

The Landscape of Public Education

A Statistical Portrait Through the Years

Public education in the United States began in early Colonial America as local, informal systems of teaching reading and writing, often as part of religious instruction and predominately limited to the upper class. Around the 17th century, basic literacy slowly began to be expected in all classes to ensure religious obedience, and particularly in the New England Colonies, where religious education was paramount, many students attended Dame schools, where working-class families paid a female teacher to provide education out of her home. In 1642, Massachusetts established a law that required all parents guarantee their children capable of reading and understanding “the principles of religion and the capital laws of this country” (Snyder, 1993), and five years later, the Old Deluder Satan Act required all towns in Massachusetts with 50 or more families to provide elementary schools and all towns with 100 or more families to establish grammar schools focused on Latin and Greek scholarship.

The first public secondary school, Latin Grammar School, was established in Boston in 1635, and by the second half of the 17th century, the public school system in Massachusetts had become a model of education for other colonies. As interest in commerce and industry grew, emphasis on religion in schools slowly waned, and by the American Revolution, education was seen as a way to promote democracy and freedom for the United States (Cohen & Gelbrich, 1999). In 1751, Benjamin Franklin established the Philadelphia Academy, a secondary school that

emphasized modern languages, agriculture, and other subjects relevant to daily life, and Noah Webster developed the first classroom spelling book to promote democratic ideals in 1783. Most schools however were not free, and although Thomas Jefferson “tried to persuade the Virginia legislature to fund elementary and secondary schools” in the late 1700s, he was unsuccessful (Cohen & Gelbrich). In addition, most women received little formal education outside of Dame schools during the 17th and 18th century, and most Native Americans and African Americans did not have access to public schools until later in the 19th century, largely due to laws passed in southern states during the early to mid-1800s prohibiting the teaching of slaves to read.

Following the Northwest Ordinance in 1787, public education became of national precedence. Act 3 of the Ordinance stated that with “religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged” (Snyder, 1993). The legislation granted land for educational institutions, and many states pushed to establish uniform public school systems. Large cities formed pauper schools paid for by public funds, but most education was still offered in common schools, which while publicly operated, were not free. Large shifts towards publically-funded education did not occur until well after the 1800s, but by the latter half of the 19th century, most school systems had adopted a public, free, and mandatory education system.

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The Educational Policy Institute's **Retention** **2011**

International Conference on Student Success
June 12-14, 2011, San Diego, CA



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The Educational Policy Institute cordially invites you to attend RETENTION 2011, our sixth annual conference dedicated to exploring contemporary issues related to student success. Hosted at the Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina in San Diego, CA on June 12-14, 2011, this year's conference looks like it could be our biggest in years, based on the number of proposals for presentations received. We will have the most breakout sessions ever, with 65 concurrent sessions, plus our plenary sessions. The event will bring together teachers, administrators, researchers and policymakers from around the world who are dedicated to promoting student success.

THERE WILL BE TWO PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

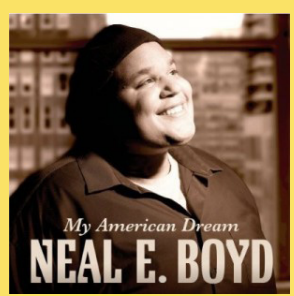
Workshop 1: An Introduction to Student Retention
June 12, 9:00 am - 12:00 noon; Dr. Watson Scott Swail,
Educational Policy Institute

This session will outline a retention framework and discuss issues related to defining retention on campus, data usage, student tracking systems, campus buy-in, and proven practices.

Workshop 2: Building a Roadmap for Meeting Institutional Regional Goals
June 12, 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm; Jay Goff & Harvest Collier, Missouri University of Science & Technology

This session provides an opportunity for institutional leaders to discuss how coordination between offices in data collection can be useful in analyzing institution-specific retention issues.

F E A T U R E D S P E A K E R S



Neal E. Boyd, 2008 winner of America's Got Talent

The unlikelyst of superstars, singer Neal E. Boyd won the hearts and votes of millions of fans when he appeared as a contestant on the wildly popular NBC show "America's Got Talent." Now, with the release of his highly anticipated debut CD "My American Dream" on Decca (June 23rd), Neal is determined to make sure that his story and his music inspires others to succeed.

