, phrases like “without loss of time” (p. 14) and “little delay as possible” (p. 14) suggested the State Department of Education’s desire for the change to happen quickly.

In a footnote to the Dallas area schools’ transition to twelve grades, Highland Park, an independent school district within the Dallas city limits, announced its transition plans in August of 1941 (“Park cities,” 1941). A difference in the pre-change Highland Park school systems was the existence of a one semester kindergarten and a following semester of pre-primary. Under the system, students reported to kindergarten at five and a half years of age, then began pre-primary at six years of age. Though it had always been an eleven-year school by name, with the kindergarten and pre-primary semesters, the system’s children had been attending twelve years already.

Superintendent H.E. Gable said that the Highland Park schools would consider gradual changes in the admittance age for its children. Gable also considered adding another half year so that their students would attend twelve and a half years by graduation (“Park cities,” 1941). Highland Park’s proposal foreshadowed the current thirteen-year system featuring twelve grades plus one full year of kindergarten.

Twelve Grades Sweep the State

After Woods's letter in the May *Texas Outlook*, which made the change official, the already swift-moving change moved even more swiftly. In the State Department of Education *Bulletin No. 409* printed on September 1 of 1941—at the beginning of the first school year after the official adoption of the twelve-grade school—another recognition of the twelve-grade system along with a more thorough plan of implementation appeared. The opening paragraph of a section titled *A Twelve Year School Program Approved for Texas* credited the April 10 meeting in Temple as a catalyst for action: “At a State-wide meeting of school administrators held at Temple recently an overwhelming majority of the group signified a desire to see Texas adopt the twelve grade school system” (Woods, 1941a, p. 51). Woods acknowledged that many questions persisted as to how to transfer from eleven to twelve grades. The SDE outlined its plan:

We suggest that the additional work be place primarily in the first three grades, with a general extension upward of materials, which would allow for additional time on the junior high school level. We believe, however, that the first three grades most need revision. We urge that the grades be renumbered immediately; for example, a student who is in the eleventh grade should be placed in the twelfth , with, of course, no change in subject material. Other grades should be renumbered in like manner. The additional year should be added at the beginning of the present program. We propose that the first grade in the twelve-year plan include work below the present first grade; that is, pre-primer, and a portion of the present first grade. The second grade shall include the remainder of the first grade with some work which has been given in the second grade. The third grade will be the old second grade with only a slight amount of the third grade work. The fourth grade will be the third grade under the former organization. The fifth grade will be the fourth grade, etc., throughout the program of study. We assume that additional material in physical education, fine arts, and safety will be added to the elementary grades, thereby enriching the program. (Woods, 1941a, p. 51)

A point of interest would be noting the paragraphs in the *Bulletin* that appeared after the actual plan. One of them addressed the junior high school, the level of the educational system that did so much to motivate George Sims to inaugurate the twelve-grade system 14 years earlier in Port Arthur. The *Bulletin* stated:

we have not made allowance for extra time on the junior high school level. However, we assume that since the child has had six years of instruction rather than five, and since he is a year older, he will be better prepared and therefore able to do better work in the junior high school. (Woods, 1941a, p. 53)

Any advantages of the twelve-grade plan for the junior high student seemed to be considered by-products of the advantages gained in the lower grades. As for those who favored the extra grade because of the advantages at the high school level, the *Bulletin* simply stated “we do not recommend any change in the senior high school except that the grades be renumbered” (p. 53). Many pages later, under the heading *The Junior High School*, during a discussion of how to install the extra grade, the SDE specifically stated that “no work should, however, be added at the top; i.e., no work should be added above the present offering in the senior high school” (p. 169). Any advantages for the high school student would not be driven by any recommended curricular change but by the inherent condition of being a year older at graduation.

