

**SECONDARY EDUCATION  
IN CALIFORNIA: A  
MONOGRAPH**

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Secondary education in California: a monograph by J. B. McChesney

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# Secondary Education in California

By J. B. MCCHESENEY

State of  
California



Mission High School Building, San Francisco

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Secondary education received scant attention during the early history of California for two obvious reasons. First, the population was composed almost entirely of men who came to the State for the purpose of engaging in gold mining, intending as soon as their fortunes were made to return to their homes and families. They had no immediate use for schools of any kind, and they gave little thought to provisions for their organization and maintenance. Secondly, the State was sparsely populated except in the mining camps, where for several years it was difficult to carry on schools of a primary grade for more than three or four months in a year. Fortune hunting was the supreme intent of the early Californians; all other interests in which civilized society is supposed to be concerned were, for the time being, held in abeyance.

However, the makers of the first Constitution realized that an instrument of that kind would be incomplete without some provision being made for education, and consequently, we find Article IX, Section 3, reading as follows:

"The Legislature shall provide for a system of schools by which a school shall be kept up and supported in each district at least three months in each year, and any school district neglecting to keep up and support such a school may be deprived of its proportion of the interest of the public fund during such neglect."

The expression "system of schools" is somewhat indefinite. At any rate, it rested with the Legislature to determine the grades of schools which they might constitutionally provide for. In the proceedings of the Legislature of 1851, Article II, Section 5, we find the following:

"Not less than 60 per cent of the amount paid each district shall be expended in teachers' salaries; the balance may, at the discretion of the



district, be expended in building or repairing school houses, purchasing a library or apparatus or *for the support of a high school.*" Thus we see that as early as 1851 legislative provision was made for the support of a high school.

But as far as I have been able to learn, no high school was organized as a result of this permission. In fact, there were no pupils of sufficient scholastic attainments to form a class, or if there were, the "diggings" had such superior attractions that a school of any kind received little or no consideration.

The next Legislature, that of 1852, enacted a new school law, making no mention of high schools. Whether the members thought that the time was not yet ripe for such schools, or whether they considered that the entire school fund should be devoted to elementary instruction, I am unable to state.

In 1855 the school law was enacted for a third time under the following title: "Act to establish, support and regulate common schools and to repeal former Acts concerning the same." Section 17 defined the duties and powers of district trustees as follows:

"They may cause the common schools within their respective jurisdictions to be divided into Primary, Grammar and High School Departments, and to employ competent teachers for the instruction of the different departments, whenever they may deem such division advisable, *provided*, there be sufficient means for all such departments, and if not, then in the order in which they are herein named, the primary school having preference."

This Act remained undisturbed on the statute books for eight years, and during this period the first permanent high schools of California were established. The San Francisco High School was organized in January, 1858, being the first in California. It was attended by both sexes, and deservedly enjoyed a high reputation.

✓ The school records of this period are exceedingly meager, thus making it difficult to collect accurate data concerning actual work done in secondary education. Then, too, the term "high school" was vaguely used, there being no recognized authority to place a line of demarcation between advanced grammar grades and high school grades proper. Previous to the formal organization of a high school in San Francisco in January, 1858, a class of advanced grammar school pupils was maintained. The school authorities of San Francisco did not call this a high school, although it is quite probable that distinctively high school branches were taught.✓

About this time a high school was commenced in Sacramento and another in Marysville, but in the annual report of the State Superintend-





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