

Executive Summary

American Public Education: Inspiration, History and Development

-Thomas Jefferson proposed a system of American public education to teach citizens of the United States about their Republic's newly crafted Constitution. He believed that such civic education would equip citizens with the knowledge they would need to be able to protect their new nation against challenges he feared could destroy it, primarily "factions," individuals or groups interested in selfish purposes and not the common good. Factions make republics the "least stable form of government."

-It took about 100 years but finally in the late nineteenth century a system of public education was established which, though locally directed, developed with a common purpose, the instillation of common values critical to a democracy.

-Key events shaped and changed U.S. public education: professional educators became involved in the administration of school systems; more differentiated curriculum was introduced; students were tracked using I.Q. tests with a view to directing students to occupational pathways; resistance to such "social engineering" and a demand for more academic rigor followed. The 1954 Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision initiated the integration of public schools, leading to an incipient voucher system in some states for private schools called "segregation academies." The passage of the National Education Defense Act, a response to Russia's 1957 launch of Sputnik, encouraged U.S. students to excel in math and science to counter the Soviet Union's potential domination of the Space Race. Since the 1980s a key aim of U.S. public education has been to prepare a literate workforce for successful competition in the global marketplace.

NH Public Education:

-Like American public education, NH public education was perceived as a community good with individual benefits. During the colonial period the government only required that towns with fifty families must maintain "some kind of schools" through local taxation. Over time state laws were enacted which more clearly recognized that it is in all citizens' common interest to have the state more directly involved in the administration and financial support of public schools. A NH State Board of Education was established in 1919 with a professional educator appointed as Commissioner of Education and as the executive officer of the Board.

-The NH Supreme Court in the 1990s, in two decisions, *Claremont I* and *Claremont II*, ruled that the provision of an adequate education is the constitutional responsibility of the state and that the state must guarantee the funding of an "adequate" education. The state's response to these decisions continues to unfold.