

A HISTORY OF THE TEXAS CONGRESS OF MOTHERS-PARENT TEACHER
ASSOCIATION AND SCHOOL REFORM, 1909-1930

A Thesis

by

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BA, University of Houston-Victoria, 2007

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

HISTORY

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
Corpus Christi, Texas

December 2016

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This thesis meets the standards for scope and quality of
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

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ABSTRACT

The role of the Texas Congress of Mothers – Parent Teacher Association in school reform has long been overlooked by historians. This study is meant to examine the efforts of the organization in school reform from its inception in 1909 to the 1930s as well as the response of educators toward the organization following the creation of the professional school system.

Chapter One examines the poor state of the public schools in the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries. It utilizes the reports of educational surveyors, the Superintendents of Public Instruction, and historians to examine school conditions. Texas, like most of the South, ranked below the rest of the nation in literacy, educational standards, and school funding. It includes a discussion of the early reform efforts and the emergence of the Texas Congress of Mothers – Parent Teacher Association.

Chapter Two uses organizational records and state reports to show the work of the organization. The priorities of each administration are examined with particular attention given to the work that helped create the professional teacher as well as efforts that led to the development of a modern system of education.

The final chapter uses publications of contemporary educators and parents as well as institutional records to discuss the reaction of the school establishment to the reforms advocated by the Texas Congress of Mothers – Parent Teacher Association. It demonstrates that once education became a recognized profession, educators began to question the need to cooperate with the organization, sparking a redefinition of organizational priorities.

The Texas Congress of Mothers – Parent Teacher Association was a major factor in changing the state's educational system. Yet, the very system they helped create would later limit

the organization's future impact. A better understanding of the contribution of the organization as well as the dynamics between it and educators should be a part of the historical record.

Further, an understanding of the history of cooperation and advancement made when both sets of stakeholders worked together could prove useful as a model for future reform efforts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As with any work, there is a whole team of individuals that made my work possible. I am reticent to even attempt to list the various individuals for fear that I will exclude someone. To all my friends, colleagues, mentors, faculty members, and family members who listened, read drafts, offered criticism and encouragement, and who kept renewing library books, thank you. You made my work possible and my life easier.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Robert Wooster and Dr. David Blanke, for their guidance, support, and patience during this project. Special thanks goes to my thesis committee chair, Dr. Laura Muñoz, for not giving up on me.

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INTRODUCTION

The first Congress of Mothers for Texas convened in Dallas on October 11, 1898. Opened by Mrs. Helen M. Stoddard, president of the state Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the "leading spirit of the Congress," this gathering was intended to create a collaborative of mothers' groups to address concerns over what attendees perceived to be the decaying state of the family and society. Attended by representatives from mothers' clubs in eleven cities, including Dallas, the congress glorified the upholding of values and warned of the dangers of moral failing. Program topics included titles such as "Purity in the Life of the Parents" and "When the Mother Fails." Other programs warned of the dangers of alcohol and cigarettes and praised the benefits of physical fitness. A central theme in all of the programs was the need for education. Evident in the discussions was a deep concern over the state of the citizenry and what the gathering believed was a decline in both its moral compass and its aptitude for full participation, which the mothers attributed to undereducated parents and poorly educated children. Only through better training for parents and maternal involvement in the public schools could these social ills be averted. The idea of using the bond of motherhood in the form of the National Congress of Mothers to bridge social and economic gaps in an effort to improve education had, in the view of one Texas newspaper, "attracted the attention of the acknowledged mental leaders among women everywhere." This first meeting was seen as a step toward improving the future of the state.¹

The Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations became a major force in modernizing education in the state of Texas. Officially organized by Ella Porter several years

¹ Editorial, *Dallas Morning Star*, October 11, 1898; Editorial, *Dallas Morning Star*, October 12, 1898 (quotations).

after the initial Mother's Congress, the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Association's elected officials pushed for a wide variety of changes in the school system; at the state level, their agenda included everything from proposing legislation for free textbooks and teacher retirement funds to advocating sex education within the schools. Simultaneously, local chapters worked to improve school facilities and educate parents on everything from life skills to the latest trends in child psychology. Responses to a 1910 survey show local chapters engaged in a wide variety of activities. Some of the larger urban chapters took a lead role in providing funding to the county school boards for the development of manual training programs and domestic science courses and providing kindergartens, while others supplied operational items like teachers' desks, maps, library items, and sanitary drinking cups. Indeed, the presence of the Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Associations was felt from the school house to the state house. Its influence was so great that at one time the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Associations was allowed to locate its state headquarters in Austin in the same state government building that housed the Texas Department of Education, and parent-teacher association courses were options at various teachers' colleges.²

However, public school districts had an almost inverse relationship to the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Associations. As the first decades of the 20th century passed, the Texas Parent-Teacher Association (as they came to be known) met with increasing resistance from professional educators. While most acknowledged the need for parental cooperation, more

² Resolutions passed by the Texas Congress of Mothers, November 24, 1917, box 2.325/U119, Texas Parent-Teacher Association Records, the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, the University of Texas at Austin, (hereafter cited as Texas PTA Records); *Appendix 12*, Plan of Work for 1937-1940, Committee on Social Hygiene, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records; Sallie Capp, poll response to Porter, 1910, Fort Worth, Tx; Mrs. Frank Baylor Hogg, poll response to Porter, June 6, 1910, Houston, Tx; Mrs. Gus McKenni, poll response to Porter, May 21, 1910, Gainesville, Tx.; Mrs. J. H. Pittman, poll response to Porter, 1910, Goliad, Tx., Box 2.325/U121, Texas PTA Records; "Parent-Teachers' Courses in Texas State Colleges," *Texas Outlook* 22 (August 1938): 38.

and more school administrators questioned the need for and purpose of mothers' groups. Classroom teachers increasingly viewed them as a harmless, well-meaning nuisance rather than an ally for genuine social and educational change.³ Where educators had once advocated for mothers' groups as a means to benefit the schools, they now attempted to narrowly define the groups' parameters, using in many ways the same progressive ideology that was the driving force of the mothers' early reforms against them.

This thesis examines the shifting relations between the educational system and the Texas Congress of Mothers-Parent Teacher Associations during the years between the organization's official formation in 1909 and the 1930s. It argues that a shift in power and political influence over the administration of Texas schools moved from the parent association to educators; that the educators used claims of professional expertise as a justification to restrict parent involvement in school affairs; and that this claim to professionalism was a direct result of standards that the association itself had demanded. In other words, educators claimed professional authority on the basis of credentials and education that the Texas Congress of Mothers-Parent Teacher Associations first argued that teachers needed. The very educational system that the Texas Congress of Mothers-Parent Teacher Associations helped to create began to dictate and essentially limit the organization's ability to participate in public education.

The introduction frames the historiography of the Texas Congress of Mothers within the larger context of historical works on education and school reform. Expanding on the

³ Catherine Simpson Adams, "Attitude of Classroom Teachers Toward the Parent Teacher Association," (master's thesis, Southwest Texas State Teacher's College, 1939), 8; George Stoepler, "The Parent Teacher Association as a Means of Interpreting the School to the Community," (master's thesis, Southwest Texas State University, 1952), 93.

historiography that follows, the introductory chapter will examine how early works on Texas education treated reform initiatives. It will also discuss the evolution of educational histories as part of the Progressive Era. The historiography will conclude with a discussion of recent scholarly treatments of the National Congress of Mothers.

Chapter One examines the reports of the Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of Texas and archival material from the Texas Congress of Mothers' Collection at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin, thus providing a discussion on the state of public school offerings and facilities and the credentials of educators at the close of the nineteenth century in Texas. Then, using institutional and secondary histories, it briefly discusses early efforts by women to improve public education in Texas, including the founding of the Texas Congress of Mothers. It will also examine the creation of education departments within larger Progressive Era women's organizations, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union and Texas Federation of Women's Clubs.

Once again using the state organization's archival records, the second chapter addresses legislative movements related to public education that were either initiated or supported by the Texas Congress of Mothers-Parent Teacher Associations. Many of these initiatives resulted in the formation of a system of governance and oversight of the state educational system that are still used today. Additionally, the chapter explores aesthetic or functional improvements that were carried out at the local levels as a result of either the mothers' efforts or a cooperative action between the mothers and school staff.

The third chapter investigates the growing differences in conceptualization of the role of the Texas Congress of Mothers-Parent Teacher Associations among educators and reformers that arose toward the 1930s, a split that closely corresponded to the institution of school management.

Specifically, this chapter will consider the published works of professional educators, at the state and national levels, and the theses of graduates of Texas teachers' colleges or the nascent education departments of major Texas universities. Further, it uses archival records to examine changing priorities within the state organization as seen in annual meeting reports and agendas, as well as within membership school reports.

Despite the impact of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Associations in the realm of public education, the organization appears infrequently in historical records apart from institutional histories. Scholars in the field of education, rather than historians, have produced the larger body of research on the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Association and mothers' groups. The few histories of Texas education that appeared in the early to mid-twentieth century, such as those by Frederick Eby and C. E. Evans, focus largely on administrative, legislative, and institutional changes. Eby, whose *Development of Education in Texas* is considered the seminal work of its time on Texas education, mentions only briefly the organization's participation within the schools. He discusses the Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Associations' involvement in the kindergarten movement and provides a small synopsis of the organization's history including its accomplishments in terms of school betterment. But, despite the political and lobbying clout of the organization, it warrants no more than a mention in five pages of the overall text, with only two of the pages focusing specifically on the group itself. Evans ignores the work of the Congress altogether. Neither of these scholars provides a serious look at the work of the Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Association or other community groups that worked to improve public and adult education.

