

THE CURRICULUM OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN ESCAMBIA  
COUNTY, FLORIDA, AS INFLUENCED DIRECTLY BY THE  
COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD  
1884-1920

Marian Watkins Black  
Florida State University

Wide-spread interest and participation in public school programs, particularly in their curricula, have been evident recently in the United States. Many have questioned whether or not this situation is a new development. Educational historians affirm that since the establishment of public schools, lay personnel, both as officials and as individuals, have strongly influenced their curricula. The question, to what extent this condition has existed in Florida counties, can be answered in part by a study of school board records in selected Florida counties.

In the late 1800's in Florida, as elsewhere in the United States, the curriculum of the public schools was greatly influenced by the actions of county boards of public instruction. Their decisions with regard to what should or should not be taught in the schools, to the qualifying examinations for teacher certification, to the selection of textbooks and other instructional materials, and to provisions for teacher institutes were major determinants of the curricula. Many of these spheres of county school board influence continued to be important long after the twentieth century had begun. This article, however, is focused upon only those official actions of the Escambia County School Board which dealt specifically with the curriculum, rather than upon other actions, the influence of which was indirect.

The School Law of 1869, implementing the State Constitution of 1868, was in effect at the time when the earliest available minutes of the Escambia County School Board were written (1). Under this law although there were four specific features which determined the influence of the school boards of Florida Counties upon the curricula, the law failed to specify a course or courses of study, a weakness according to Cochran (2). In practice, however, the county school boards assumed this responsibility as their prerogative (3).

Probably county school boards in Florida were organized and kept minutes of their decisions prior to 1869 when required to do so by state law, but the minutes of the Escambia board on file in the office of the county superintendent date from October 8, 1884 (4). These early records of board meetings attest to numerous actions dealing with phases of the curriculum.

Whether there had been a county adoption of textbooks and what were the county regulations specifying courses for the several grades before these early records are unknown. It is likely that there had been such actions for two reasons: first, the school law of 1883 required county boards of public instruction, which previously had not done so, to meet by May 7, 1883, for the purpose of adopting uniform textbooks (5); and second, this belief is supported by the action of the Escambia County School Board when in August, 1885, three members - P. K. Yonge, George S. Hallmark, and A. V. Clubbs - were appointed a committee to revise the existing curriculum of School Number 1 in Pensacola (6).

A month later the report of this committee was adopted as read and ordered printed. The report entitled "A Leaflet on Curriculum for Public School No. 1", describes the curriculum for grades one through eight, inclusive. Below are excerpts giving requirements for selected grades (7):

Grade 2, Sec. A. - Second Year. October to January  
Third and Fourth Assistants.

READING. Watson's 2n, begin and finish.  
SPELLING. Swinton's Word Primer, from page 50 to page 63.  
GEOGRAPHY. Monteith's First Lessons, from beginning to page 28.  
WRITTEN ARITHMETIC. Robinson's Table Book and First Lessons from beginning to page 30.  
MENTAL ARITHMETIC. Exercises in Addition and Subtraction up to 40, Multiplication and Division up to 8.  
Penmanship. Composition. Calisthenics.

Grade 2, Sec. B - Second Year. January to June.  
Third and Fourth Assistants.

READING. Watson's 3d, Begin and Finish.  
SPELLING. Swinton's Word Primer, from page 64 to end.  
GEOGRAPHY. Monteith's First Lessons, from page 29 to end.  
WRITTEN ARITHMETIC. Robinson's Table Book and First Lessons, from page 31 to page 73.  
MENTAL ARITHMETIC. Exercises in addition and subtraction up to 75; Multiplication and Division up to 15.  
Calisthenics. Composition. Penmanship.

Grade 5 - Fifth Year. October to June.  
First Assistant.

READING. Watson's 6th, begin and finish.  
SPELLING. Swinton's Work Analysis, from beginning to page 76.  
GEOGRAPHY. Monteith's Comprehensive, from beginning to page 53.  
GRAMMAR. Smith's New, from page 41 to page 116.

WRITTEN ARITHMETIC. Robinson's Practical, from beginning to page 204.

MENTAL ARITHMETIC. Stoddart's Intellectual, from beginning to page 88.

HISTORY. Quackenbos' United States, from beginning to page 256.  
Callisthenics. Composition. Penmanship

Grade 8 - Eight Year. October to June.  
Principal

GEOGRAPHY. Maury's Physical from page 69 to end.

ANALYSIS AND PARSING. First and second Books Milton's Paradise Lost.

NATURAL SCIENCE. Morton and Parker's, Part Second.

ARITHMETIC. Robinson's Higher, from page 243 to end.