Though the language was stronger and more thorough, there was still no mandate. State Superintendent Woods stated in the 1941 *Bulletin* that “this plan is merely suggested for those who wish to make the change and who are seeking the suggestions of the State Board of Education” (p. 53). However, there was a hint of mandate 113 pages later during the discussion of the junior high school. In 1941, the school districts could still choose whether or not to have junior high schools, and in

order to advise those districts which featured junior high schools, the SDE assured the districts that “beginning with the year 1941-1942, the public program of Texas should cover twelve years of work” (p. 169). On the following page, the SDE mandated that junior high school “must work toward a unit of organization embracing the three grades, 7, 8, 9” (p. 170). In an attempt to standardize the number of grades schools could use to designate as junior high grades, the SDE communicated simply and directly its expectation for twelve grades in the statewide program without exercising a statewide mandate.

With the printing of the plan in the 1940-1941 *Bulletin*, most eleven-grade schools in Texas began their shift to twelve grades. Later, in the 1941-1942 discussion of the twelve-grade school program in the *Bulletin*, the SDE stated that “more than eighty percent of the schools in the state changed over to the twelve year plan last fall. Most of them followed the plan outlined below” (Woods, 1942a, p. 45). That plan was an almost word-for-word match with the plan from the prior year’s *Bulletin*. Even with the statistic indicating 80% compliance during the 1941-42 school year, the *Bulletin* still included the “exception” paragraph: “This plan is merely suggested for those who wish to make the change and who are seeking the suggestions of the State Department of Education” (p. 47). Despite the soft wording of that paragraph, the SDE also stated “the other schools are expected to make the change with the beginning of this school year [1942-43]” (p. 45).

The *Biennial Report* for 1940-1941 and 1941-1942 indicated that “practically all of the Texas schools” (Woods, 1942b, p. 15) had chosen the SDE’s plan for twelve-

grade organization. It also stated that according to the records of the Textbook Division, at least 95% of Texas schools had begun operating a twelve-grade program, although that percentage conflicted with the 80% statistic from the same year's *Bulletin*. The report from the Division of Curriculum gave a good overview of the status of the twelve-grade transition by the end of the 1941-1942 school year. The report indicated that assisting local systems with the change to twelve grades was a "major activity" (p. 42) of the Curriculum Division during that year, and that the division's recommendation was to place additional work mainly in the first three grades. It stated "quite obviously, it will take a few years for the schools of the State to have anything like uniformity in their offerings under the 12-year plan" (p. 42). The transition to twelve grades in Texas was almost complete, but the details of implementation were just beginning.

Texas Issues Mandate

Finally, in September of 1944, in the *Standards and Activities of the Division of Supervision Bulletin No. 438*, the mandate came beneath the heading "A Twelve Year School Program Required for all Accredited High Schools":

The twelve year school program was approved by Texas in 1941. During the last four years approximately 90% of the high school districts have adopted the eight year elementary school. We feel that the time has come when all schools should be on the uniform twelve year program. The Committee on Classified and Accredited High Schools hereby approves the twelve year plan for all accredited high schools, and instructs the Director of Supervision to require that the twelve year organization be a pre-requisite to a fully accredited high school district. Schools that have not made the change to a twelve grade program because of emergency conditions may classify as twelve grades and run a blank eighth grade for the next year. (Woods, 1944a, p. 14)

By late 1944, the SDE reported that there were very few schools that had not adopted the twelve-grade plan (Woods, 1944b), and in 1946 the SDE stated that “only one more year is to be allowed for the few remaining systems to complete the transition if they are to remain on the accredited list” (Woods, 1946, p. 18).