Neal Boyd credits his postsecondary success to many of the educators and mentors who believed in him and made a difference in his life.

Figure 1. Number of Public Schools in the United States, 1870-2009

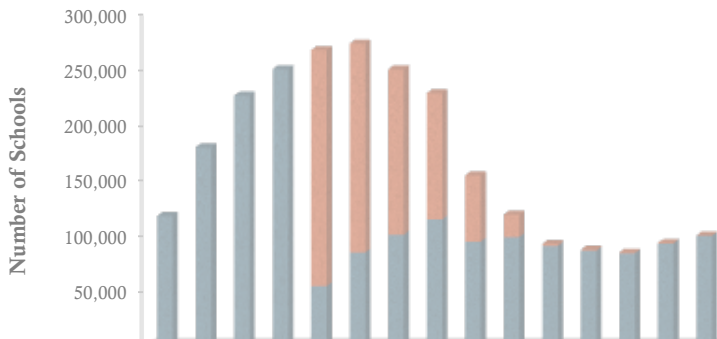
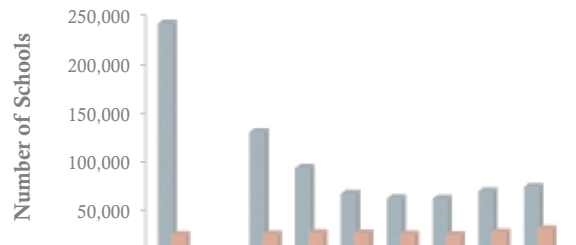


Figure 2. Number of Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, 1930-2009



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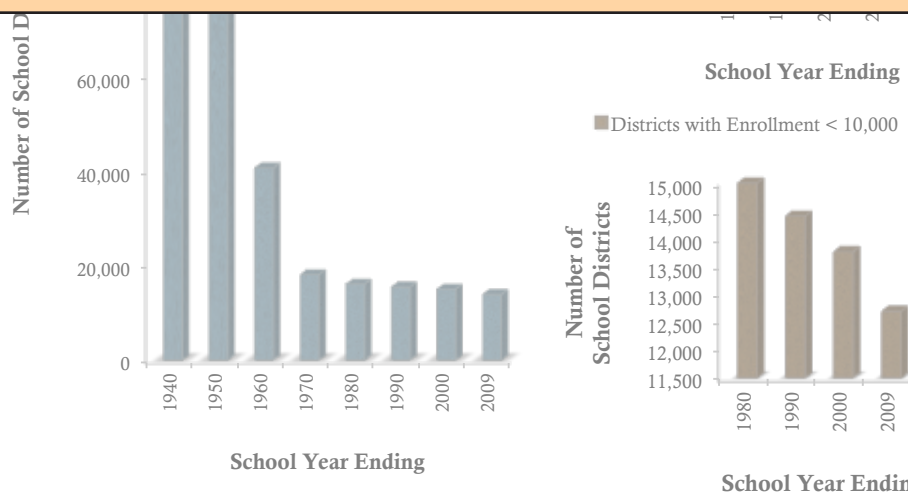
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several rapidly decreases during the first several decades of the 20th century. After 1920, the total number of schools began to decline as a result, and by 1950, the number of schools had dropped 44 percent.

Despite the rapid decline of one-teacher elementary schools, as well as the "high school movement" in the early 1900s, the large majority of schools during the first half of the 20th century were elementary. In 1930, less than 10 percent of public schools were secondary, and while that number climbed slowly each decade, secondary schools accounted for only 16 percent of schools by 1950. In the decade following *Brown vs. The Board of Education* in 1954, which declared segregated schools unconstitutional, numbers of elementary



Sources: Snyder, T. D. (1993). *120 years of American education: A statistical portrait*. National Center for Educational Statistics, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office; Snyder, T.D., and Dillow, S.A. (2011). *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*. National Center for Educational Statistics, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office