The shift to social history in the 1970s resulted in education appearing more frequently in historical records, especially in works that focus on the groups or social movements that effected change. Historians who chronicled the work of women's groups and the agency of minorities found education to be a primary concern and stressed the inequalities that characterized the school systems. Studies of minority activism in the South and in Texas in particular, for example, subsumed the parent teacher reform movement to the larger discussion of race and the changes to educational access at the legislative, curricular, and institutional level.⁴ References to parent-teacher associations of the minority schools thus focus on their efforts to provide basic needs for school function. However, these parent-teacher associations largely existed outside of the Texas Congress of Mothers in the segregated South.

Because women's groups often spearheaded school reform efforts, parent-teacher organizations appear more often in works that discuss women's activism, particularly those that examine the use of the ideology of motherhood to justify women's actions in the public sphere. This trend of associating women's reform work with women's defined roles is especially true for histories of women in the South, who also contended with the ideal of Southern womanhood.⁵ A prime example of a work that focuses on women's activism as municipal housekeeping is Judith

⁴ For example see Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teacher's in the Segregated South* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2007). For Texas specifically see Guadalupe San Miguel, "Let All of Them Take Heed": *Mexican Americans and the Campaign for Educational Equality in Texas* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1987); Carlos Kevin Blanton, *The Strange Career of Bilingual Education in Texas, 1836-1981*, Fronteras Series 2 (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2007).

⁵ See Anne Firor-Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) and *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Anastasia Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South: Women's Organizations and Politics in North Carolina, 1880-1930* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997); Megan Seaholm "Earnest Women: The White Woman's Club Movement in Progressive Era Texas, 1880-1920" (PhD diss., Rice University, 1988); Rebecca S. Montgomery, *The Politics of Education in the New South: Women and Reform in Georgia, 1890-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); James L. Leloudis, II, "School Reform in the New South: The Woman's Association for the Betterment of Public School Houses in North Carolina, 1902-1919," *Journal of American History* 69, no. 4 (March, 1983): 886.

McArthur's *Creating the New Woman: The Rise of Southern Women's Progressive Culture in Texas, 1893-1918*, which contains the most significant examination of the educational reform work of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations outside the histories of the organization itself. McArthur's study discusses many of the major undertakings of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Associations, such as the push for compulsory education and the installation of kindergartens as part of the public schools. However, *Creating the New Woman's* primary aim is to examine the broader women's movement, its domestication of politics, and particularly the overlap or coordination of work between the organization and the Federation of Women's Clubs.⁶

Monographs that consider the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Association often rose out of the educational departments of universities and normal schools, and tend to fit into two categories. The first type, institutional histories, largely focus on the agendas and legislative and programmatic accomplishments under the various administrations. A second strand tends to look at the ideological and cooperative place of the parent-teacher organization within the broader educational system. Many examples of the second type are quantitative or theoretical in form. Their complex basis provides a glimpse of the educational field's claim that having a higher understanding and licensed authority better qualified educators to determine issues relating to education or the betterment of children.⁷

⁶ Judith N. McArthur, *Creating the New Woman: The Rise of Southern Women's Progressive Culture in Texas, 1893-1918* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

⁷ See for example Lucille Moore. "History and Development of the Texas Congress of Parents and Teachers," (master's thesis, University of Texas, 1946), 8; Adams, "Attitude of Classroom Teachers Toward the Parent Teacher Association," 8; Stoepler, "The Parent Teacher Association as a Means of Interpreting the School to the Community," 93.

Even at the regional and national levels, historical studies that include the PTA are rare, and almost never consider the direct relationship between the organization and the educational system. Synthetic histories of educational reform, whether national or regional, tend to focus on issues related to the institutionalization of schools, often a contested process and almost always reactionary. Many educational reform narratives discuss the patterns of change as a response to rapid changes in industry. And, like other histories that focus on reform, the story essentially is one where the battle lines between centralization and localism are frequently fought by middle-class, urban reformers versus the rural population. Lawrence Cremin's *Transformation of the Schools: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* is one of the earliest works that presents educational reform in the form of expanded function as part of the larger progressive response to industrialization. Central to the progressive work is the ideal that education can affect change at the individual level, but the discussion is limited largely to the larger changes in ideology and policy with minimal discussion of the groups who worked to enact the changes.⁸

A more recent book, David Tyack's *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* also discusses the "transfer of power from laymen to professionals" that occurred within the schools in a process he called a move from a rural model to an urban one. Yet, in reading this particular work, it would seem that educators achieved the organizational changes solely with the aid of a few business professionals. Parent-teacher associations are, here too, excluded from the conversation. In a later study concerning the history of educational reform, co-authored with Larry Cuban, Tyack, again, largely ignores the contribution of parent organizations. Though a brilliant discussion of the dichotomy between the beliefs regarding what

⁸ Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), viii-x; see also Lawrence A. Cremin, *Traditions in American Education*, New York: Basic Books, 1976).

education can achieve and the pace of actual change in practice, it minimizes the role of parent-teacher associations. The organization is listed amongst those places where educational policies were topics of discussion, but it continues to describe the PTA as only discussing “how to best spend the money they raise.” This particular exclusion seems especially odd since parent-teacher associations and other reform groups were among those that most fervently believed in education’s power to remedy social ills.⁹

The Congress of Mothers and other parent organizations receive more attention in William Reese’s *Power and the Promise of School Reform: Grassroots Movements during the Progressive Era*, which includes the many groups that worked to affect changes within the school as a larger effort of municipal housekeeping. While his work discusses many of the roles that the organization played in school reform, such as its push for kindergartens, Reese seems to concentrate more upon the organization’s role as mediator between the professionalized school and the home.¹⁰

Early scholarship that deals with education in the South, specifically, tend to follow the same general pattern used by Texas historians. For example, Charles Dabney’s 1936 history of education in the South, which traces the first attempts at garnering support for public education from its endorsement by Thomas Jefferson in 1818 to 1930, looks at the broader changes as they relate to the region’s unique political and economic situation. Using largely biographical sketches, Dabney discusses the central events, individuals, and institutions involved in

⁹ David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 5, 24 (quote); David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 1, 42 (quote).

¹⁰ William J. Reese, *Power and the Promise of School Reform: Grassroots Movements during the Progressive Era*, Reflective History Series, edited by Barbara Finkelstein and William J. Reese (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002), 28, 162-163.

educational reform and, significantly, draws a metaphoric parallel between the exuberance of the educational reforms and a crusade, a parallel that would also be discussed by later Progressive Era historians.¹¹

Southern Progressive Era historians frequently considered education in their studies, since education offers a pivotal snapshot of the values and mores of a community or larger region. These works, like other Progressive Era histories, focus on shifts in social values and priorities as they related to changing demographics and economics. As a result, individual groups, such as the Congress of Mothers, are given little attention. For example, in Dewey Grantham's *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition*, one chapter on educational reform in the South during the Progressive Era focuses primarily on large institutional bodies or legislative movements. He speaks extensively about the Southern Education Board (SEB), an organization run by prominent educators such as Edgar Gardner Murphy, which lobbied for and helped finance educational reform campaigns in the southern states. Even though women's groups such as the Congress of Mothers also worked to garner public enthusiasm for school reform, parent-teacher associations are overlooked, and the only women's movements given much attention were those more directly related to social reform movements, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union and suffrage campaigns.¹²

Only recently have historical works begun to emerge regarding the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations and its relationship with educators. William Cutler

¹¹ Ibid. For other examples of the treatment of the education movement as a crusade see C. Vann Woodward, *The Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*. Vol. 9 of *A History of the South* (1951, 1971; Repr. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 401; and Dewey W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 250; Charles William Dabney, *From the Beginning to 1900*, vol. 1 of *Universal Education in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), vii, ix.

¹² Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, 246-274.

looks directly at the relationship between parent groups and teachers and the shifts between cooperation and antagonism that has plagued relations between the two groups. In his book, *Parents and Schools: The 150-year Struggle for Control in American Education*, Cutler argues that the relationship between home and school is a “contrived one,” which he defines as having been “bureaucratized,” and one that has been influenced by a wide variety of factors including its political beginnings, the professionalization of teaching, the degree of localism encountered, and the needs of the region. Cutler demonstrates the periodic push and pull between the two groups across the various generations. Because it is about parent groups and their relationship to the schools, the Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Association figures in the discussion, but is not the sole agency examined.¹³

Christine Woyshner has concentrated on the shift in status of the organization at the national level in relation to the educational hierarchy. Her 2003 article “Race, Gender, and the Early PTA: Civic Engagement and Public Education, 1897-1924” discusses the shift in the home-school relationship and examines the role of women’s civic organizations in revising all areas of the school and how the authority in school reform was affected by gender and race. Woyshner attributes the weakening of the Congress of Mothers to male administrators who saw the group’s interventions as “outdated and unrelated to the contemporary needs of the schools.” In a later book, *The National PTA, Race, and Civic Engagement, 1897-1970*, Woyshner focuses on how the organization’s impact was affected by and mitigated by racial issues. Describing the PTA as an institution in itself, Woyshner acknowledges an abrupt change in the drive/impact of the PTA within the educational system. But, rather than attributing the altered relationship to the

¹³ William W. Cutler, III, *Parents and Schools: The 150-year Struggle for Control in American Education* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 2.

increased professionalization of educators and to evolutions in the educational system, she sees the pivotal moment occurring with *Brown v. Board*.¹⁴

In short, the work of the Texas Congress of Mothers Parent Teacher Association has, largely, been interpreted almost solely in terms of gender or class, as part of the general progressive movement, or more recently in terms of race. However, to study it exclusively in this manner is too limiting. Its leadership at the state and national level was, in fact, made up of educated white middle- to upper-class mothers, and the agenda of many of their projects carried the same moral and social imperatives. Yet, unlike many other progressive era reform movements, it established and maintained a connection at the local level through teachers seeking better employment conditions and mothers seeking to improve the quality of education for their children. It would be limiting, also, to look at the group only as another women's movement hoping to gain a voice in governance, particularly of issues related to children. Many members, particularly at the state leadership level, did belong to groups that championed women's causes, just as the organization evolved out of other social groups. In Texas, specifically, the founding member attended the National Congress of Mothers' Conference as a representative of the Education Division of the Texas Women's Christian Temperance Movement. But here too the comparison stops as the Congress of Mothers very intentionally chose male advisory board members in order to avoid being seen as a traditional women's group; further, they actively campaigned to enlist fathers in the ranks of the membership, though success was minimal. In fact, the change in name from Congress of Mothers to Parent Teacher

¹⁴ Christine Woyshner, "Race, Gender, and the Early PTA: Civic Engagement and Public Education, 1897-1924," *Teachers College Record* 105, no. 3 (April 2003): 522, 523 (quote); Christine Woyshner, *The National PTA, Race, and Civic Engagement, 1897-1970* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009).

