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Timeline of Public School Governance in the District of Columbia

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Timeline

1791: District surveyed and what would later become “Washington City” placed under direction of three Commissioners appointed by George Washington. Incorporated towns of Georgetown and Alexandria City continue to be governed under terms of their incorporation. The remaining areas continue to be governed partly by the Commissioners and partly under the forms of county governance used in the ceding states of Maryland and Virginia.

1799: George Washington dies.

1800: Congress moves from Philadelphia to Washington City in the District of Columbia.

1801: Congress divides District into two counties — Alexandria and Washington counties.

1802: Congress abolishes Board of Commissioners, incorporates and establishes limited local self-government in Washington City with Presidentially appointed Mayor and 12-member City Council elected by free white male property owners with 1 year residence. Five serve in upper house, 7 in lower house. Charter provides authority for “the establishment and superintendence of schools.”

1804: Congress extends Washington City 1802 Charter 15 years, provides for direct elections of both houses of Council, each with 9 members. Council establishes school for Washington youth under 13-member Board of Trustees: 7 appointed by Council, 6 by all who contributed more than \$10 to the public schools. Whites only. Thomas Jefferson elected to the Board, served as Board President for 4 years.

1807: First black school organized by former slaves George Bell, Nicholas Franklin, and Moses Liverpool; supported by private contributions.

1811: Lancasterian school started in Georgetown (older pupils used as monitors to hear recitations of younger pupils — one skilled school master could handle several hundred children in this way). Similar school opens in Washington in 1812.

1812: Congress provides for election of Washington City Mayor by the two houses of Council. Enlarges Council with 8-member Board of Aldermen (2 from each of 4 wards), and a 12-member Common Council (3 from each ward).

1816: Washington City Council divides city into two geographic school districts, with two Boards of Trustees — one selected per the 1804 model, the other entirely by Council.

1818: Washington City Council appoints Trustees to both Boards.

1820: Congress extends Washington City charter, provides for election of Mayor by white male property owners. Public schools become “pauper schools” as Council directs trustees to only accept the poor due to financial problems. Whites only.

1842: City of Georgetown assumes responsibility for private schools receiving public funds, creates 7-member Board of school guardians appointed by Georgetown Council.

1844: Washington City Council reorganizes schools into single system under 13-member Board of Trustees, 3 appointed by Council from each of the city’s four wards, with Mayor as President of the Board, ex officio. Those who could afford paid some tuition. Mayor William Seaton played lead role. Tuition-paying pupils accepted at 5 cents per month.

1846: Congress votes to allow Alexandria City and County retrocede to Virginia. Residents of the city approve, residents of county excluded from referendum vote.

1848: Congress approves new charter for Washington City which provides for election of Board of Assessors, register, collector, and surveyor; abolishes property qualification and extends vote to all white males who pay \$1 school tax to support free white public schools. Schools become object of political disputes between branches of government.

1857: Washington City Council provides for Superintendent of Public Instruction, appointed by school trustees. Mayor vetoes act, says he should appoint Superintendent like other executive officers.

1858: Washington City Council transfers authority to appoint trustees to Mayor, increases trustees’ powers. Requires trustees to furnish annual estimate of operating budget and year end school report. Board divided into sub-Boards, each with responsibility for supervising in detail schools in different districts.

1862: Congress passes law mandating all children (age 6-14) in District, black and white, required to receive 3 months education per year. Requires 10% of taxes collected on “Negro-owned property” to be set aside for black schools, under supervision of a Board of Trustees for Colored Schools, appointed by the Secretary of the Interior.

1864: Sums from black property taxes lower than Congress expected, Congress revises formula requiring District cities to pay a portion of education funds to colored schools equal to proportion of school-age black children. District cities resisted, Washington Mayor Wallach complains that Congress has never given any aid to District schools, as it had in the territories. Congress establishes a 7-member School Commission appointed by the County Levy Court to establish and govern Washington County schools (1 from each of 7 school districts in the county).

1869: Washington City Council provides for appointment of Superintendent of Schools by Mayor.

1871: Congress defines entire District as one political unit under single government modeled after Congressionally created Territorial forms of government. Congress repeals Charters of District cities of Georgetown and Washington, eliminates existing government offices and powers. Also eliminates the office and powers of the Washington County levy court. Under the new “Territorial” government, President appoints governor, Boards of public works and health, and an upper house. DC voters elect lower house and a non-voting delegate to Congress. Territorial government assumes responsibility for appointing Superintendents for the three school systems — puts responsibility under one Superintendent,

reporting to 3 Boards in 3 systems. Black schools in Washington and Georgetown retain their own Trustees and Superintendent, appointed by the Secretary of the Interior.

1873: Congress gives Territorial Governor authority to appoint Trustees and Superintendent to black schools. Washington Normal School started (whites only) to train teachers.

1874: Congress abolishes Territorial government, replaced with 3-member Board of Commissioners (two civilians, one an officer of the Army Corps of Engineers) appointed by the President and confirmed by Congress (DC's new legislative body). Commissioners replace four Boards of School Trustees with one 19-member Board: 11 from Washington City, 3 from Georgetown, 5 from Washington County. Five required to be black. Two Superintendents — one for white schools, one for black.

