

Iowa's country schools. It helped improve educational opportunities for thousands of Iowa children. But there would be bumps in the road that limited the impact of this landmark legislation.

In 1920, when the standard school law went into effect, more than half of Iowa's public school students were attending one- and two-room country schools. School participation in the program increased rapidly. By 1924, roughly one out of ten of Iowa's country schools had qualified, and there were standard schools in all but a few Iowa counties. State Superintendent May E. Francis noted its success in "raising the standard of the rural schools . . . as it has improved the type of building. Instead of the unattractive, inefficient box model, the new buildings have modern plans employing in most cases finished basements, modern light, heating and ventilating systems, and often chemical toilets." She praised the legislature, calling the law a "turning point in Iowa's educational policy." "Of the hundreds of millions that the farmer has paid into the state treasury for the support of education in general in the state of Iowa,"

Francis remarked, "this is the first attempt to give his school some direct benefit from it."

The DPI's 1925 Regulations for Standardizing Common Schools articulated the kinds of improvements that county superintendents were instructed to look for during their evaluations. Fifty-three standards with various point values were grouped under six categories—grounds and outbuildings; the schoolhouse; equipment and care of the schoolroom; library and supplementary readers; teacher and academic requirements; and community activities. For example, if a teacher was judged to be excellent or superior, the school received six points. If the school had a vestibule and separate cloak closets for boys and girls, it earned three points. To be deemed "standard," a school needed 80 points out of 100. Scores of 85 the second year and 90 the third were required to continue the designation. (See right and page 136: This rating card, circa 1928, shows the revised scoring.)

The annual appropriation of \$100,000 to fund the standard school program was more than adequate to start with, but already by the 1923/24 school year, the

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## May Francis championed "the smallest school unit"

P. E. McClenahan was the state superintendent of public instruction when the standard school law was adopted. But it was May E. Francis who championed the cause for the country schools. Her advocacy for country schools in general helped get her elected state superintendent, but it also forced her from that office.

Francis began her career as a country school teacher and was then elected county school superintendent in Bremer County. In 1919 she was hired by McClenahan to be the first inspector of rural schools at the Iowa Department of Public Instruction. Her responsibilities included preparing and administering the first regulations for standard schools.

Francis surprised the educational establishment by announcing her decision to run for state superintendent in 1922, opposing the man who had hired her. Another candidate, W. H. Bender, decided to run as well, thus creating a three-way race for the Republican nomination.

Francis campaigned on her support for country schools and on spending restraint. "I believe that the taxpayers, especially of the rural districts, should not be called upon to expend millions of dollars for palatial school buildings. Rather we should

improve buildings and equipment, and with less of the taxpayers' money, lift the standard rural schools to a place of paramount importance in our educational system," she wrote in *Midland Schools*.

"I shall inaugurate a policy of ever advancing in school affairs. . . . [yet] measure this advancement by the rule of conservation, sanity and safety. This in order that fads and fadism shall not run rampant like a hungry lion, devouring the hard-earned dollars of the taxpayer. . . . Progress and advance for the smallest school unit—the rural school."

Francis won a close primary election and then trounced her Democratic opponent in the general election, becoming the first woman elected to statewide public office in Iowa. Historian David Reynolds noted: "She became the first state superintendent in more than a generation not to tout school consolidation as the only effective means of improving the quality of rural schools."

Her troubled tenure as state superintendent lasted one term. In 1924, at the urging of the Iowa State Teachers Association, a special legislative committee met to investigate alleged illegal and unfair acts by the DPI. Francis was charged with rais-

ing the grades of teachers to permit them to receive certificates, refusing to accredit some consolidated schools, and arbitrarily refusing certificates to some entitled to them.

On a narrow vote of the committee, she was exonerated of all charges. But the investigation weakened her leadership influence. Francis completed the remaining two years of her term. She devoted much of her time to campaigning for improving the quality of the country school and trying to help the large number of small consolidated schools cope with financial problems.

In 1926 she was challenged in the Republican primary by Agnes Samuelson (a former teacher, Page County school superintendent, and extension professor in rural education at Iowa State Teachers College). Samuelson, who favored consolidation as a way of improving rural education, won the primary and the election.