Association was intended to make the membership in the organization more acceptable to fathers. Further, it would be short-sighted to blame only male administrators for the change in status of the Congress of Mothers-Parent Teachers Association since criticism of the organization was leveled by many women educators as well, possibly as a means of protecting their new professional standing.¹⁵

The race factor is always prevalent, particularly in dealing with the region that had been the Confederate South; Texas is no exception, and many of the improvements pushed for did, in fact, primarily benefit white school children. But the Congress was not completely a race-favoring organization. On the national level, the organization was race inclusive. Most of the legislative improvements it pushed for affected all schools in the state and increased the level of professionalism among African-American teachers as well. And though Texas did have a separate congress for African Americans, at the 7th Annual Congress held in Dallas, Texas, in October of 1915, the African-American Congress of Mothers—who happened to be meeting at the same time in the same city—requested that a representative come speak at their meeting and report on the organization’s work in the black schools. Two women readily volunteered when Ella Porter put forth the motion. Further, the Texas Congress of Mothers-Parent Teachers Association translated tracts into Spanish to reach parents of Hispanic heritage as early as 1918 which were also distributed by the National Congress and other states with Hispanic populations.¹⁶

¹⁵ Speech by Ella Porter for Child Welfare and Texas Congress of Mother’s Day, undated, Box 2.325/U121, Texas PTA Records; Helen M. Stoddard to Ella Caruthers Porter, February 9, 1927, Box 2.325/U121.

¹⁶ Minutes of the 7th Annual Child Welfare Conference, October 26, 1915, Dallas, Texas: 18, Box 2.325/U120, Texas PTA Records; Annie Wood to Lucille Moore, Austin, April 8, 1946, in Lucille Moore, “History and Development of the Texas Congress of Parents and Teachers,” (master’s thesis, University of Texas, 1946), 120-121; Mrs Charles Woodson, Report from San Antonio Council. Minutes of the 10th Annual State Conference, November 6-8, 1918, Wichita Falls, Texas: 6, Box 2.325/U123, Texas PTA Records.

The PTA is a rare extant Progressive Era organization. While the PTA is still active within the schools, its role is largely limited to social programs and practical fundraisers to supplement meager district budgets, particularly in Texas. Yet, at one time the Parent Teacher Association was a political powerhouse that contributed significantly to the development of the modern school system. A great irony exists in this shift. The Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Associations helped to create a professional education system which then used this very professionalism to alter the influence of the organization—a fact sorely neglected in historical records, and particularly true for Texas. This thesis seeks to recognize the contribution that the Texas Congress of Mothers made to educational reform. It also works to clarify the relationship that existed between the organization and school administrators at state and local levels, seeking to identify the administrative power shift away from volunteer associations and increasingly into the hands of educators.¹⁷

The modern public school system continues to be a contested realm. Increasing demands are made of the educational system by policymakers and taxpayers who desire a cost-efficient way to enable young people to compete in the workforce. Disagreements range from equitable funding issues to instructional best practices and ideologies. None of the stakeholders deny that schools are most functional when there exists a cooperative relationship between the school and the home, yet the two groups are often at odds with one another, and a push and pull relationship has been the norm. Examining the history of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher

¹⁷ Texas PTA, *Annual Report 2010* (Austin: Texas PTA, 2010), 2-5. For example, the 2010 report of the Texas PTA showed expenses primarily related to environmental and parent education programs as well as scholarships for students and educators.

Association and its interactions with schools will help illuminate the vacillations in school reform efforts, information that could aid current and future reform efforts.

CHAPTER ONE: EARLY EDUCATION IN POST-CIVIL WAR TEXAS AND THE BEGINNING OF REFORM

Texas has had long had a long and difficult history with education. While the commitment to provide education for children was espoused as early as the colonial period, any system developed was provided for inconsistently and unequally for most of the state's early years. Lagging educational standards and provisions took its toll on the New South, and Texas was no exception. Literacy rates remained lower than in most areas of the North, rates of poverty were immense, and many children lived in the direst conditions prior to and following Reconstruction. This chapter examines the state of publicly-funded education in Texas in the early twentieth century. It will discuss the various stakeholders involved in educational reform in the South, and the emergence of groups that sought to improve the physical and pedagogical status of the public schools, improve the standards for and education of teachers, and empower the schools to provide early intervention programs for the social and physical health of children. Further, it will assess the creation of the Texas Congress of Mothers as a response to the increased demand for educational reform.¹⁸

Texas schools lagged behind those in much of the country in the early 1900s. Underfunded and operating with little or no oversight, the quality of every aspect of the state's public education system was poor. Only in a few metropolitan districts did nicer schools exist. The role of the state Superintendent of Public Instruction was severely limited, and while some laws existed, enforcement was lax and uneven, or in some areas not applicable. For example, because of possible inclement weather or potential hostile threat that, the list of counties

¹⁸ Evans, *Story of Texas Schools*, 23.

exempted from compulsory attendance laws outnumbered those that were not. Additionally, most citizens were suspicious of state-controlled education. However, Texas's educational system had not always been this way.

The period of Reconstruction in the state of Texas had produced a school system that would be recognizable by today's standards under the leadership of the Prussian-born Jacob DeGress, a Union officer who served as assistant commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau in Texas from 1865-1868. Three years later, he was appointed to the position of superintendent of public schools by Republican Governor Edmund J. Davis. The Reconstruction-era system that was created had state standards, graded levels, and county supervisors who reported directly to the Superintendent. However, despite the success of the educational program, it became an easy target for opposition politicians. The system was costly; the centralized state control was counter to the southern ideal of self-determination; and many in the state did not see the need for their children to be forced to attend school. Further, many were opposed to paying for schools for freedmen. The school board, in an attempt to save the system, responded by reducing costs wherever they could, including reducing teacher's pay. Taxes and administration of the program continued to be an issue. When the Democratic-controlled Thirteenth Legislature met in 1873, they passed a new set of laws over Governor Davis's veto that restored control to the local districts, limited the capacity of the local boards to raise taxes for school support, and eliminated parent fines for non-compliance with compulsory attendance mandates. The decrease in support for the public system created by Davis continued into the Constitutional Convention of 1875.¹⁹

¹⁹ Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, 284; Moneyhon, "Education and Reconstruction Politics," 409, 415; *General Laws of the State of Texas Passed at the Session of the Thirteenth Legislature, Begun and Held at the City of Austin, January 14, 1873*, in *The Laws of Texas*, Vol. VII, Compiled and Arranged by H.P.N. Gammel (Austin: The Gammel Book Co., 1898), 536-547; W. H. Heck, "Educational Uplift in the South: How Southern City People are Aiding in the Development of the Rural Schools – Illiteracy Being Gradually Eliminated – Communities Voting to Tax Themselves for School Funds – An Inspiring Story of Progress," *The World's Work* 8 (1904): 5027; Charles

With conservative white Democrats firmly in control, the resulting Constitution of 1876 radically changed the article on Education – Public Free Schools. Now Article VII of the Texas Constitution, the new article dismantled the educational system set up during the Reconstruction era. The revised Constitution turned control over the free public schools back to local officials. Restrictions on spending the permanent school fund for other state purposes were removed. This Constitution also mandated that separate systems be operated for white and black children, increasing the cost of providing education. The position of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction was reduced essentially to one of record keeping, and it would remain that way until 1884.²⁰

Though an increasing population contributed to the expansion of the schools and increased total funding, improvement in real measures was limited. Between 1870 and 1890 the number of schools, white and black, as well as the number of pupils and teachers increased. Yet, the funding increase was minimal. According to Department of Education figures, Texas spent approximately \$2.14 per pupil in 1870. In 1890, the amount was \$3.34. In current spending terms, it would amount to \$88.86 per pupil. Current actual state spending per pupil for our existing school system is \$263.60, and state funds are not the only source of funding. While the change in spending represented a marked increase, it paled in comparison to other states in the South. Virginia, for example, spent an average of \$4.87, and the local contribution was a significantly higher percentage of funds than those provided by the state. And, while Texas did

William Dabney, *From the Beginning to 1900*, vol. 1 of *Universal Education in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), 419.