1876: First public school beyond 8th grade — Advanced Grammar School for Girls — started; school for boys started a year later. Preparatory High School (now known as Dunbar, after poet Laurence Dunbar), started in 1870 as grammar school, becomes first black high school (offers 9th grade and beyond).

1878: Commissioner government made permanent under Organic Act, providing for 50% payment of District budget (reduced to 40% in 1919; fixed percentage ended in 1925). Provides for 19-member Board of Trustees of Public Schools, appointed by Commissioners.

1882: Congress reduces Board to 9 members, 3 of whom must be black. Washington High School opens at 7th and) Sts. NW, covering 3 years' work beyond grammar school.

1885: Commissioners announce they are taking over duties of trustees (whom they appoint); after citizen protest and mass meetings, Commissioners return some power to trustees.

1895: Congress enlarges Board to 11, authorizes appointment of women to Board. Congress eliminates "Georgetown" as a specific place name in the law and consolidates that area into the city of Washington. All municipal ordinances of Washington extended to Georgetown, Georgetown ordinances repealed.

1900: Commissioners dismiss reform Superintendent of white schools, Senate District Committee investigates school management, holds hearings, Congress determines role of trustees is vague and too easily assumed by Commissioners, sets up 7-member Board of Education (7-year terms) appointed by Commissioners. Board given complete jurisdiction over all public school administrative matters, power to appoint 1 Superintendent and 2 Assistant Superintendents (1 for white, 1 for black schools), power to employ and fire all teachers and employees. Board required to submit yearly budget to Commissioners, which Commission forwarded with recommendations to Congress as part of overall budget. Board members paid \$10 per meeting, \$500 cap per year. Citizens begin to complain that paid Board gets too involved in school management.

1906: Congress sets up 9-member Board of Education composed of DC residents, requires 3 members be women. To assure independence of Commissioners, makes judges of the Supreme Court of DC responsible for appointment, elaborates in greater detail the authority of the Board and Superintendent. Tradition develops that 3 members (1 woman, 2 men) would be black. Budget remains under Commissioner control. Appointees changed in 1936 to District Court of U.S. for DC, and again in 1948 to U.S. District Court for DC. (Act of June 20, 1906 is the Basic Authority of current School Board — 34 Stat. 316, ch. 3446, as amended).

1918: Citizens' Joint Committee for an Elective School Board, headed by Board of Trade member, established to lobby for elected Board (movement gained 70 organizational members over next 10 years).

1920: Beginning in 1920, there were numerous proposals and committee and sub-committee hearings in Congress to modify the structure of the school system in a variety of ways.

1930: A unit of local history and government was made part of the required American history course for junior-high-school pupils. No textbook and very little material was available, a committee of teachers of social studies in Washington schools prepared a pamphlet, published in 1933, and later in a volume entitled "Washington, Yesterday and Today."

1948: First of a series of DC Home Rule bills (subsequently introduced in nearly every session of Congress, but blocked from reaching floor for a vote by southern segregationists) introduced — calls for payment of Board members, to be popularly elected, with City Manager who would participate in Board meetings. Appointed Board opposes plan. School Board issue and Home Rule are linked.

1949: Strayer Report (George Strayer of Columbia University) recommends administrative and supervisory responsibility be delegated at each level where it can function effectively.

1952: Board instructs Superintendent to study possibility of desegregation; report received after 1954 concludes that Board "spent most of its time on administrative matters, such as school transfers rather than on policy questions."

1954: *Bolling v. Sharpe* invalidated the use of racially separated educational facilities in DC. Congressional payment drops to 8.5%, prompting citizens to increasingly question Congressional involvement in District decision-making.

1956: Board of Education embarks on the Track System ("ability grouping") to deal with shifting demographics related to desegregated system. Judge who heads Board selection committee suggests transferring selection to Commissioners. Davis Investigation of public school conditions (House District Committee) — according to Carl Hansen, advocate of desegregation, it was designed to show desegregation had failed.

1958: Hansen appointed Superintendent. Hansen develops and implements Track System.

1966: Citizen organization established to lobby for elected Board, headed by Rev. Channing Phillips. *Hobson v. Hansen* — Julius Hobson sues Superintendent Hansen, the Board, and DC judges for unconstitutionally depriving the poor and black school children of equal education opportunities, says appointment of Board by judges places Court in conflict of interest when hearing suits against schools. Board did not appeal on advice of Corporation Council. Hansen resigns, appeals on his own behalf, loses appeal (1969). Racial composition of DCPS: 92% black. The Pucinski Report on poverty in DC schools — commissioned by U.S. Congress in 1965 — released.