Francis left Iowa and enrolled at the University of Texas, where she later became an instructor in the College of Education and earned a Ph.D. She also wrote two historical novels, two children's books, and a fourth-grade spelling book.

—by William L. Sherman



STATE OF IOWA  
Department of Public Instruction

RATING CARD FOR STANDARD RURAL SCHOOLS

County..... Township..... District..... Date.....  
 Teacher..... Address..... Salary per Mo.....  
 Total enrollment..... No. months of school..... Date of Inspection.....  
 Number of pupils belonging for six months..... Average Daily Attendance..... First date approved.....  
 President of the Board..... Address.....  
 Secretary of the Board..... Address.....  
 Treasurer of the Board..... Address.....

This school has met the requirements specified for standardization by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and should be designated as a standard school and receive state aid as provided by law. Should this school fail to maintain the required equipment and efficiency, I will remove its certificate of standardization and will notify the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

.....  
County Superintendent.

Standard School—800 or more points  
 B Class School—700 to 800 points  
 C Class School—600 to 700 points

D Class School—500 to 600 points  
 E Class School—below 500 points  
 Points marked \* are required for standardization

No district will be satisfied to attain only the minimum score but will try to provide for its boys and girls better educational opportunities each year.

*Agnes Samuelson*  
 Superintendent of Public Instruction.

I. GROUNDS AND OUTBUILDINGS—120 Points		II. THE SCHOOLHOUSE—(continued)	
1. Grounds well cared for, in good condition, accessible, and removed from dangerous conditions.....	10	4. Good doors with lock and key.....	5
2. Trees, shrubbery, and flowers, attractively placed.....	10	5. Outside platform with steps in good condition and provided with handrail.....	5
*3. Flag and flag pole with flag display in good weather (Statutory—Section 4253, School Laws of Iowa).....	10	6. Interior walls in good condition, tinted a light shade.....	10
4. Adequate grounds, fenced against traffic hazards.....	10	7. Windows on left, or left and rear of pupils.....	20
*5. Toilets—Two inside, separate, sanitary toilets, or two separate, sanitary, outside toilets, provided with latticed screen for entrance.....	20	*8. Windows supplied with good translucent shades and sash curtains.....	10
6. Supervised play, and suitable equipment.....	20	*9. Heated and ventilated by approved system (Underline: Basement furnace, room furnace).....	30
7. Water supply—Good well or cistern supplying pure water.....	20	10. Separate cloakrooms, vestibule, and storage closet.....	20
8. Walks—cinder, gravel, or cement—from schoolhouse to road, well, and toilets.....	10	11. Interior clean and tidy. Floors in good condition, smooth, tight, and properly treated for preservation.....	10
9. Fuel room in good condition, well supplied with fuel and kindling.....	10	12. Twenty (20) square feet of floor space, and 220 cubic feet of air space for each pupil.....	20
II. THE SCHOOLHOUSE—190 Points		13. Window space 1-6 to 1-4 of floor space.....	10
*1. Good foundation.....	10	14. Twenty linear feet of slate blackboard the proper height, with chalk trays, good erasers and good grade of crayon.....	10
*2. Roof and siding good.....	10	15. Provisions for community meetings: (a) Added space (b) Lighting system (c) Folding chairs.....	10
3. Well painted exterior. Good windows with no broken lights, provided with locks.....	10		