Summary

No longer a mere suggestion, what began with the Port Arthur schools in 1927 had become a requirement for Texas schools. Texas’s shift from eleven to twelve grades was gradual; 20 years passed between Port Arthur’s inaugural twelve-grade year in 1927 and the SDE’s eventual mandate of the twelve-grade system in 1947. Superintendents and teachers played a role in helping the state decide to act on the twelve-grade system. The Texas State Teachers Association supported the change, and its official endorsement immediately preceded the called meeting of a group of superintendents in Temple to request that the SDE provide more direction for districts making the change. State Superintendent Woods was invited to this Temple meeting, and after the meeting the SDE began its real attention to the matter. In fact, the SDE referenced the Temple meeting in the text of its instructions to schools in the SDE bulletins. The resulting statewide change came from the system itself and grew through teachers and superintendents before finally reaching the State Department of Education.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Prior to 1940, most Texas school districts had eleven grades. In 1926, Port Arthur, Texas, schools added a twelfth grade, and by 1939 at least 13 other Texas school districts had changed to twelve grades. All accredited Texas schools presently have twelve grades of schooling. However, there is not a thorough record of how the changeover from eleven to twelve grades occurred in Texas schools; the purpose of this study was to tell the story of how Texas public schools changed from eleven grades to twelve. This study was historical in nature with two guiding research questions: What were the issues and conditions of the educational community in Texas between 1925 and 1950 that influenced the decision by school districts to change from eleven to twelve grades, and how did districts make the transition from eleven to twelve grades when they adopted the twelve-grade program?

Research Question #1

What were the issues and conditions of the educational community in Texas between 1925 and 1950 that influenced the decision by school districts and eventually the State Department of Education to change from eleven to twelve grades?

Throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Port Arthur ‘experiment’ with a twelve-grade school remained a local exercise. Despite the prevalence of the twelve-grade system throughout the northern United States and its emerging presence in the

South, Texas remained an eleven-grade state. Supporters for eleven grades found evidence against the twelve-grade model in the work of Dr. Herschel Manuel (1927) of The University of Texas who claimed that test scores from seven-year elementary students were actually higher than those from eight-year elementary students. The extra year of study before secondary school—the eighth year—was a central component of George Sims’s twelve-grade school.

In 1929, Edgar Knight of North Carolina University argued that the primary reason the South lagged behind the North in educational achievement was simple complacency; that despite a nineteenth century economic recovery during Reconstruction, the South was dragging its feet in regard to true educational innovation and the willingness to finance such innovation. Whether or not Texas was suffering from Knight’s opinion of southern complacency, Port Arthur’s success and excitement about the twelve-grade system did not catch on. By 1936, only one other district had adopted a similar system.

Knight’s thoughts appeared in a 1930 *Texas Outlook* article, one year after the Texas legislature passed a pivotal law reducing the entrance age of public school students from seven to six years. While the addition of an extra grade in Port Arthur had created little public discussion, the lowering of the entrance age inspired commentary from educational researchers, administrators, teachers, newspapers, and the public at large. Such a change affected all Texas children six years of age and under and sent ripples through all levels of schooling. The impact of the law would have a profound effect on the twelve-grade school movement as well. The first class of six-

year-olds to graduate from their eleven-grade school systems in 1941 would be 16 or 17 years of age. Debate over the capabilities of such young graduates occurred throughout the state, throughout the decade.

By the 1937-38 school year, there were at least 14 twelve-grade schools in Texas. In addition to Port Arthur, there were twelve-grade schools in Carthage, El Paso, Goose Creek, Iraan, Jefferson, Kermit, Lefors, Mercedes, Montgomery, Rankin, Sheffield, Stinnett, and Saltillo. The following year, Superintendent G.P. Parker of Jefferson published the results of a survey in which he contacted the superintendents of the other twelve-grade schools with a series of procedural questions. In addition to the questions about cost and textbook issues and problems with transfers of students from eleven-grade systems, Parker asked whether their communities and students approved or disapproved of the system. All of the superintendents who responded reported that their communities supported the change and that the system was serving their students well. Parker concluded his report with a call to the state for consistency. He noted that every other state in the union either had a twelve-grade system or was in the transition to such a system. He called for uniformity in methods and standards, and he did not like the fact that the 13 Texas schools which had chosen to join the rest of the country with twelve-grade systems were having to chart their paths alone, acting as pioneers with no guidance.

