

**THE ORIGIN AND  
DEVELOPMENT OF  
THE PUBLIC  
SCHOOL PRINCIPALSHIP**

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The origin and development of the public school principalship by Paul Revere Pierce

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## INTRODUCTION

The literature on educational administration is conspicuously barren in historical accounts of the origin and development of our leading officers in public-school administration. Such accounts as do exist are fragmentary and report chiefly episodes of these officers in the management of local schools. As a result, the basis for generalization regarding the professional status of modern administrative officers in public schools is decidedly inadequate.

The idea of tracing the genetic development of one of these officers, the public-school principal, occurred to the author as a task worthy of extended research. Accordingly, with the approval of his sponsoring professor, he undertook the problem as a Doctoral investigation with the results herewith reported. For data he went to the published annual reports of executive officers in twelve city school systems. By perusing thousands of pages of these reports, covering a period of school history of one-hundred years, he was able to discover the order of development of the major duties assigned to school principals and the conditions which gave impetus to the development of the modern principalship.

The findings of the investigation provide for the first time an authentic picture in retrospect of the growth and development of the principalship and furnish the criteria for evaluating the duties now performed by school principals. A careful reading of the study by principals and by supervisory officers of principals should result in a new conception of the professional responsibilities of administrative officers. The forces which gave rise to the development of the earliest professional powers and duties of principals are even stronger and more essential today than they were at the time lay officers of boards of education began to seek professional assistance in the organization, administration, and supervision of local schools by turning to superior teachers and clothing them with certain administrative responsibilities too technical for laymen satisfactorily to perform. The further evolution of the professional responsibilities of principals occasioned by the rapid growth of cities and the development of the city superintendent of schools provides the immediate historical background of the modern principalship, without which a full appreciation of the professional status of the



principal would be scarcely possible.

The principalship is still an evolving position. If the schools of the country at large are taken into consideration almost all stages in the development of the office can be found. The condition makes all the more essential to teachers and administrative officers who aspire to a professional career in the school principalship a knowledge of the origin and development of the position. This knowledge has been placed within the reach of every principal in the United States by the contribution here presented.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES . . . . .	iv
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION. . . . .	1
Purpose of the Investigation	
The Principalship of Elementary and Secondary Schools	
Sources of Data	
Technique Employed	
✓ II. THE RISE OF THE MODERN PRINCIPALSHIP. . . . .	7
Factors Retarding Development	
How Grading Accelerated Development	
The Principal Teacher	
Nature of First Administrative Duties	
Freeing the Principal from Teaching Duties	
The Beginnings of Supervision by Principals	
Reaction to Central Office Supervision	
A Period of Professional Reaction	
The Period of Professional Leadership	
The Principalship Today	
III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRINCIPAL. . . . .	25
Administrative Duties Defined	
Early School-Board Rules	
Extension of Administrative Activities	
Growth of Prescribed Duties from 1853 to 1900	
Administrative Duties from 1900 to 1933	
The Attitude of the Superintendent	
IV. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUPERVISORY FUNCTIONS OF THE PRINCIPAL . . . . .	57
Supervisory Activities of Principals Prior to 1900	
Growth of Supervisory Functions of Principals from 1900 to 1918	
Supervisory Activities of Principals Established since 1920	

Chapter	Page
V. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE PRINCIPAL TO GENERAL AND SPECIAL SUPERVISORS. . . . .	89
General Supervisors and Principals Prior to 1900	
The Period from 1900 to 1918	
Development Since 1918	
Summary	
Principals and Special Supervisors Prior to 1900	
Development from 1900 to 1918	
Development after 1918	
Summary	
VI. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRINCIPAL AS A COMMUNITY LEADER. . . . .	123
Community Leadership of Principals Prior to 1900	
Community Leadership of Principals from 1900 to 1918	
Community Leadership of Principals since 1918	
VII. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PERSONNEL OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP	152
Qualifications of Principals Prior to 1875	
Development of the Qualifications of Principals from 1875 to 1900	
Development in Personnel from 1900 to 1918	
Development of the Personnel of the Principalship since 1918	
VIII. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROFESSIONAL STATUS OF THE PRINCIPAL . . . . .	179
Evidences of Professional Growth of Principals Prior to 1900	
The Professional Status of Principals from 1900 to 1918	
The Professional Advancement of Principals since 1918	
IX. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS . . . . .	210
Administrative Responsibilities	
Supervisory Functions	
Relations with General and Special Supervisors	
The Principal as a Community Leader	
The Personnel of the Principalship	
The Professional Status of the Principal	
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	222