III. EQUIPMENT—190 Points		V. TEACHER AND SCHOOL ORGANIZATION—(Con'd)	
1. Single desks .....	5	9. An average daily attendance of 85 per cent required. Not over 2% of tardiness. School hours closely observed .....	10
Adjustable .....	5	10. Housekeeping: Careful attention to light, heating, ventilation and cleanliness, including cloakroom, toilet, playground, and basement .....	20
Movable .....	5	11. Efficiency of teacher (Ranked by County Superintendent)	
Properly placed .....	5	(a) Professional attitude (10)	
*No child seated so his feet cannot reach floor		(b) Teaching and discipline (35)	
2. Good desk and chair for teacher.....	10	(c) Playground management and care of property (10)	
3. Chairs for visitors.....	5	(d) Personal appearance and manner (10)	
4. Kindergarten table and chairs.....	10	(e) Community and social contacts (10).....	75
*5. Approved equipment for primary work.....	20	12. Attitude of Pupils:	
6. Interior of room tastefully decorated.....	5	(a) Orderly	
7. Display and bulletin board.....	10	(b) Neat and clean	
*8. Three good pictures framed—not more than one portrait included .....	10	(c) Courteous	
9. Suitable dictionaries .....	10	(d) Industrious—trying to do required work	
10. Charts—reading, hygiene .....	10	(e) Loyal to school and careful of school property.....	20
11. Complete set of eight (8) up-to-date maps, including Iowa; evidence that they are used.....	20	13. Homes of pupils visited by teacher.....	10
12. Globe—twelve inches in diameter; used daily.....	10	14. At least two demonstrations of school work prepared and given to public.....	20
13. Good talking machine and ten approved records.....	10	15. Organized health program.....	10
*14. Drinking and washing facilities:		*16. Physical Education as prescribed by State Course of Study .....	10
(a) Sanitary drinking fountain or covered cooler		17. Hot lunch <i>in season</i> .....	10
(b) Sink and drain—or wash basin		18. Other improvements not listed: (a) radio (b) window ventilators (c) textbooks on art (d) chart printing outfit (e) hectograph (f) paper cutting machine (g) piano (h) screens for windows and doors (i) manual training equipment (j) additional records, 15, for teaching music (k) provisions for outdoor lunch	
(c) Individual or paper towels		Not over 25.....	
(d) Liquid or powdered soap or individual cakes			
(e) Individual drinking cups if cooler is used.....	20		
15. Other equipment:			
(a) Waste basket			
(b) Song books			
(c) Thermometer			
(d) Atlas			
(e) Pencil sharpener			
(f) First aid kit			
(g) Mats for cleaning shoes			
(h) Latest world almanac			
(i) Desk copies in all subjects			
(j) Material for some good writing system including teacher's manual .....	20		
IV. LIBRARY AND SUPPLEMENTARY READERS—90 Points		VI. COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES—120 Points	
1. Good bookcase used for books only.....	10	1. Teacher Salary	
2. List of 100 books chosen from state bulletins.....	20	\$10 above minimum (10).....	10
3. Standard set of encyclopedias of recent date.....	20	Each additional \$5 (2).....	
4. Supplementary readers for all grades from one to seven as listed.....	20	2. Nine month term.....	10
5. One current events paper—one farm paper.....	10	3. Attitude of directors	
6. One table for primary grades, with many varieties of primers and lower grade reading material.....	10	* (a) Visit school	
		(b) Have building in order and supplies on hand at opening of term	
		(c) Hold regular meetings with minutes recorded	
		(d) Encourage teachers to attend professional meetings .....	10
		4. Cooperation with County Superintendent:	
		(a) Attend meetings called by county superintendent	4
		(b) Consult county superintendent before buying supplies .....	8
		(c) Consult county superintendent before hiring teachers .....	8
		5. Represented at state, district, or county fairs.....	10
		6. Compete in spelling, arithmetic, dramatic, music, or other contests.....	10
		7. Conduct a school literary society, Boys' and Girls' Clubs, Boy Scouts or Campfire Girls, Girl Reserves.....	10
		8. Be a community center for two or more meetings.....	10
		9. Community activities:	
		(a) Board or patrons assist in scoring school	
		(b) At least one-half number of parents visit school once during the year	
		(c) Donations of labor or equipment by community or individuals .....	10
		10. Community organizations:	
		(a) Active Parent-Teachers' Association affiliated with state and national organizations.....	10
		(b) Other community clubs.....	10
V. TEACHER AND SCHOOL ORGANIZATION—290 Points			
1. Training:			
High School Normal Training.....	10		
College, including special training for rural schools.....	10		
2. One year of previous experience (5)			
More than one year (5).....	10		
3. Teacher retained a second year.....	10		
4. Professional Spirit:			
(a) Membership in state or National Education Association .....	2		
(b) Attendance at educational meetings called by county superintendent .....	4		
(c) Reading of at least one professional magazine every year .....	2		
(d) Reading of at least one professional book every year .....	2		
5. Attendance at summer school within past three years	15		
6. Interest in community.....	10		
7. Management:			
(a) Well-kept records and prompt reports			
(b) Daily program posted and followed			
(c) Not over 28 classes per day			
(d) Good order—all children profitably employed.....	20		
8. State Course of Study and bulletins followed.....	10		



funds were insufficient "to care for all the schools meeting the standards," as Francis reported. She recommended increasing the appropriation to \$150,000. Unfortunately, Francis and the DPI lacked sufficient political clout, and improving country schools was not a priority for the Iowa State Teachers Association (ISTA) and other school leaders.