However, by the time Parker wrote his report, the class of 1941 was only two years away from graduating as 16- or 17-year-olds and statewide discussion was underway. Throughout the late 1930s, more and more people weighed the comparative

advantages and disadvantages of the two systems, and the twelve-grade system gradually gained favor. As more students graduated from twelve-grade schools in the south, better statistics were available to judge the effectiveness of the extra time. The research showed that the twelve-grade graduate had a broader knowledge base thereby making him more competitive in the work force and better prepared for college.

Reports from colleges showed a higher dropout rate from eleven-grade graduates versus twelve-grade graduates. The existing twelve-grade schools in Texas reported that the financial cost of implementation was small and that the communities continued to support the system. Researchers began to agree with Sims's 10-year old argument that the extra year in grammar school reinforced vital basic skills. In 1938, the Texas State Teachers Association endorsed the twelve-grade idea even though it had yet to be adopted by a majority of Texas schools. The same year, school officials in the Dallas area voiced their concern over the impending graduation of students who were too young to be on their own.

Not all Texas voices were calling for change. Lower income citizens were concerned that the new system would delay students from entering the workforce to help support their families. Some educational leaders protested that the extra year of school would punish the large numbers of students who were capable of doing the prescribed work in eleven years. Others believed that success after school depended more on individual qualities like discipline and ambition than on age or number of years of schooling, and that the advantages of the extra year would be difficult to quantify.

But more and more of the dialogue came from voices supporting the change. Researchers showed increases in scores, teachers appreciated the extra time to be used for mastery of content, and parents appreciated the extra year of learning and maturing that would be provided. With administrators focused on practical concerns like textbooks and teachers focused on pedagogical concerns like psychological development of the younger students affected by the change, the move to twelve grades gained momentum as the decade of the 1930s drew to a close.

In 1939, McCuan included in his article, “Comparing Texas high schools with those of other states” a list of 15 reasons given by Ayres on the benefits of implementing a twelve-grade school system and concluded by arguing that changing the system would put Texas on the path toward a better educational rating. At last, as the 1940s began, the State Department of Education began to support the twelve-grade system as well. In 1940, State Superintendent of Public Instruction L.A. Woods recommended a plan for making the transition which would insert the extra grade at the elementary level. A state-level plan was finally in place, but State Superintendent Woods also indicated that the plan was good only for those districts interested in exploring the change. Even though Woods’s plan was phrased as a suggestion and not a mandate, many districts began to implement the twelve-grade plan. Dallas area schools began their plans for implementation in the months following the publication of Woods’s plan as did other districts throughout the state.

In 1941, the Texas State Teachers Association formally asked for the plan to be adopted, and in April administrators and teachers from across Texas actually requested

a meeting with State Superintendent Woods to petition him for more specific plans of action. On April 10, that meeting occurred in Temple, Texas, and Woods would later maintain that the meeting was a major factor in the official state announcement concerning twelve-grade schools. Within the week, Woods laid out a more detailed transition plan, one providing for future students as well as current ones. He also noted that the SDE had already unofficially recognized the legitimacy of the twelve-grade system and had adopted textbooks for a twelve-grade program. He concluded by declaring that the state could no longer operate under two separate systems. In the May 1941 issue of the *Texas Outlook*, Woods sent an open letter “to all County and Local School Superintendents” (p. 14) announcing that the twelve-grade plan was endorsed by a large majority of the state; that two systems could no longer exist; and that a plan for implementation was to be presented officially. Even though there was still no mandate for schools to comply, the language was strong and the plan was precise. Many schools throughout the state announced their intentions and plans to transition as soon as possible. In the September 1941 *SDE Bulletin* the plan was reiterated and the language urging schools to comply was stronger. By a 1942 *Bulletin*, similar language was used along with the report that 80% of Texas schools had complied. Finally, in a 1944 *Bulletin*, Woods announced that the SDE was requiring compliance in order for schools to be accredited. In 1946, the SDE announced that very few schools had yet to comply and that all schools must comply by 1947 to retain accreditation.

Research Question #2

How did districts make the transition from eleven to twelve grades when they adopted the twelve-grade program?