1967: President Johnson abolishes Board of Commissioners, replaces with an appointed Commissioner/Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and an appointed City Council and placed a majority of black officials in charge — Congress did not veto plan. Judges appoint majority black Board, but continue practice of not reappointing members who are too "vocal." Judges of US Court of Appeals and the District Court vote unanimously to ask Congress to relieve the court of appointment responsibility. Board releases report on DC schools by Teachers College, Columbia University ("Passow Report"), saying Board "operates intuitively, not from clear analysis of policy regarding its responsibilities and functions," said problem stemmed from divided authority structure, and called for community control and decentralization; recommended 8 Community Boards of Education, each with a Superintendent approved

by central Board. Congress continues to debate issue, divided along identity and ideological lines as issue is seen through lens of larger Home Rule and Civil Rights issues.

1968: Congress establishes 11-member elected Board of Education — 3 At-large, 1 per Ward. Power to appoint superintendent. 70% registered voters go to polls for first election in which 53 candidates run. Fragmented vote — only Hobson amassed required number votes to be elected. Runoff election held on November 26th.

1969: Julius Hobson elected to Board at-large. 19 Reports of the Executive Study Group for a Model Urban School System for DC approved by Board, after involvement of the "professional and general communities" in the generation of new proposals based on Passow Report.

1970: The Dowdy Report by Congressman John Dowdy with in-depth review of paid personnel, hiring practices, discipline and control and standard operating procedures of DCPS. Found widespread violations of DC and U.S. laws on school property. Focused on crime and law enforcement.

1971: Management Review Report by U.S. Office of Education and DCPS to strengthen federally-supported programs.

1972: The Nelson Commission Report gives recommendations for organizational and operational structure of city government and DCPS. (White) Congressman John McMillan (South Carolina) loses his seat, (Black) Charles Diggs (Michigan) becomes head of House District Committee. Diggs holds hearings, develops Home Rule bill. Proposes a Board of Regents appointed by Mayor and Council as supervisory authority over Board of Education and public colleges. Board opposes plan. Diggs drops proposal.

1974: Congress establishes Home Rule government with elected Mayor, 13-member City Council (8 ward, 5 At-large, one of which is Chairman)

1975: Elected Home Rule government takes office in January. School Board votes to include local history in public school curriculum. Group led by Superintendent Vincent Reed, Associate Superintendent James Guines, and historian Kathryn Schneider Smith form the DC History Curriculum Project, assemble scholars and experts to prepare course. Pilot projects resulting in 7 texts were edited and combined into book *City of Magnificent Intentions: A History of the District of Columbia* (1983, 1997).

1976: DC Law 1-35, DC Public Postsecondary Education Reorganization Act amendments include compensation of Board members; contracting and reprogramming powers. Board votes to establish Advisory Neighborhood School Councils.

1981: Board reduces number of Advisory Neighborhood School Council regions from 6 to 4 to reduce costs.

1989: Our Children, Our Future report released by the DC Committee on Public Education (set up by Federal City Council).

1992: A Time to Act released by DC Committee on Public Education.

1993: BESST: Bringing Educational Services to Students — DC Public Schools Educational Reform Agenda by Superintendent Franklin Smith.

1995: Congress passes and President signs law creating Presidentially-appointed District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Board (“Control Board”) and a mayor-appointed Chief Financial Officer. Congress establishes DC Public Charter School Board as part of DC School Reform Act of 1995 to grant charters authority to establish charter schools independent of the public school system. Like public schools, they receive funds based percentage of enrollment. Mayor appoints 7-member Board from list of 15 nominees selected by U.S. Secretary of Education. DC School Board also authorized to grant charters. 31.5% DC public students live in poverty.

1996: Control Board fires Superintendent, strips elected School Board of most of its authority until June 2000, slashes salaries from \$30,000 to \$15,000, gives oversight to appointed 9-member Board of Trustees (one of which is for the School Board President). General Julius W. Becton appointed by Control Board as CEO/Superintendent/Trustee/State Education Officer.

1997: Congress passes and President signs National Capital Revitalization and Self-Government Act, stripping authority from all locally-elected representatives and transferring day-to-day control of 9 of 12 agencies to appointed Control Board. Bill provides \$200 million in debt relief, takes back unfunded \$5 billion pension liability transferred to District government in 1974, and takes over Medicaid, courts, and prisons (“state functions”). Locally-elected officials can regain authority after four consecutive balanced budgets. Arlene Ackerman hired as Chief Academic Officer and Deputy Superintendent by Control Board, with understanding she will become Superintendent when General Becton retires. DC Public Charter School Board begins operating, receives 26 applications.

1998: DC Public School Task Force charged with finding ways to improve education for Hispanics, Asians, and other non-English speakers quit en masse, saying school officials ignore their advice. General Becton quits, saying some Control Board members were aligned against him, questioned his integrity, over \$62 million operating deficit created under his watch by not firing the required 400 administrators and other employees. Becton’s handpicked successor, Arlene Ackerman, appointed Superintendent by Control Board for 3-years at \$150,000, performance bonuses, and \$9,600 per year car allowance. Appeals Court rules on Board lawsuit — Control Board does not have authority to delegate power to Trustees, Control Board makes Trustees an advisory panel.

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