



New Jersey Council of Education

THE COUNCIL EMERGES: IT BECOMES INDEPENDENT

In April, 1962, the New Jersey Council of Education was officially incorporated as a chartered organization under the laws of New Jersey.

Long before that date, however, the difficulties foreseen in the maintenance of a harmonious and symbiotic relationship between the council and its “parent” organization, the New Jersey State Teachers’ Association, had appeared. Such conflicts created policy conflicts that finally led to an agreement by both groups that all threads of official relationship be terminated - with each organization pursuing common educational interests in its own fashion, in the light of its own resources.

In 1887, the accepted intention was that the Council of Education would be an extended arm, not a rival, of the New Jersey State Teachers’ Association. The State Teachers’ Association served the whole state. Its members were scattered, growing in numbers, and relatively unorganized. There was a void, which only a small, capable group, able to obtain intensive and focused participation on specific problems, could fill. This function, it was believed, a concentrated attack-force like the Council, could perform. The Association, meeting only once a year, typically unable to get quick approval of actions rising out of the addresses presented at its meeting, fully realized that the Council, as far as the Association was concerned, was a creature peculiarly fitted for its time.”

The Council, it was anticipated, would overcome the problem of the Association’s necessarily delayed action by keeping under continuous and careful scrutiny and investigation such subjects as were of signal importance and imperative action. To make certain that the Council would not work at cross-purposes, but always in concert with the announced current objectives of the New Jersey State Teachers’ Association, the fall meeting of the Council was originally and deliberately set to coincide with the annual meeting of the Association. Keep in mind that half of any new group of members of the Council was to be selected by vote of the Association at that time.

For nearly a decade, the relationship for the most part proved wholesome. Interests and concerns seemed to move in parallel lines. In the late 1880’s, however, relationships began to deteriorate. A crisis occurred in 1899 when, at the annual meeting of the Association in Jersey City, a motion was made, without any attached reason or explanation, to refuse to nominate the required quota of Council members. The motion was passed, seemingly without discussion. Despite the absence of clarifying background, it is generally believed that the State Teachers’ Association was expressing its displeasure over the membership of the Council, then, as now, comprised chiefly of administrators, mostly principals and superintendents.

Apparently, the specific issue before the New Jersey State Teachers’ Association at that “moment in history” involved a disagreement over whether membership in the newly-established Retirement Fund should be voluntary or mandatory. The Council and the Association, jointly and with Herculean effort, had pushed the Retirement Act through the Legislature in 1896. After the passage of the Act, however, a corrosive divisiveness became evident, with most of the teachers on one side and most of the administrators (many of whose leaders were Council members) on the other side.

In November, 1900, the Council thoroughly examined all angles of its relationship with the State Teachers’ Association. It insisted that its position in respect to the Teachers’ Retirement Fund was one of strong support. It believed that to make the State Teachers’ Association a virtual “trustee” of the Fund was to build into it a fatal weakness, with incalculable future consequences. Seeing no worthwhile compromise in the offing, the Council finally decided unanimously that “if the Council wished to keep the purposes of its organization general, it must be divorced from the State Association.”

No longer, thereafter, was their official reaction in respect to membership. Nevertheless, a de facto cooperation continued to exist between the two organizations. Of the first forty-six Council of Education presidents (1888-1939) for example, twelve served at one time or another as New Jersey State Teachers' Association presidents. Two of them, William N. Barringer and John Enright, served two one-year terms as presidents of the State Teachers' Association. Charles A. Philhower, Westfield superintendent, was in the Association's highest office for three continuous years. William J. Bickett, Trenton superintendent, served simultaneously as Council of Education and State Teachers' Association president in 1925. Since 1939, however, no Council president, has served as top officer in the State Teachers' Association, although some Council presidents have served in lesser Association offices and Council members have been elected to Association presidential offices.

Leadership in the two organizations separated sharply after 1925. Dr. Philhower was the only individual after that date who held the highest office in both organizations. Since the inception of the Council, however, there have been only eight State Teachers' Association (NJEA) male presidents who were not, or who are not now, Council members. The exceptions are Henry W. Maxson, F. Thorn, and Edwin Shephard, who were Association presidents in the bitter pension fight of 1898-1900, and W. Collam Cook in 1904, Powell G. Fithian in 1911, Henry P. Miller in 1928, Warren M. Cummings in 1971-73, and Frank Totten, 1977-1981.

The Council of Education, itself an offshoot of the State Teachers' Association, later helped to create a new organization which, in a literal sense, was a spin-off independent extension of itself. In November, 1905, implementing a report of one of its own committees, the Council resolved that “---there should be formed a new educational organization under the patronage of, and with the moral support of the Council-membership to include superintendents, principals, and supervisors of special subjects.”

The recommended organization, into which the Council first breathed life and energy, was originally called “The State Association of Superintendents, Supervising Principals, and Supervisors.” It later became the New Jersey Department of Superintendents, and is now known as the New Jersey unit of the American Ass