The first such transition happened in Port Arthur in 1927. After studying the findings of George Strayer's survey of the Port Arthur schools, Superintendent George Sims decided to move to a twelve-grade system. Though he felt it would address many issues, foremost on the list was the need for more time in the junior high schools for content mastery. The survey had indicated that Port Arthur students were behind their peers in other states, so for Sims and Port Arthur, the addition of the extra grade was focused in the junior high school. In order to give a better foundation and another year of maturity to these target students, Port Arthur added its grade after the seventh grade year. Strayer had suggested this strategy in his survey, so Sims followed it: the first seven grades were reorganized into eight grades with the "abler and older pupils" (Strayer, 1926, p. 173) to move into high school. If the student had already finished eighth grade by the time the system was changed, he was to finish in the original eleven years, while those below the eighth grade would finish their schooling in twelve years.

Sims and Port Arthur had Strayer's survey to guide them, but all of the early transitions from eleven to twelve grades were carried out by schools which were finding their way without state-level guidance. The first 13 districts that followed Port Arthur's transition created distinctively different paths to twelve grades, becoming what Superintendent G.P. Parker of Jefferson would call "pioneers" in the field (Parker, 1939, p. 22). These pioneers had several issues to consider. One was rate of adoption:

when to make the change. Some schools made the change almost immediately after making the decision to have twelve years of schooling, others delayed making the change for a year, and some schools gradually introduced the system over the span of many years. A second issue was grade organization: how to arrange the grades and where to place the extra one. Each district had its own approach. Some districts already featuring a pre-school year just renumbered the grades. Others added the grade at the beginning of the primary level; those opting for this approach then reorganized the curriculum of the first three grades. One district renumbered grades 8-11 to become grades 9-12 while the first through the seventh grades were changed to become the first through the eighth grades. Yet another school added a half year before first grade and another half year between seventh and eighth grade.

Such variety in transitional plans continued as different schools decided to make the change until the SDE began to acknowledge the movement. In 1939, State Superintendent L.A. Woods addressed the issue by basically giving Texas schools permission to have a twelve-grade school beginning in 1939-1940 school year, but he declined to offer a plan, encouraging each superintendent to choose the method he thought would work best. The following year, Woods offered the starting point for a plan, recommending that the additional work be focused in the first three grades because those grades “need(ed) most revision” (Woods, 1940, p. 50). By 1941, Woods solidified his plan, calling for the grade to be added in the first three grades and for the whole school system to be organized as an eight-grade elementary plus a four-grade high school, or a six-grade elementary plus a three-year junior high school then a three-

year high school. He instructed schools making the transition to classify students leaving seventh grade as ninth graders in the fall of 1941 and to simply renumber all the grades above the current fifth grade. Later that summer, the SDE further specified that the added grade should come at the beginning of the program and that the year's curriculum include pre-primer work plus a portion of the current first grade work. The new second grade would feature the remainder of the old first grade work and a slighter portion of the old second grade. The new third grade would feature the remaining work of the old second grade plus a fraction of the old third grade, making the new fourth grade roughly commensurate with the third grade from the former system. Though it would take the SDE another three years to mandate these changes, Texas's eleven-grade schools had their formula for transition. No longer would individual schools "pioneer" their own paths.

Implications of the Research / Discussion

In this historical study, a qualitative method was used to present and document Texas's change from eleven to twelve grades. Historical research was chosen for this study because this type of research gives us perspective (Furay & Salevouris, 2000), context (Cubberley, 1920), and may help us solve present-day problems (Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Ravitch, 2000). Modern public schools find themselves amidst constant change. Educational researchers and theorists, state education agencies and legislators, and school administrators all work to find solutions to numerous problems, but these entities are not always working from the same hypotheses. The reality is that most major initiatives in Texas education come from the state level in the form of mandates

which must be implemented at the local level. History will decide which of these initiatives meet their objectives and which fail to do so. My study shows us that history should also be consulted as these initiatives are being constructed. The history of education is circular—our forefathers faced problems with reading, writing, and math similar to ours and the efforts to solve those problems have been tried, discarded, and resurrected. The old saying “there is nothing new under the sun” can be applied to education. As the pendulum swings, decision makers should be aware of its swinging.