NATURAL PHILOSOPHY. Steel's Physics, begin and finish.

HISTORY. Swinton's Outlines from page 24 to end.

ALGEBRA. Robinson's from page 163 to end.  
Composition. Elocution.

This curriculum, as seen above, illustrates the conception of the curriculum which includes specifying the subjects, the titles of textbooks, and the pages therein to be studied in each grade.

The same leaflet also contains brief notes to teachers advising them not to confine themselves to the texts, but to teach through the use of illustrations "that the child may be taught to think and to reason" not merely to learn "what is laid down in the book" (8). Thus the curriculum as set forth included both the "what" and the "how".

In 1886 a new curriculum was adopted for School Number 1, which was to be followed by all schools in the county as far as possible. The major change from that of 1885 was that the curriculum for grade 2, section B, was moved almost in entirety to grade 3, with consequent changes in the higher grades. Other changes were:

1. In grade 1, section A, beginning reading was to be taught from Appleton's Reading Chart rather than from a first reader.
2. Beginning geography was moved from second to third grade.
3. The study of history began in the sixth rather than in the fifth grade.
4. Physiology which was to be taught in the sixth grade, was the only new subject added to the entire curriculum.
5. A change in texts was made in eighth grade English where Rhetoric and Composition by Hart was substituted for "Analysis and Parsing" of the first two books of Milton's "Paradise Lost."

In general the instructions were much more specific than in 1885, for example, in grade 1, section A, the description of arithmetic was changed from the one word "Counting" to "Instruction in Counting to 100." Arithmetic for grade 2 was to include:

Notation, Numeration, and Roman Numerals Completed.  
Addition and Subtraction of Simple Numbers.  
Multiplication - Multiplier of tens.  
Division - Divisor to exceed 9.  
Table of Federal Money.

Further regulations for teachers directed that "in no case shall any book or study be introduced not prescribed therein"(9).

The modifications of the curriculum adopted one year earlier were: (a) moving several subjects to higher grades; (b) adding physiology; (c) adopting a few new textbooks; (d) regulating more specifically what was to be taught; and (e) forbidding the use of texts or the introduction of studies not prescribed by the board.

In 1888 the list of texts adopted for use in the county was as follows (10).

Sheldon's Word Studies  
Hill's Elements of Rhetoric and Composition  
Avery's First Principles of Natural Philosophy  
\* Stoddart's Intellectual Arithmetic  
\* Hart's Grammar and Analyses  
Houston's Physical Geography  
Mill's Physiology  
Anderson's New Grammar School U. S. History  
\* Robinson's Progressive Practical Arithmetic  
\* Robinson's Higher Arithmetic  
\* Swinton's Word Primer  
\* Swinton's Word Book  
\* Swinton's New Word Analysis  
Barnes' Readers, First Through Fifth  
Barnes' Elementary Geography  
Barnes' Complete Geography  
Maxwell's Primary Lessons in Language and Composition  
Ward's Business Forms, Nos. 1 through 4  
Payson, Dunton, and Scribner's Copy Books  
Dinsmore's Model Script Spelling Blanks

Examination of these titles reveals no new subject added since 1886.

The 1889 school law of Florida establishing a uniform system of common schools and county high schools, authorized and directed the county boards of instruction thus (11):

To prescribe in consultation with prominent teachers, a course of study for the schools of the county and grade them properly, and to require to be taught in every public school in the county over which they preside, Elementary Physiology, specially as it relates to the effects of alcoholic stimulants and narcotics, morally, mentally and physically, and all persons applying for certificates to teach, shall be examined upon this branch of study, under the same conditions as other branches required by law.

Physiology had previously been placed in the curriculum in Escambia County in 1886. Hence, it appears that local initiative added this subject which was later required state-wide.

In 1893 on motion of A. V. Clubbs three persons were appointed a committee to examine history textbooks and recommend a suitable text in United States history. Upon unanimous recommendation by these three "prominent old citizens of the county", A Higher History of the United States by Henry E. Chambers of Tulane University was adopted. Other books adopted at this time which replaced those adopted in 1888 were (12):

Barnes' Reading Chart, part 1st  
Pathfinders, no 1 and 2  
McGuffey's Fourth and High School Readers  
Appleton's Numbers Illustrated  
Northen's Young Declaimer  
Harkness' Latin books  
Maxwell's Introductory and Advanced Lessons in English Grammar  
Swinton's Gaul Outlines (history)  
Mills' Physiological charts  
Wentworth's Geometry and School Algebra  
Seaside and Wayside, no. 1-4, by Wright

Comparison of the lists of adopted texts for 1885, 1886, 1888, and 1893 indicates (a) that the subjects remained unchanged from 1885 through 1888, with the exception of physiology which was added in 1886 and (b) that in 1893 subjects added included Latin, World History, Algebra, Plane Geometry, high school reading, and advanced English grammar. The common school, that is the elementary grades, was being extended upward to develop a secondary school in compliance with the state law of 1889.