²⁰ Texas State Constitutional Convention of 1875. *Constitution of the State of Texas, Adopted by the Constitutional Convention, Begun and Held at the City of Austin, on the Sixth Day of September, 1875* (Galveston: News Steam Book and Job Establishment, 1875), 14-15; John J. Lane, *History of Education in Texas* (Washington: GPO, 1903), 39; Dabney, *Universal Education in the South*, vol. 1, 420.

have the lowest rate of total illiteracy in the southern states, the improvement in literacy during the twenty-year period was minimal. Further, Texas had unique pockets of illiteracy. Just after the turn of the century, Edgar Gardner Murphy found thirty counties with rates of illiteracy that were twenty percent and higher. For example, Hidalgo County on the U.S.-Mexican border had the highest rate of illiteracy at 53.1%.²¹

The poor condition of the schools was a frequent topic of conversations. Some areas saw improvement, but those were mostly in areas of greater population. The problem was, however, that the vast majority of the state lacked these population centers. One survey of the American South, published in 1908, found that Texas had only twelve cities with a white population of over twenty-five thousand and only thirty-eight with a population above ten thousand. States in the north had greater centers of population, especially in relation to their size. Massachusetts, for example, had forty-seven cities above twenty-five thousand. The U.S. average percent of children in the schools in cities above twenty-five thousand was twenty; in the South it was only six percent of the children in public schools. According to this observer, the South lacked the very infrastructure required to provide efficient schools.²²

Lagging behind the rest of the states was considered by many educators as inexcusable when the monies potentially available for school support were fairly large. A 1904 Bulletin of the University of Texas published a listing of funds for the schools compared to other states as

²¹ See tables in J. L. M. Curry, *A Brief Sketch of George Peabody and a History of the Peabody Education Fund through Thirty Years* (1898; repr., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 118-120; Texas Education Agency, "Per Capita Rates, 1949-2015," Texas Education Agency, http://tea.texas.gov/Finance_and_Grants/State_Funding/Additional_Finance_Resources/Per__Capita_Rates/ (accessed November 6, 2016); Murphy, *Problems*, 307-308; Others also noted that other Southern states, such as North Carolina and Georgia, had begun approving more local taxation for the support of schools, see Heck, "Educational Uplift in the South," 5028.

²² Edgar Gardner Murphy, *Problems of the Present South: A Discussion of Certain of the Educational, Industrial and Political Issues in the Southern States* (New York: Grossett & Dunlap, 1908), 37-40.

well as per capita expense per pupil. Citing a State Treasurer Report of 1902, the “permanent school fund” and the “perpetual school fund” were close to \$25 million and \$47 million respectively. Texas had a larger total school fund and reported income from state taxation than Massachusetts, New York, Illinois, Missouri, California and Pennsylvania. The bulletin showed that Texas was at the top among these states in state taxation raised for the schools. Yet, in local taxation raised, Texas trailed these states’ rates and was twenty-eighth among all states. And, per capita expense per student was below the average of all educational divisions and even lower than the U.S. average. On this scale, Texas came in at thirty-seventh overall, coming in ahead of only other southern states. Further, the state lagged in the length of the school year and the percentage of scholastic population enrolled. For the 1901-1902 school year, Texas had only 66.74% of the total scholastic population enrolled in the public schools. The bulletin also cited the problem of having dedicated resources for elementary and higher education but lagged significantly in the area of secondary education, thereby setting up students to be unprepared for more advanced studies.²³

The Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction for the years 1905-1906 reinforced these claims. The report indicated that Texas trailed the national averages in virtually all areas, from funding to length of attendance. The enrollment had increased, but attendance, particularly at the community schools, continued to lag. Average daily attendance in the community schools was less than half of the enrollment. City schools had greater monies available than the rural schools, and the length of term was inconsistent and not compliant with the term as dictated by the Constitution. Between short terms and non-enrollment,

²³ William Seneca Sutton, *Some Wholesome Educational Statistics*, Bulletin of the University of Texas, No. 23, General Series, No. 3. (Austin: University of Texas, 1904): 5-8, 10-11.

Superintendent R.B. Cousins acknowledged that “we are doing one fourth as much school work in the education of the people as might be done.”²⁴

The inequity in schools and poor attendance were not the only areas of concern to the Superintendent. Many of these he saw as part of a larger problem in the state’s investment in education. The demand for local control created a dual system of schooling in the state with both community schools and schools that used the district system. Community schools were those with complete local control, usually from a county superintendent and local trustees, and subject to the influence of the community members. Districts were created by incorporation by towns or cities and allowed to create their own separate school boards and superintendents. The community schools often had inadequate facilities and teachers with lower levels of certification than the district schools. District schools had room for improvement as well; several districts still had one-teacher schools with students of varied age and ability. Further, teacher education varied, and even though Texas was experiencing a shortage of teachers, “convict guards” received a greater rate of pay than some rural school teachers when room and board was factored into the overall gross pay. At the conclusion of his report, Cousins made it clear that in order to continue to improve schools would need more money and supervision by professional educators.²⁵

If the schools appeared to be in crisis, the state of the black schools was worse. Very little direct mention is made of them in most reports. One surveyor’s comments were limited to applauding the fact that there were “no disturbing efforts in Texas as were made in some other

²⁴ R.B. Cousins, *Fifteenth Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the Years Ending August 31, 1905, and August 31, 1906* (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones Col, 1906), 11, 13, 8 (Quote).

²⁵ Ibid. 11, 14, 20, 25 (Quote); Lane, *History of Education in Texas*, 86-88.

States to associate colored with white children in the public school.” He noted the creation of Prairie View Normal School to train black teachers, and claimed that the black per capita allocation was equal to white children. This last statement was dubious, especially when the superintendent report of a few years later showed that country schools for black youth had fewer teachers at all certification levels who were paid less than white teachers, and there were huge disparities in the number of libraries and the value of the schools. Another observer reported that “it is only in rare instances that they [black schools] have been definitely reached by this southern uplift movement, the impulse of which is a recognition of the need of the undeveloped Anglo-Saxon.” Despite the glaring disparity in conditions, the Superintendent had no separate discussion of the black schools. The issue was only reflected numerically. While almost all accounts of the educational system insisted that separate schools were the best system (often claiming that blacks preferred to stay separate), little was made of the difference except for one chronicler’s observation that the financial drain of operating two systems very obviously weakened the state’s educational system and its ability to operate at utmost efficiency.²⁶

That Texas performed so poorly in the provision of school houses, the education of teachers, and daily attendance was a source of concern to more of the population than is reflected in official reports and commentary. For support of his own proposals, Superintendent Cousins put forth resolutions from the Farmers’ Congress of Texas. There were several additional stakeholders interested in improving the schools and the overall wellbeing of children.

Philanthropic organizations, such as the Conference for Education in Texas and the Peabody Education Fund, contributed financial support and often personnel hours to strengthen the

²⁶ Lane, *History of Education in Texas*, 45 (Quote), 36; Cousins, *Report*, 10; Philip Alexander Bruce, *The Rise of the New South*, vol. 17 of *The History of North America* (Philadelphia: George Barrie & Sons, 1905), 356; Heck, “Educational Uplift in the South,” 5029 (quote).

educational efforts in the South.²⁷

The main influence in educational reform in the South was the Conference for Education in the South and its Southern Education Board. The Conference for Education in the South, a body of concerned educators and philanthropists, worked to affect change at the larger system level. Although the motives of the Southern Education Board have been seen as suspect because they did not address the race issue, the organization sought to increase political pressure by creating a public crusade for school reform. The agency's method was to work primarily through local school reform campaign leaders and elected officials. Texas, however, was excluded from the work of these organizations.²⁸

As a result, interested Texans formed the Conference for Education in Texas which modeled its work after the national organization. This group hosted annual gatherings to discuss concerns over school conditions and the needs of the school system. By gathering to discuss the latest theory, work, and important issues, they created a unified political front for educational problems in the state. Their work in Texas did produce some immediate results. Through their work, a constitutional amendment was added in 1908 which more than doubled the amount of taxation that could be raised for support of the schools and changed it to be effective upon a majority popular vote rather than at two-thirds. In 1909, another amendment was added to allow school districts to be formed for more efficient operation in sparsely-settled areas.²⁹

²⁷ Cousins, *Report*, 36; Link, *Paradox*, 127-134; Joseph C. Kiger, "Large Foundations in Southern Education," *Journal of Higher Education* 27, no. 3 (March 1956): 125-128; Heck, "Educational Uplift in the South," 5029.

²⁸ Dabney, *Universal Education in the South*, vol. 2, 3-6, 12; Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, 247; Link, *Paradox*, 127-128.

²⁹ For organizational chart see Dabney, *Universal Education in the South*, vol. 2, 514; Dabney, *Universal Education in the South*, vol. 2, 382-385; McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 57-58; Louise R. Harlan, "The Southern Education Board and the Race Issue in Public Education," *Journal of Southern History* 23, no. 2 (May 1957): 192-194; Link, *Paradox*, 131, 130; Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, 248-249, 253.

The General Education Board as well as the Peabody Education Fund were more financially involved in efforts to improve southern education. General Education Fund monies were largely distributed to institutions of higher learning to increase the number of scholars among the citizenry. They contributed to a number of public high schools and institutions of higher learning, including financial support to a number of the black schools. The Peabody Educational Fund invested primarily teacher education. Peabody not only provided a number of scholarships for students to attend its normal school, it also distributed its income among the states for support of the state normal schools. Many of these same funds were given also to help build the black schools, both the public free primary schools and institutions of higher learning.³⁰

In addition to philanthropic organizations, a number of voluntary associations began to focus on education. Increased concern arose regarding the overall ignorance of much of the South. It was believed that many of the social ills of the day could be alleviated with the right education. This sentiment is probably best expressed by Edgar Gardner Murphy in his description of what the schools should do:

They must touch this day's earth and this day's men through the truths and the perils of to-day. They must be instructors of the contemporary civic conscious. And in this hour, I take it, they must help the State to bring to mean a profounder and therefore a simpler reverence for the institutions and the processes of public order.