For the modern student of educational history, what is there to learn from a study of Texas’s transition from eleven to twelve grades? First, researchers should note the origin of this major change. The statewide addition of a grade into the public school system was a significant move, affecting everyone involved in the state’s public schools. Arguably, it was one of the most sweeping changes of the last century of Texas schooling. However, this change did not begin at the top of the system. The changeover began with the efforts of a single school district and slowly spread to a handful of other districts over the next 10 years. As the idea gained momentum during the late 1930s, the SDE was asked to be more involved by the schools it served. Moreover, the first group to call attention to the idea of twelve grades was the TSTA. In a truly inverted pyramid, the change grew from one school to many, from teachers up to the State Superintendent. Ultimately, State Superintendent Woods did not take aggressive action on the issue until after he attended the April 1941 meeting to which he was invited by local superintendents and officials. In our current era of state mandated tests and curricular scopes and sequences, local-level teachers and administrators should

know that a very major initiative that influenced the way Texas education looks began at their level; that even though significant bottom-to-top change is difficult, it is not historically unprecedented.

Second, current statewide changes in pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment come from House Bills that are debated in state legislatures and signed into law. From there, state agencies oversee the mandated course of action. Most teachers and administrators begin to deal with the change only after the mandate is given. The SDE did not handle the change to twelve grades in such a manner. The movement was created and embraced by individual school districts who favored the idea. The reasons for changing to twelve grades did not come from a state authority, but were discovered by the local districts. Their methods of implementation varied as did their timetables for completing the implementation. When enough schools attempted the change to twelve grades and called for state intervention, the SDE outlined a plan of action, but instead of phrasing the plan as a mandate, State Superintendent Woods asked superintendents “to work with your school boards in putting this plan into execution” (Woods, 1941a, p. 14). The SDE waited 3 years until it made compliance a prerequisite for accreditation, after most Texas schools had already made the transition.

Throughout the debate over the twelve-grade system, the state legislature was silent. The issue was settled by school districts, school organizations, and the SDE. As of this writing, the legislature has yet to pass legislation requiring twelve-grade schools in Texas. Therefore, modern school officials should note the historical precedent of major change without legislative mandate. It is possible for school people to make

school decisions without politicians' involvement. For anyone interested in site-based decision making in public schools, Texas's move to twelve grades is a good historical case study. Begun locally before being embraced statewide, the SDE's participation started slowly and gradually intensified. Then, when a majority of the state's districts had already moved to twelve grades, the SDE mandated the changeover.

Third, the study of Texas's transition from eleven to twelve grades certainly has a place in the current discussion of the pertinence of the twelfth grade. As the twelve-grade movement expanded across Texas in the early 1940s, districts embraced the change for a variety of reasons. Superintendent Sims of Port Arthur was motivated by the needs of junior high students struggling to make adequate progress. After the state's lowering of the entrance age from seven to six years of age, many districts wanted to add an extra year to the primary school so their youngest students would have more time to master the basics. Some schools just outside urban areas were motivated to make the change because the urban areas were changing, creating problems when students transferred between districts.

Shift to current times. As state education budgets continue to strain and as community colleges and universities continue to compete for students at younger and younger ages, the twelve-grade public school has come under scrutiny. Some legislators and superintendents advocate either eliminating the senior year or making it optional, arguing that students do not have a full course load of classes during that year and that college-bound students have already been admitted to colleges before the senior year is finished, eliminating the need for high performance in their final high

school courses. Some states allow tenth graders to test out of high school courses and enroll in community colleges and yet others combine the last two years of high school with the first two years of college (see, for instance, “Panola Early College High School,” 2014). There should be a feeling that we have been here before. After decades of operating in an eleven-grade system, Texas underwent a 20-year transition to twelve grades. Among the most consistent arguments: the world is growing more complicated and 16- to 17-year-old students are not ready to enter that world. Proponents of the twelve-grade system argued that an extra year of schooling would give students more academic training and an extra year of maturity. As they implemented their changes, most discovered that the cost was not prohibitive.