For both 1893-94 and 1894-95 the teachers of the first grades were directed by the county school board to use the following texts in their teaching (13):

Primer of Physical Training by William G. Anderson  
Physical Evolution by Hunt  
Good Morals and Manners by A. M. Gow  
Ventilation of School Buildings by G. B. Morrison  
Elementary Numbers by Wentworth

Excerpts from the curricula as adopted for the several grades, indicate the general emphasis to be given and the methods to be used (14):

#### Grade 2 - Spelling

480 words from Swinton's Word Primer, page 1 to 50,  
written from dictation on slate.  
Occasional lessons written on paper for reference.  
The spelling lessons of the reader.

#### Grade 2 - Language and Composition.

Maxwell's Primary Lessons in Language and Composition,  
from beginning to page 72.

Memory Gems - One each week. These must be frequently  
written on slate and paper, and towards the close of the  
term in a small bland book, close attention to be given  
to capitals and punctuation.

Expressions of thoughts by pupils about objects presented  
to the eye by teacher.

The teacher must keep a list of objects presented.

Oral description of Reading Lesson.

#### Grade 7 - Elementary Nature

Easy science, to be taught orally by objects and experiments  
is earnestly recommended.

Crosby's Common Minerals and Richard's First Lessons in  
Minerals will form a guide for the teachers use.

#### Grade 8 - Spelling

Eight years are given in the Curriculum to the Important branch  
of Spelling. This is a matter of congratulation that one of the  
fundamentals has such marked attention. While this is true we  
are confronted with a community of poor spellers. Not only is  
this true among adults, but notably so among our school  
children. The deficiency among children is greater in the  
spelling of the more common words. Why is this? An answer  
is expected from our progressives. But we are more in earnest  
about a cure for the radical evil.

School teachers in institutes and educational meetings, should give prominent attention to the deficiency of pupils in spelling.

Study of the courses of study from 1885 to 1894 reveals the instructions to the teacher became more detailed, with reasons being given for certain emphases in the curriculum.

In 1898 a committee of teachers was appointed to select textbooks and to revise both the course of study and the rules and regulations for administering the public schools of the county. For the first time school board members were sharing their rights to make decisions. Since P. K. Yonge and W. A. Blount, both members of the school board, were asked to serve in an advisory capacity, it is clear that the board was relinquishing little of its authority. Their report was adopted on August 9, 1898, when texts were also adopted, contracts being signed for the next five years. (15).

Three years later at the request of H. E. Bennett, principal of School Number 1, several modifications, chiefly changes in texts or in grade placement of subjects were made (16):

Metcalf's Grammar, Part I was to be used in grade 6; Part II, grade 7; Part III, grade 9.

In grade 9, arithmetic was to be reviewed once weekly; advanced grammar to be studied three times a week; civil government once a week; and Harkness' Easy Methods in Latin was to be completed.

For grade 10, complete algebra, and for last four months, take elementary geometry; Latin, Caesar, or equivalent reading and rhetoric.

Spelling, one of the subjects causing much concern today, caused concern in 1894 and continued to trouble the school officials of sixty years ago. The board "ordered" that H. E. Bennett and four other teachers serve as a committee (a) to correspond with leading publishers in this country asking them to submit spellers to be examined for adoption and (b) "to see if better methods could not be devised and adopted in the public schools in this county for the purpose of improving the spelling among the children in said schools". This committee later reported that after diligent search they were unable to secure a speller especially adapted to grades 1, 2, 3, and 4 (17).

The development of high schools in the county had caused patrons of rural graded schools to desire that their children be given opportunity to study the high school subjects without having to board away from home. In response to one request, Professor Morrison was given permission to teach the ninth and tenth grades in School Number 16 provided that his school was taught until 4: 00 p. m. daily, and provided that the parents supplemented his salary and that the work was not done at the expense and detriment of the pupils in the lower grades (18).

In September, 1903, upon recommendation of H. E. Bennett and Pauline Reese textbooks were adopted for the following high school subjects: English and general history. Selection of texts for German, French, and Spanish was deferred until a teacher of these languages could be secured (19).