In his mind, public order itself was dependent on a quality educational system. Some of the philanthropic groups believed that only education was capable of creating racial tolerance, but

³⁰ "General Education Board," *Science* 34, no. 879 (November 3, 1911): 597-598; Kiger, "Foundations in Southern Education," 126-128; Lane, *History of Education in Texas*, 53-55; J. L. M. Curry, *History of the Peabody Education Fund*, 121-125, 147; Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, 261; Bruce, *Rise of the New South*, 35, 397-400.

these same groups declined to address the issue of the racial divide's effect on the overall quality of education.³¹

The majority of the voluntary associations engaged in educational reform were missionary branches of churches as well as committees emerging from larger social reformation movements. Texas had many chapters of several national organizations, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the International Congress of Farm Women. These women's groups, made up largely of educated, middle class women believed that education was the vehicle needed to correct a host of social ills, from drunkenness to the spread of venereal disease.³²

The South was slightly delayed in joining the progressive era movements. The backlash against Reconstruction reforms and the return to the sentiment of individual control meant that progressive reforms, such as child labor laws, farming demonstrations, and even school reform movements came several years behind much of the rest of the country, many not occurring until the turn of the century. And, Texas women were slow to turn towards progressivism with the first Congress in 1894. However, the call to improve social order and civic conditions moved women in the South out of the home and into the public arena. Missionary societies and reformist groups sprang up throughout the South all with the effort to try to reorder social conditions.³³

³¹ Murphy, *Problems of the Present South*, 48-49 (Quote); Harlan, "Education Board and Race," 191; Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, 259.

³² McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 47-49, 85-86; Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, 24, Heck "Educational Uplift in the South," 5028-5029.

³³ McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 1; Woodward, "The Search for Southern Identity" in *The Burden of Southern History*, 3rd ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008): 19; Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 396-428; Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, 200-204; McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 9; Scott, *Southern Lady*, 136; Seaholm, "Earnest Women," 103, 42.

Because so much of southern women's activism took the form of municipal housekeeping and was tied into the ideal of motherhood, the schools naturally became a focus of reform. For many black schools, especially, the work of the missionary societies and women's clubs was critical. There were different forms that the work of voluntary organizations took. Some groups worked to improve the physical conditions of the schools. For schools in some areas, the efforts really oversaw aesthetic improvements, but for others it involved trying to keep the windows sealed and the heat going. Other women's groups were concerned about the social condition. Fears of moral decay led them to band in groups to fight alcohol and other vices. These groups were invested and interested in the schools because they recognized that education could play a key role in an individual's formation. The belief was that if you could train a child at an early age to avoid these vices, all socio-economic indicators for the state and nation would improve. Then there were groups that undertook to improve the quality of the educational system. These groups demanded better pay and working conditions for teachers, enforcement of school laws, and insisted that the field of education be treated as a serious field of study not only theoretically but also professionally.³⁴

Of the women's associations, two would emerge at the end of the nineteenth century that would be the most prominent and high profile. The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) joined other groups to combat a "common enemy." Working in conjunction with church groups and other reform organizations, the WCTU focused efforts not solely on prohibition but also on education and child labor crusades. Education, they felt, was imperative

³⁴ Elizabeth Hayes Turner, *Women, Culture, and Community: Religion and Reform in Galveston, 1880-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 10, 146; Gerda Lerner, "Early Community Work of Black Club Women," *Journal of Negro History* 59, no. 2 (April 1974): 159; Seaholm, "Earnest Women," 104, 270, 277, 287; Erwin V. Johanningmeier, "Public Education: Educational Research, and the Nation's Agenda During the Progressive Era," *American Educational History Journal* 33, no. 1 (2006): 100.

to the creation of upright citizenry. Not only did the children need education in order to improve the economic standing of the state, but they also needed direction on how to improve their own standard of living, physically and spiritually. And though the WCTU made little progress on increasing women's activism in some parts of the state since many were opposed to prohibition, the organization would play a role in the initiation of the Congress of Mothers in Texas.³⁵

The second pivotal group emerged at a Woman's Congress held at the State Fair during the fall of 1894. Contemporary accounts credit the pioneering women who would emerge as the Texas Federation of Women's Clubs (TFWC) for bravery for their willingness to attend the gathering. Scholars even recognize the tentativeness of many women who came to the progressive movement, attributing their apprehension to generations of living under a patriarchal system. The significance of the gathering of delegates from a variety of women's organizations who promoted progressive agendas was not lost on observers. The name of the gathering was changed in some early reports to Council to align it with the national movement as well as to remove any partisan inference. The gathering brought together women from a variety of women's organizations ranging from study and literary associations to the WCTU. Following a national lead that many women in other states had followed, the participants envisioned creating a Texas organization that would allow each autonomous group to continue its work while simultaneously contributing toward common goals that improved the condition of women throughout the state. They believed that the power of their collaboration would be more effective

³⁵ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 389 (quote), 391; John W. Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership and Social Christianity, 1900-1980* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2008), 19; McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 3; Ella Caruthers Porter, "National Congress of Parents and Teachers," undated, 2, Box 2.325/U121, Texas PTA Records.

in creating changes than working independently.³⁶

The main emphasis throughout much of the women's conference at the state fair was education. Women needed to be educated since it was their duty to educate others. And education would continue to be a focus of the newly formed Federation. The women of the TFWC used public education campaigns to urge passage of legislative actions that would create the new kindergartens in the state and increase taxation for the support of schools. Further, they used more concrete means to affect positive changes schools. They raised monies to support vocational programs and other improvements to facilities and equipment. The TFWC would continue to see education as an important endeavor, supporting kindergartens and encouraging the professionalization of teachers through better training and standards; however, they neither worked alone in their campaigns nor was it their only focus. Increasingly, the TFWC and other women's organizations began to see the limitations to affecting real and permanent change in Texas schools and society as long as they lacked the right to vote. And though it initially threatened to divide the collective, suffrage was eventually adopted as part of their agenda.³⁷

Despite their immense contributions to improving the educational institution and the physical plant and curriculum of many individual schools, neither the WCTU nor the TFWC would emerge as the leader in school reform in the early twentieth century. The agency that garnered the most support among the male-dominated legislators and educational leaders as well

³⁶ Stella L. Christian, ed., *The History of the Texas Federation of Women's Clubs* (Houston, TX: Dealy-Adey-Elgin Co., 1919), 4, 5-6, 10, 11, 14-16; McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 3; Andra Knecht, "'We are from the City, and We are here to Educate You:' The Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs and Tallulah Falls School," in *Educational Work of Women's Organizations, 1890-1960*, ed. Anne Meis Knupfer and Christine Woyshner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 216; Seaholm, "Ernest Women," iv.

³⁷ Christian, *History of Texas Federation of Women's Clubs*, 11; Hayes Turner, *Women, Culture, and Community*, 146, 148, 349; McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 61-62, 107-108; Seaholm, "Ernest Women," 267-8.

as among teachers of both sexes and parents was the Texas Congress of Mothers. The Texas Congress of Mothers would emerge from the leadership of the Texas WCTU; the organization, however, elected a slightly different path than most reform organizations founded by women by its primary attention to improvement of the schools, a factor that helped the Congress of Mothers maintain credibility with male administrators and educators. The Texas Congress of Mothers, in other words, attempted to bridge the common interests of school reform in all groups, and it did so with an unusual amount of success.

In October 1896, Mrs. Helen Stoddard, president of the Texas WCTU from 1891-1907, asked Ella Caruthers Porter to chair the Mother's Department of the WCTU. Porter had been the head of a Dallas Mother's Club, one of the first such organizations in the state. Porter's club focused on providing mothers with knowledge of the best practices in childrearing and educational pedagogy and policies. When an invitation was received for a representative to attend the first gathering of the National Congress of Mothers in Washington, D.C. in 1897, Porter was appointed, but she was unable to attend the initial meeting due to a sudden illness in her family. Instead, Porter participated in the National Congress of the following year. Here Porter was officially recognized as the organizer of Texas. She returned from the Congress excited about duplicating the organizational model that the National Congress provided as well as encouraging a meeting and alignment of the mother's clubs that had grown up throughout the state.³⁸

The first state Congress of Mothers would occur in October of 1898. Planned and executed by the WCTU, it was, fittingly, opened by Helen Stoddard, the WCTU president. The

³⁸ Ella Caruthers Porter history, undated, Texas President's Material, Box 2.325/U121, Texas PTA Records, 1-2; Helen M. Stoddard to Ella Caruthers Porter, February 9, 1927, Correspondence, Box 2.35/U121, Texas PTA Records; Editorial, *Dallas Morning Star*, October 11, 1898.

meeting assembled a host of women from around the state. Following opening devotions and the address of welcome, the first speech of the day was “Why a Congress of Mothers” presented by Stoddard. This speech was followed immediately by Porter’s titled “Responsibility of Motherhood.” The opening two speeches of the conference set the tone for the remainder of the three-day program. The rest of the agenda of contained speeches by the leaders of the special interest units of the state WCTU, such as purity, heredity, and narcotics, as well as elected officials from the various chapters of the WCTU. Porter would again present at this gathering. On the last day, she gave another speech on “Mother’s Meetings.” This first gathering laid the groundwork for the development of a Congress of Mothers in Texas.³⁹

Life events prevented Porter from devoting her entire attention to the creation of state branches of the National Congress. Her husband’s death left her as sole care provider for two young daughters, a role she felt ill-equipped to fill. Believing that her lack of education limited her in this regard, she took her small daughters and moved to Tennessee. Her daughters were placed in a school in Nashville, while she enrolled in an area Lady’s College. According to her autobiography, she made an annual return to Texas as well as attended meetings of the National Congress of Mothers. And while no official state organization formed during this period, local mothers’ clubs began to appear as more mothers embraced the need for combined effort in the area of school reform.⁴⁰

Porter’s first order of business upon her return to Dallas in 1909 was to create additional

³⁹ Ella Caruthers Porter history, undated, Texas President’s Material, Box 2.325/U121, Texas PTA Records, 1-2; Editorial, *Dallas Morning Star*, October 11, 1898.