If the “modern world” of the early 1940s was too complicated for a 16- or 17-year-old to navigate, the same issue should be carefully considered today. And, if budgetary issues are a concern, there should be careful analysis of how much money schools would save by making the senior year optional. As Sims and other proponents of twelve grades discovered 80 years ago, the twelfth grade was not cost prohibitive then. Would making it optional save much money today? Also, reformers should consider why twelfth graders have less than full loads of classes and study ways to enhance the opportunities of senior students before cutting out the year. Times and circumstances may have changed significantly enough to render obsolete the twelfth grade that Texas added over a period of two decades. Certainly some of the arguments for eliminating it differ from those used by proponents in the 1930s and 1940s. However, before any decisions are made, the decision makers should look to historical

research and consider why things happened as they did (Thomas, 2003); they should consider the story of Sims and Port Arthur, of the pioneer schools of the 1930s, and of the statewide embrace of the twelve-grade system created by local teachers and administrators without the force of legislative action.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study lays the foundation for potential research in several areas. First, all of the data reviewed for this study were for White schools only; information and data on schools for African-American students were not included. In some cases, the data for the schools for African-American students existed but were separate from that of the schools for White students. Future researchers might repeat this study and include the data on schools from African-American students.

Second, the eleven-grade system in the Southern states should be investigated further. Why were there eleven grades in the South versus twelve grades in the North? How did the eleven-grade system become the norm in the South, and by extension, in Texas?

Third, this study provides an in-depth look at Port Arthur, the first school to make the transition to twelve grades in Texas. However, the study does not address the last school to make this transition. Future researchers might uncover this information as well as whether there were geographic or demographic patterns in the adoption timeline. For example, did large schools adopt sooner than small schools, or vice versa?

Next, what happened to the schools that initially kept an eleven-grade graduation plan as an option for individual students? This study showed that all Texas schools were eventually required to conform to the twelve-grade plan in order to stay accredited. When did schools offering an eleven-grade option discontinue that offering and what were the conditions surrounding that discontinuation?

Also, this study ends with the SDE officially requiring all Texas schools to have a twelve-grade system. What happened in the next years? Were there oppositional voices calling for a return to the eleven-grade plan, and what were the conditions surrounding this opposition? For example, were there continuing letters to the editor during the period immediately following Dallas's adoption of the twelve-grade plan or did the issue disappear from the conversation? The introduction to this study shows that there is current opposition to a twelve-grade system, so future research might address if there were precursors to this opposition throughout the twentieth century.

Finally, what about Port Arthur itself? Conditions in this city seem to be unique even before Strayer's survey and Sims's pioneering efforts with twelve grades. A 1912 school document from Port Arthur shows evidence of a twelfth grade while yearbooks from later years show only eleven grades. So, the assumption is that Port Arthur had a twelve-grade system for a period of time and then it was reduced to an eleven-grade system at some point before Sims became superintendent. To be sure, the Port Arthur school had eleven grades when Strayer conducted his survey, and Sims did indeed change the Port Arthur system from eleven to twelve grades in 1927. However, it stands to reason that Sims would have known about the earlier brief twelve-grade

systems before his tenure began. Would it have been easier to suggest a twelve-grade system in a place where that precedent had been set? What conditions caused the earlier twelve-grade system to be developed? When was it developed? Why was it reduced to eleven grades? And if a pre-World War I twelve-grade system existed in Port Arthur for a few years, did one exist anywhere else in Texas?

Through this study, I have charted the history of the development of the twelve-grade system in Texas. Currently the twelve-grade system is being questioned in Texas and throughout the nation. As those debates continue, with some voices calling for elimination of the mandatory twelfth grade, an understanding of the journey from eleven to twelve grades becomes more necessary.

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