During the next few years several additions were made to the high school curriculum: in October, 1904, arrangements were made for the teaching of French and Spanish; in January, 1906, patrons were requesting that domestic science be added, at which time the board agreed to add both it and industrial training provided it could afford to do so; in May, 1906, a drawing teacher was employed for the next year; in August, 1909, agriculture was included in the subjects for which texts were adopted (10). These actions show both the desire of grammar schools to expand upward and expansion of the curriculum.

Meanwhile a course of study which was adopted by the county board in 1906 included the following admonitions and regulations:

There were to be at least two lessons of science work or "nature study" in all grades. Aims, methods, and materials were suggested.

Morals and manners were to be considered among the most important topics for all grades.

In all grades a formal spelling lesson was to be held every day.

The course of study for the high school, as proposed by the state High School Commission and modified to meet local needs, included as requirements four years of English, four years of mathematics, four years of history, two years of Latin, and an additional two years of Latin or two years of French, German, Greek, or Spanish.

There is no evidence that Greek or German was taught. Neither is it clear whether or not four years of science was required or elective. Since science was continuously emphasized in elementary school and it was later required in high school, it appears likely that it was required at this time (21).

By March, 1910, the board had adopted for the Pensacola High School two courses of study, commercial and classical. Pupils had the privilege of taking either, but in no case was either course to be split. The subjects to be taken in each course were (22):



## Classical

## Commercial

## First Year

|                    |         |                       |         |
|--------------------|---------|-----------------------|---------|
| Algebra            | 5 hours | Algebra               | 5 hours |
| English            | 5 hours | English               | 5 hours |
| Physical Geography | 5 hours | Physical Geography    | 5 hours |
| Latin              | 5 hours | Commercial Arithmetic | 3 hours |
|                    |         | Commercial Spelling   | 2 hours |

## Second Year

|                |         |                |         |
|----------------|---------|----------------|---------|
| Plane Geometry | 5 hours | Plane Geometry | 5 hours |
| English        | 4 hours | English        | 4 hours |
| Biology        | 3 hours | Biology        | 3 hours |
| History        | 5 hours | History        | 5 hours |
| Latin          | 5 hours | Bookkeeping    | 5 hours |

## Third Year

|                               |         |                                     |         |
|-------------------------------|---------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| Algebra and Solid<br>Geometry | 5 hours | Bookkeeping (1st half)              | 5 hours |
| English                       | 4 hours | Commercial Geography<br>(last half) | 5 hours |
| History                       | 5 hours | English                             | 4 hours |
| Latin or French               | 5 hours | History                             | 3 hours |
| Chemistry                     | 5 hours | Stenography and<br>Typewriting      | 3 hours |
|                               |         | Chemistry                           | 5 hours |

## Fourth Year

|                 |         |   |         |
|-----------------|---------|---|---------|
| Trigonometry    | 3 hours | English                                 | 4 hours |
| English         | 4 hours | Physics                                 | 5 hours |
| Physics         | 5 hours | Commercial Law and<br>Parliamentary Law | 5 hours |
| Civics          | 3 hours | Civics                                  | 3 hours |
| Latin or French | 5 hours | Stenography and<br>Typewriting          | 3 hours |

Comparison of these courses of study indicates that all high school graduates were expected to have studied English for four years, science for four years, history for two years, and civics, algebra, and plane geometry. Hence, thirteen of the nineteen courses were identical for all students.

The years between 1910 and 1920 brought further modifications and enrichment to the high school curriculum. One of the rural high schools in 1915 had asked that it be given permission to substitute agriculture in its curriculum for Latin. The board voted that agriculture might be included, but that Latin should also be retained, the student being permitted to select either. In 1917 students in the Pensacola High School orchestra began to receive credit for their work. Two years later a person was employed on the high school faculty as "head of the Department of Education," and a normal department preparing teachers for the elementary schools of the county was added (23).

The board made other decisions relating to the curriculum, such as (a) permitting a type of social promotion in the elementary grades beginning in 1902; (b) organizing the school so that in 1894 grades one through four were designated primary, grades five through eight, intermediate, and grades nine and ten, grammar, a change from 1889 when the intermediate grades were defined as grades three through eight; and (c) adopting marketing systems (24).

This last mentioned area of county board influence caused considerable discussion. There were demands that the regulations included in the courses of study be changed, for example: the curriculum committee and the organization of parents of Elementary School Number 40 asked that the marking of pupils in the primary and grammar grades be changed to the following: E, excellent, 95 to 100; V.G., very good, 90 to 95; G, good, 80 to 90; S, satisfactory, 70 to 80; U, unsatisfactory, 60 to 70; F, failing, below 60. This recommendation was accepted by the board (25).