⁴⁰ Ella Caruthers Porter history, undated, Texas President’s Material, Box 2.325/U121, Texas PTA Records, 2-3; Mrs. Theodore W. Birney to Lucille Moore, April 16, 1943 in Moore. “History and Development of the Texas Congress of Parents and Teachers,” 125.

local clubs and combine those with Parent-Teacher Associations that had sprung up in her absence, thus creating the Dallas Council of Mothers, a body made up of sixty-one Parent-Teacher Associations. Later that year she would organize a meeting of representatives from Mother's Clubs throughout the state. Also attending this conference were two representatives of the National Congress of Mothers. A state organization was officially founded, and Porter was elected the first president. Headquarters were established in Dallas at the Methodist Publishing House and the *Texas Motherhood Magazine* was made the official publication of the organization. Porter immediately started lobbying for the organization and sought the support of other educational stakeholders such as the Conference for Education which even contributed monetarily to the cause.⁴¹

From these rather fragmented and relatively inauspicious beginnings, the Texas Congress of Mothers would immediately set to work to improve the quality of childhood throughout the state. Within months of its formation, it boasted having several thousand members. Virtually no area that concerned children was excluded from the work of this organization; however, the institution most critical to the organization was the public schools. While they would work to educate parents of the science and the demands of child rearing, the schools would be critical as places of social as well as educational development. What children did not get at home, the Mothers would argue, became the responsibility of the school. This message was a departure from the intense localism of the state's current framework. The scope of work that was foreseen

⁴¹ Minutes "Organizing the Texas Mother's Council, March 31, 1909, Box 2.325/U121, Texas PTA Records; Ella Caruthers Porter history, undated, Texas President's Material, Box 2.325/U121, Texas PTA Records, 3; Mrs. Theodore W. Birney to Lucille Moore, April 16, 1943 in Moore. "History and Development of the Texas Congress of Parents and Teachers," 125.

by the organization was daunting, yet within a few short years, the organization would play an instrumental role in the creation of a modern system of education throughout the state.⁴²

⁴² Ella Caruthers Porter history, undated, Texas President's Material, Box 2.325/U121, Texas PTA Records, 3.

CHAPTER TWO: THE RISE OF THE TEXAS CONGRESS OF MOTHERS

The Texas Congress of Mothers took an immediate lead in pushing for change within the school systems. Like many other reform era organizations, its leadership consisted largely of educated, middle-class, white women who were familiar with the most influential educational theorists as well as the scientific method of motherhood that they deemed necessary to create upright citizens and to bring the South in line with the needs of a new society. But the founders of the organization understood that a more inclusive effort was needed to affect change. The local chapters raised their voices in support of state-wide improvements but also became a key agent in developing local support for progressive reform within the schools. Collectively, the group was instrumental in changing the education of children from a local endeavor to a professionalized model with trained teachers. Within a few decades, the group would help to establish the basis of the modern education system.

The model of the National Congress of Mothers planned for a centralized agenda at the state level to push for major structural changes while local chapters carried out the work of educating taxpayers as well as providing real improvement to the community schools. The state organization, which would lead lobbying efforts and provide materials and other publications, was directly supported by dues paid by the local chapters as well as any other funds the group could gather. In some states, such as New York, local chapters of any great quantity did not appear until after World War I and the passage of the suffrage amendment.⁴³

Texas, on the other hand, never experienced this lack of momentum. By 1910, a

⁴³ Claudia J. Keenan, "The Suburban PTA and the Good Life, 1920-1960," in *Educational Work of Women's Organizations, 1890-1960*, ed. Anne Meis Knupfer and Christine Woyshner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 239.

year after the first gathering of parent-teacher associations under one umbrella, chapters of the Congress of Mothers could be found throughout the state working toward a variety of improvements. Many of these were found in more urban environments, such as Houston and Dallas, but clubs had also arisen in smaller areas in the state, such as Texarkana and Goliad. At its early inception, the gathering of Texas Congress of Mothers, unlike many reform groups headed by middle class women, enjoyed the support of both male administrators and professional educators who were anxious to improve the state's schools. Many of the local organizations had been created either by the faculty or with the support of the faculty. Principals, teachers, and even superintendents participated in organizing the associations at their schools. The group from Travis School in Houston, for example, was created when the school principal called a meeting of the mothers of the school.⁴⁴

Educators had long endorsed the assistance of other women's groups to aid in the battle for improving schools. The Conference for Education had welcomed the aid of the Texas Federation of Women's Clubs. Eager to gain the same types of endorsement, Ella C. Porter, organizer and first president of the congress, immediately sought the cooperation and support of the educational stakeholders in Texas, including the State Department of Education, the State Teachers' Association, and the State Department of Health. She also received encouragement as well as financial support from the Conference for Education.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Sallie Capp, poll response to Porter, 1910, Fort Worth, Tx; Mrs. Frank Baylor Hogg, poll response to Porter, June 6, 1910, Houston, Tx; Mrs. Gus McKenni, poll response to Porter, May 21, 1910, Gainesville, Tx.; Mrs. J.H. Pittman, poll response to Porter, 1910, Goliad, Tx.; Mrs. Grace E. Zimmer, poll response to Porter, 1910; Mrs. M.D. Tilson, poll response to Porter, 1910, Texarkana; Mrs. E.H. Holland, poll response to Porter, 11910, Houston, Box 2.325/U121, Texas PTA Records.

⁴⁵ F. M. Bralley, "Report of the First Year's Work of the Conference for Education in Texas, *Texas School Journal* 25 (1908): 7; Ella Caruthers Porter history, undated, Texas President's Material, Box 2.325/U121, Texas PTA Records, 3; A History of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 1909-1912, 1909-1929, 1929, undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 5.

Porter, keenly aware of the need for promotion in garnering popular support, arranged for the Congress to launch its first campaign from the Texas State Fair in Dallas in 1910. With the assistance of a professor from the state university, Porter arranged to bring part of the Child Welfare exhibit that had been presented in New York to Texas. If there was any doubt that the schools would be the primary focus of the group's agenda, that doubt was put to rest at the fair. Exhibits featured models and plans for the ideal school buildings. It also included some focus on public spaces, such as sanitary drinking cups as a replacement to the common drinking cup and a model for a public playground. These topics eventually were included into the discourse regarding school improvement, the sanitary drinking cup in the schools to reduce sickness and the subsequent absenteeism and the playground to encourage outdoor activity and physical fitness.⁴⁶

Porter and other volunteers also took advantage of the State Fair venue to enlist women in their work. Leaflets were distributed which discussed the advantages of mother's clubs as well as parent-teacher associations. They not only advocated for the creation of parent-teacher partnerships throughout the state but even included organizational information. Leaflets provided a "model Constitution and By-Laws" to aid in the formation of local chapters. By taking advantage of a public event that showcased the most modern technology, Porter was able to catch the interest of those looking to move the state forward. At the end of the first year, one hundred and fifty local organizations had joined the Congress.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ella Caruthers Porter history, undated, Texas President's Material, Box 2.325/U121, Texas PTA Records, 4; A History of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 1909-1912, 1909-1929, 1929, undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 2; Ella Caruthers Porter, Child Welfare and Texas Congress of Mothers' Day Speech, undated, Box 2.325/U121, Texas PTA Records.

⁴⁷ Ella Caruthers Porter history, undated, Texas President's Material, Box 2.235/U121, Texas PTA Records, 4.

A veteran of women's organizations, Porter understood the need to include male supporters in order to be effective in lobbying for change. The list of the pioneer members, though largely women, does include the names of two male school officials—Prof. J.W. Cantwell, Superintendent of Schools for Wichita Falls and prior Superintendent of Fort Worth, and DeWitte McMurray of Dallas. Porter was effective in gaining cooperation from the educational establishment because of her insistence that the organization adhere closely to its agenda and abstain from the controversial reform that many women's organizations advocated, especially suffrage. She reasoned it was in the best interest of the organization to “not make the mistake of dissipating our energies along other lines. No matter how worthy they may be.” She wanted to avoid the appearance of supporting any cause other than those directly related to educational standards. Once she had garnered support of administrators and enlisted a group of individuals and parent-teacher groups, Porter began efforts to reform the school system into a truly professionalized endeavor.⁴⁸

The organization of the Texas Congress of Mothers followed the style of many reformist groups. Modeled along guidelines provided by the National Congress, the Texas Congress established state offices, elected by the membership to provide guidance to the state organization. They also divided their work into separate committees, each dedicated to a specific purpose such as legislation and education and one that oversaw the publication of the group's *Motherhood* magazine. A governing body of officers was established consisting of the president, vice-presidents, secretaries, a treasurer, and an auditor. The specialized committees would report with officers at the state convention every year. The Executive Committee also included the

⁴⁸ List of Pioneer Parent-Teacher Associations which came into the Texas Congress of Mothers, in 1909, Individual Pioneer Members, undated, Texas President's Material, Box 2.325/U121, Texas PTA Records, 1-3.