Instead of increasing funding, the legislature in 1927 now stipulated that the money could be used for improvements and apparatus, "but no part thereof shall be paid to any teacher for compensation."

Nevertheless, DPI officials and country-school advocates continued to promote participation in the standardization program. Between 1924 and 1928 the number of standardized schools nearly doubled. But the level of appropriation remained constant, and the prorated amount dipped to \$2.70 per student.

In 1928 the DPI revised the criteria and point system, converting it to a 1,000-point scale. Criteria for the schoolhouse and grounds were largely the same, but more specific requirements were spelled out for teacher preparation, classroom management, and community and social activities held at the school.

State Superintendent Agnes Samuelson pointed to particular progress: "Many two and some four year college graduates are teaching standard rural schools. Some of the schools have running water, electric lights, radio, telephone, manual training and home economics equipment, kindergarten tables and chairs, and a well organized Parent Teacher Association, or other community groups."

Jessie M. Parker, who headed the DPI's rural schools division, remarked on the program's momentum in 1930: "Buildings have been painted inside and out. The cream ceiling and buff side wall tinting . . . has given sunny, cheerful schoolrooms. Light shades, playground equipment, hot lunch equipment, and kindergarten tables and chairs, are found in practically all schools."

Parker continued: "Many schools which have been on the standard list for several years wish to progress further in making the best possible rural school. To encourage this, the honorary rating of 'Superior School' has been established." Qualifying schools had to be judged "standard" for three years and then score above 900. "The Superior School must have a teacher who is above average," Parker commented, "a building and equipment of standard plus certain required features, a community enthusiastic in support of the school, and pupils doing excellent work."

The "superior school" designation was honorary only and provided no additional funding. But schools now received a second bronze doorplate, this one rec-

angular with the words "SUPERIOR SCHOOL." In 1930 the first three Iowa Superior Schools were Bradford #4 in Chickasaw County (taught by Lela Martin); Eden #3 in Clinton County (Agnes Schnack); and Newton #4 in Jasper County (Grace Lynch). The number of superior schools would peak at 63 in 1940.

Participation in the standard and superior school programs continued to increase into the early thirties. By 1932, the program's peak year, more than 30 percent (2,715) of Iowa's ungraded one- and two-room schools qualified as standard schools, but by 1940 the number had dropped to 2,465. The Great Depression, a declining rural population, and reduced funding all took a toll on the program. The aid to standard schools had fallen steadily over the years, from the original \$6 per student, to \$3 in 1927, \$2.70 in 1928, and then hovered around \$2 in 1932 and 1933.

Still, administrators valiantly noted gains. In 1934, Parker recorded that "a large proportion of the state aid for standard schools has been used for building up libraries by adding supplementary readers and single copies of easy reference material on history, geography, citizenship and other school subjects. As a result of this concentration, reading in all rural schools shows a marked improvement."

Two years later, Superintendent Samuelson remarked that "use of the school as a community center is recognized as one of the characteristics of a good standard school and parent-teachers' meetings and those held under other auspices are doing much to sponsor school improvement in the community and to develop a more wholesome and satisfying rural life."

Some might argue—and some did—that Iowa's standard school program provided more funding to schools that were doing well, and did little to help those schools most in need. John R. Slacks, from Iowa State Teachers College, observed in 1939 that "the present plan of distribution of funds requires a district to have a good, well-equipped school before it can qualify for aid. The wealthy districts can do this without a great effort, but there are poor districts that cannot meet the requirements. . . . Would it not be more logical," he reasoned, "to give aid to those districts with low taxable values? Surely . . . districts that have been given state aid for years have acquired enough interest and pride in their schools to keep them up to that standard without outside help."

Nevertheless, schools that participated in the evaluation probably benefited from the process even if they did not score high enough to obtain the designation.