Instruction was influenced also by the official sanction by the board of requests of individuals and groups, examples of which follow: (a) acceptance of the offer of the county medical society to provide the services of one of its members to lecture to the members of the senior class of School Number 1 on physiology and hygiene, one hour weekly; (b) permitting the sponsoring of essay and declamation contests on a variety of topics, varying from "Resources of Florida" to the life of "Robert E. Lee" and the "Dangers of Alcohol"; (c) allowing medals to be awarded for outstanding performance, such as one for excellence in English; and (d) providing for the celebration of holidays, such as Arbor Day and Columbus Day (26).

In the earliest years for which records are available, the county school board of Escambia County passed numerous regulations influencing and determining the curriculum of the public schools of the county. The impetus for these actions of the board appears sometimes to have originated with the lay personnel officially designated the responsibility for overseeing the schools, that is the county school board; at other times, with individuals of lay organizations; at still other times with members of the teaching profession. Regardless of who had initiated the idea, final approval and responsibility for its incorporation rested with the board, the members of which were elected by citizens of the county. The decisions of the board

concerned largely the course of study; however, they approved and incorporated suggestions of individuals and groups which broadened the curriculum beyond that to be found in the adopted texts and approved subjects. After 1910 fewer decisions which specifically defined the curriculum were recorded in the minutes. By 1920 both the elementary and the high schools included most of the subjects taught today.

The definite regulations of the early years doubtless were necessary when this county and others, as well as the state superintendent, were developing and enlarging the school curriculum and when few teachers were well prepared. The men who comprised the school board membership from 1884 through 1920 built the foundation upon which the present day curriculum has developed and assisted in evolving ways in which such development takes place today. It was they who began to expand the curriculum outward so that it included vocational subjects, upward to include high schools, and downward to embrace the kindergarten; and to enrich it with the inclusion of music and art. What remained to be done in the years after 1920 was largely broadening and deepening this expanding curriculum through improving the preparation of teachers and the administration and supervision of the schools.

## Footnotes

1. Laws of Florida, 1869, Chapter 1722, No.10.
2. Thomas Everette Cochran, History of Public-School Education in Florida, Bulletin, 1921, No.1, Tallahassee, Florida; State Department of Education, 1921 (Lancaster, Pa.: The New Era Printing Company, Inc., 1921) p. 46.
3. Nita K. Pyburn, The History of the Development of a Single System of Education in Florida, 1822-1903 (Tallahassee, Florida: The Florida State University, 1954) pp. 65, 94, 95.
4. Laws of Florida 1869, Chapter 1722, No.10; Cochran, op. cit., pp 9, 10, 17, 18, 40, 52.
5. Marian W. Black, "Eleanor K. Foster", Florida Educators, F. S. U. No. 30. (Tallahassee, Florida: The Florida State University, 1959) p. 98.
6. Minutes of the Escambia County Board of Public Instruction, August 8, 1885 (hereafter referred to as Minutes.)
7. Escambia County Board of Public Instruction, "A Leaflet on Curriculum for Public School no.1", attached to Minutes, September 28, 1885.
8. Ibid.
9. Minutes, July 8, 1886.
10. Minutes, September 18, 1888.  
(\* Indicates on previous list of adoptions)
11. Laws of Florida, 1889, Chapter 3872, No.26, Section 20: 10.
12. Minutes, July 7, 1893.
13. Board of Public Instruction of Escambia County, Curriculum of Public Schools of Escambia County for 1893-94, Pensacola, Florida: Board of Public Instruction, 1893 (H. S. White Printer, 1893) p.5, attached to minutes, August 13, 1894.
14. Ibid, pp.7, 8, 25, 26.
15. Minutes, June 9, 1898.
16. Minutes, September 9, 1901.

17. Minutes, December 9, 1901; August 18, 1902.
18. Minutes, September 8, 1902.
19. Minutes, September 7, 1903; September 19, 1903.
20. Minutes, October 7, 1904; January 8, 1906; May 26, 1906; August 10, 1909.
21. Escambia County School Board, Course of Study, Rules and Regulations for the Public Schools of Escambia County, Florida, 1906 (Pensacola, Florida; News Job Print, Ruling and Binding, 1906).
22. Minutes, March 14, 1910.
23. Minutes, December 8, 1915; November 8, 1917; May 17, 1919.
24. Minutes, April 8, 1902; June 8, 1889; Escambia County Board of Public Instruction, "A Leaflet on Curriculum for Public School No. 1", attached to Minutes, September 28, 1885.
25. Minutes, December 8, 1914.
26. Minutes, January 27, 1887; March 8, 1887; March 8, 1890; October 7, 1892; April 7, 1893; April 18, 1897; October 8, 1897; February 8, 1900.