President of each committee.⁴⁹

The state Executive Committee played a vital role in the organization translating the directives from the National Congress into instructions for action at the local units. The state organization worked out of an office in the Methodist Publishing House in Dallas, Texas, paid for by Eleanor Brackenridge of San Antonio, head of the state organization's Legislative Committee. The office provided the chapters with everything from literature suggesting programs and content, information on the latest legislation that would improve the schools, and the newest information on health and hygiene related to childhood and public facilities. The state organization also served to gather and publish statistics related to school operation and the activities of the local units. Leadership, without the privilege of suffrage, used lobbying to push for kindergartens, curriculum additions, and other legislation that affected primarily women and children.⁵⁰

Porter, in her capacity as president, continued to press for recognition and legitimacy of the organization through attempts to reach large audience in Texas and across the nation. She hosted the second state conference in the capital city, Austin, and gathered at its closing ceremony the representatives from eighteen state organizations in the first Child Welfare Conference in the Southwest. This collective combined their efforts to increase the strength of state and national appeals for Child Welfare Legislation. The state chapter progressed at such a rate that it even garnered the attention of the National Congress. The president of the National

⁴⁹ A History of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teachers, comp. Mrs. H.B. Chamberlain, 1919-1935., undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records; Myrtle Bridwell, "The Organization and Administration of the Parent-Teacher Association" (master's thesis, Southwest Texas State University, 1950), 17.

⁵⁰ Bridwell, "Organization and Administration," 17; History of the Texas Congress, undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 2;, 1910, Minutes of State Meeting for the year 1909-1910, Box 2.325/U120, 4, 1, 3.

Congress, Mrs. Frederick K. Schoof of Philadelphia, attended a 1912 state meeting held in Houston, and they decided to host the 1912 national spring conference in Dallas; however, an outbreak of meningitis forced a relocation of the event to Atlanta. By the end of Porter's administration, the state association totaled more than ten thousand members with both a number of districts and county organizations formed.⁵¹

Each successive administration of the Congress of Mothers-Parent-Teacher Associations at the state level pushed for agendas that would improve the standards of schools and better the qualifications, standards, and pay of school teachers and administrators. The group also championed any form of protection on women and children. One observer proclaimed that pushing for legislation that protected children was "one of the most fruitful efforts in the parent-teacher movement."⁵²

The work of the organization did not stop with legislative matters alone. They also tried to promote child development. Mrs. Chalmers Hutchinson, the president of the organization from 1912-1914, focused her agenda on child study and strengthening the organization. The administration published a course on the problems of the schools in its *Motherhood* magazine and urged the National Congress to publish child study courses in its monthly publication, *Child Welfare* magazine. An educated woman herself, Hutchinson believed that mothers needed to be informed of those things that influenced a child's development, from physical activity and hygiene to psychology. High schools and state Normals were also advised to integrate child study into their curriculum. By creating a conversation between parents, teachers, and future

⁵¹ History of the Texas Congress, 2-8, undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records; Ella Caruthers Porter history, undated, Texas President's Material, Box 2.325/U121, Texas PTA Records, 4; A History of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 1909-1912, 1909-1929, 1929, undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 1.

⁵² Bridwell, "Organization and Administration," 33 (quote)

generations about the problems of children and schools, the group helped garner support for legislation that would normally have been shunned by southern voters who still overwhelmingly spouted the primacy of localism.⁵³

The conversation seemed to work. Members of the organization worked to keep abreast of any measures put forth for the benefit of children and worked to gain public support through informational meetings, publicity, and through their publications at the local and state level. They supported compulsory school attendance measures and assisted in the passage of the Married Women's Property Rights Bill. They also participated in the establishment of the Texas State Training School for Girls, a rehabilitation home for delinquent young women.⁵⁴

The administration of Mrs. F. W. McAllister of San Antonio, who served from 1914 until her resignation in 1917, was no different. McAllister had been the member charged with the organization's *Motherhood Magazine*. Her administration lobbied for a compulsory school law. Finally, passed in 1916, the compulsory school law required children age eight and above to attend school for a prescribed number of days, increasing each year to reach a 100-day minimum by the 1918-1919 scholastic year. The organization also garnered support for the passage of the Smith-Lever Vocation Bill. Eventually known as the Smith-Hughes Act, the measure initiated vocational education by providing matching funds for teacher instruction in subjects such as home economics, agriculture, and industrial education. Though the administration and methods of vocational education are now criticized, the Smith-Hughes Act was seen by many at the time as being a vital step toward improving overall conditions in the South in the most expedient way.

⁵³ A History of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 1909-1912, 1909-1929, 1929, undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 9; Link, *Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, 1.

⁵⁴ Bridwell, "Organization and Administration," 33; History of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 1909-1912, 1909-1929, 1929, undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 10-11.

Texas lagged in all standards compared to the national level. Proponents of the separation of educational tracts and directing students into either traditional academic and vocational training followed the theories of efficiency rather than those that felt inclusive education was best. It was believed that streamlining areas of talent would best prepare all levels of students for the future.⁵⁵

Organizationally, the Texas Congress also became more formalized during the McAllister administration. The office moved to a location in the Gunter Building in San Antonio, and the leaders adopted a prayer and song to be performed at any official gathering. The words to both the prayer and the song, “A Little Child Shall Lead” by Mrs. F. L. Jaccard of Fort Worth, were published as front material in a handbook provided to members. They also formalized their processes of teaching about child development and the latest science in homemaking by working cooperatively with The College of Industrial Arts and the University of Texas to create study courses for the organization. Branches were to learn about things such as Household Sanitation, Study of Foods, Proper Feeding of the Family, Selection of Foods and Principles of Cookery, Personal Hygiene and Home Care of the Sick.⁵⁶

When the next state president, Mrs. E. A. Watters, took over the association, the United States had entered into World War I. The outbreak of the war and the increasing needs and concerns it created meant that many of the service organizations momentarily broke from their

⁵⁵ A History of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 1909-1912, 1909-1929, 1929, undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 10, 4, 12; Doughty, *Twenty-First Biennial Report, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Texas, September 1, 1916, to August 31, 1918* (Austin: State Board of Education, 1918), 264; Gene B. Preuss, *To Get a Better School System: One Hundred Years of Education Reform in Texas*, No. 111: Centennial Series of the Association of Former Students (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009), 26.

⁵⁶ A History of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 1909-1912, 1909-1929, 1929, undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 12,15; Bridwell, “Organization and Administration,” 32; “Texas Homemakers Course,” (Denton: College of Industrial Arts, 1915): Table of Contents. Box 2.325/U123, Texas PTA Records.

traditional focus to tend to more immediate needs, or what were seen as the “needs of the hour.” The Texas Congress of Mothers Parent Teachers Association was no different. Activities included a letter writing campaign to Washington in protest over the “social evils” found within army camps, continuing an effort from the prior McAllister administration. Publications collected during her presidency contained a host of flyers and publications regarding sexuality and sexual hygiene, brochures on prostitution, the white slave traffic, and a publication titled, “Friend or Enemy? To the Men of the Army and Navy.”⁵⁷

Concern for conditions on the home front prompted the Congress to appoint a specialized Committee of War Work to promote war gardens in an attempt to combat food shortages. They also joined with other groups, such as the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs and the National League for Women’s Service, in promoting personal thrift and investment in government bonds. Perhaps a result of the war, Watters’ administration was also the first to reach outside the bounds of Porter’s limitations on the issues that the organization undertook. Rather than just seeking to change the conditions of the schools, the legislative group took on activities to improve the overall condition of women. For the first time, the Congress of Mothers came out in support of national platforms for women’s suffrage, prohibition, and a minimum wage law for women.⁵⁸

Watters’ administration produced the biggest shift in focus of the organization and increased activity around issues other than education, but it did not lose sight of educational reform altogether. The association pushed for more controversial changes within the school

⁵⁷ History of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 1909-1912, 1909-1929, 1929, undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 15 (quote), 16 (quote); Publications produced/collected during administration, Mrs. E.A. Watters, 1917-1920, undated box 2.325/U123, Texas PTA Records.

⁵⁸ A History of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 1909-1912, 1909-1929, 1929, undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 17; McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 108.

system. Through advocacy work, the Congress of Mothers began to lobby for laws removing the limit on the education tax and the provision of free text books in all public schools. The group also continued to push for increasing centralization and increased supervision over rural schools. They urged legislative measures that would introduce professional management into the system by allowing for the election of a County Superintendent by County Boards, increasing supervision and administrative hierarchy. And, the organization promoted the establishment of a Teacher Retirement Fund. The war-induced economic problems, such as inflation and declining income, made any increase in support of school reform at the taxpayer expense particularly significant.⁵⁹

Other educational concerns, some immediate and some more institutional, were also promoted. Boy Scouts were very frequently removed from school to perform social service projects. Because it so frequently interrupted the scout's school work, the group very publicly expressed its disapproval. Also, since the women represented the majority of the teaching force, the group also strongly advocated for the appointment of women to the governing bodies of "all educational institutions" and pledged its cooperation with all other organizations that worked for this purpose.⁶⁰

The changes promoted by the Associations were considered vital by educators as well indicating that the priorities of the association usually followed the declared needs of the professionals in the field. Many of the priorities of the association under the first Watters

⁵⁹ Preuss, *To Get a Better System*, 26-29; A History of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 1909-1912, 1909-1929, 1929, undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 17; Resolutions passed by the Texas Congress of Mothers, November 24, 1917, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records.

⁶⁰ Resolutions passed by the Texas Congress of Mothers, November 24, 1917, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 1 (quote).

administration mirrored those declared in the biennial report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. It was not uncommon for the association to know the priorities of leading educators as many were invited to address the members attending the state conferences. Professors of education like Frederick Eby and the Superintendents, like W. F. Doughty, frequently were included in the programs. Doughty's biennial report for the period of 1916-1918 requested many of the same revisions that the organization endorsed. He expressed concern over the state of the rural schools and the limited attendance that was the norm. Better leadership and supervision over the schools and the need for additional funds to provide quality education were also cited as primary needs for an efficient and effective system of public schools. He also spoke of the need to create a professionalized teaching workforce, well prepared and well educated. Some of these items were realized during his administration. A special appropriation was provided to aid the rural schools, and the Department of Education was given authority over the high schools and the ability to classify them.⁶¹

The culmination of the change in women's status during the war years and the increased union of legislative lobbying of women's groups along with a new Progressive Governor, William P. Hobby, convinced the state legislature to grant suffrage to women for state primaries. For the first time in Texas, a woman, Annie Webb Blanton, with the encouragement of Governor Hobby, successfully ran for statewide office, winning election to Superintendent of Public Instruction. Blanton was educated at the University of Texas, served on the faculty of North Texas Normal College, and had been the first woman elected as president of the Texas State Teacher's Association prior to being the State Superintendent. Just prior to being elected,

⁶¹ W.F. Doughty, *Twenty-first Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Texas, 1916-1918* (Austin: State Board of Education, 1918), 2-12; Evans, *Story of Texas Schools*, 120-123.

Blanton's address at the state conference of the Congress of Mothers - Parent-Teacher Association was entitled "How the State Department of Education and the Congress of Mothers could Unite Efforts toward Common Welfare." Her election generated excitement among all the organizations that pushed for reform of the schools. Blanton was met with tremendous excitement and thunderous applause when she appeared at a state conference of the Parent-Teacher Association shortly after the election.⁶²

Blanton was an aggressive advocate of quality education and worked with a variety of groups, including the Parent-Teacher Association, to ensure the betterment of education for the children in the state. Her biggest concern at the beginning of her administration was the shortage of teachers even at the higher education level as well as the limited funds available to provide for the distribution of free textbooks. The state legislature had failed to allocate money to provide the textbooks. Cooperation with volunteer associations was critical as she inherited a school system that had inadequate record keeping at the county level making it hard to follow through with the law on textbooks even if the money had been there initially. Further, many local administrators fought against Blanton due to either a resistance to the free text book law or as merely a matter of opposition to a woman serving in the role of State Superintendent.⁶³

With an ally in the Superintendent's Office, the following administration of Ida Caddell Marrs was even more ambitious, and the Parent-Teacher Association became a more permanent fixture within the educational system of the State. Under the Marrs administration (1920-1922), a

⁶² Katherine C. Reynolds & Susan L. Schramm, "Annie Webb Blanton: Taking on Texas and the Nation," in *Separate Sisterhood: Women who Shaped Southern Education in the Progressive Era*, vol. 26 of *History of Schools and Schooling*, Alan R. Sadovnik and Susan F. Semel, eds. (New York: Peter Lang, 2002): 148-154; Reports of the 10th Annual Conference held in Wichita Falls, November 7, 1918, Box 2.325/U123, Texas PTA Records.

⁶³ Annie Webb Blanton, *Historical and statistical data as to education in Texas, January 1, 1919-January 1, 1921* (Austin: Department of Education, 1921): 5, 7, 9.

permanent office for the Congress of Mothers was established in the state capital. With the aid of the Superintendent, the office was moved into the offices of the Department of Education, and for the first time an executive secretary was hired to handle the day-to-day tasks of the state chapter. They also increased their presence within the wider state by beginning to publish a monthly bulletin, which carried the message of the president as well as the goals and identified plans for the various committee chairs.⁶⁴

Marrs allied closely with the Education department as well as with the priorities of the Superintendent. She frequently expressed her concerns over the condition of rural education and the limited supervision of the schools, a cause seen as an imperative to Blanton. Marrs discussed her belief that the Parent Teacher Association was critical to the dissemination of knowledge to the families in the rural areas who were normally slow to accept change, “especially as they [new ideas] relate to education.” She believed that supervision of the school could be improved if there existed an expectation of high standards, which could only be achieved by sharing the association’s knowledge and experience, part of the reason she created the organization’s bulletin. In her opinion, educators met resistance because they “failed to take the people more into their confidence concerning new developments and present needs in education.” The work paid off. During Blanton’s administration, teachers’ salaries were increased, and the local taxation limit of fifty cents of every one hundred dollars for the maintenance of the schools was finally lifted by the Thirty-sixth Legislature, making it possible for local districts to raise additional funding to improve the quality of the schools. The system also increased standardization by the introduction of classifications at all levels of the elementary schools and

⁶⁴ A History of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 1909-1912, 1909-1929, 1929, undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 23.

established a score card system that ranked schools on all facets of operation—grounds and outbuildings, the school building, state of the equipment as well as on the quality of teachers, pupils, and community.⁶⁵

Further, during the first Marrs administration women's organizations formed a Joint Legislative Committee. Emboldened by newly attained suffrage rights, women's groups formed this specialized committee in order to unify their efforts on a variety of fronts. Several groups participated in this committee, including the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women. Marrs served as chairperson of the committee. The group helped push the amendment to provide more funds for rural schools as well as the Minimal Woman's Wage Law.⁶⁶

Marr's second administration (1922-24) also focused on spreading the word about the association and encouraging its growth. To increase understanding of the association and its goals and objectives, the association went to both the families and the educators. The organization sponsored a child welfare survey to be made by the Child Labor Committee. Visitations were made to 1,000 families, and the results discussed conditions in the rural areas throughout the state. Data from this survey was used to advocate for better supervision and funding for the rural schools, and the visitations allowed the committee members to share information about the Parent-Teacher Association with the families it visited. For educators, instruction on Parent-Teacher collaboration started to be provided in the state teacher college summer schools as well as at the state university. Institutes on the work of the association were

⁶⁵ Ida Marrs, Speech on Extension of Information Concerning Rural Supervision, 1926?, Box 2.325/U123, Texas PTA Records, card 2 (quote), card 4, card 3 (quote); Evans, *Story of Texas Schools*, 124-27.

⁶⁶ History of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 1909-1912, 1909-1929, 1929, undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 23.

held throughout the state. The Marr's administration worked to make sure all groups knew of the work of the organization and of its potential.⁶⁷

Ida Marrs would continue to work for the benefit of Texas education well past her term as president of the Association. She was the only Texas member elected to serve as president of the National Association (1929-1930). During that time, she and some other officials were invited to participate in a Geneva conferences as representatives of the association as part of the International Federation of Home and School, a group she would later direct, as well as part of the World Federation of Education Associations. In 1930 she was appointed to a White House Advisory Committee on Education.⁶⁸

Mrs. C. E. Maddocks of Ranger, Texas, was the next president elected. Her administration (1924-1927) continued to promote legislation that would improve the conditions of the schools and increase professionalism within education. Some of the bills that received endorsement during her administration were supplemental appropriations bills for the public schools, providing for professional oversight at the county superintendent level, and for high school programs in the rural schools. There was also an increased push to improve the overall health of Texas children. Moreover, the Maddocks administration helped coordinate the Summer Roundup, a program that provided health inspections to pre-school children to help make sure that health issues could be addressed prior to the child's attendance in the public schools, a precursor to having nursing staff at the individual schools. The group also promoted legislation

⁶⁷ History of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 1909-1912, 1909-1929, 1929, undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 27-28.

⁶⁸ Moore, "History and Development of the Texas Congress of Parents and Teachers," 75.

that would require physical education as part of the standard curriculum.⁶⁹

Maddocks also worked to increase the membership in the association by reaching out to young mothers and forming pre-school associations. These associations provided programs to the mothers on a variety of topics designed to provide a “Child Four Square,” intended to help develop the child’s “spiritual, mental, physical, and social wellbeing.” The programs were developed using materials from the National and State Congresses as well as books on child psychology. By stressing the needs of the developing child, the state organization paved the way for early childhood programs to be adopted.⁷⁰

Cooperation with educators was still an important factor. At a meeting of the Board of Managers in January of 1926, the members heard a letter read from the head of the Texas State Teacher’s Association, J. M. Bledsoe. Following an Educational Survey recommendation, he was charged with putting together the Texas Education Commission. In the letter, he outlined the planned membership to include, among others, the presidents of the all the universities and colleges as well as the president and secretary of the Texas Congress of Mothers. The inclusion of the organization as part of this Commission helped ensure that they were involved in policy and decision making for the state education system.⁷¹

Mrs. Noyes Darling Smith would serve as the state president from 1927-1931. During the course of the Smith administration, the state legislature passed two association-sponsored bills

⁶⁹ History of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 1909-1912, 1909-1929, 1929, undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 31-32; Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Association, “State Bulletin,” Austin: Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, December 1925, Box 2.325/U135, Texas PTA Records.

⁷⁰ Mrs. C.E. Maddocks, letter to author, in Moore, “History and Development of the Texas Congress of Parents and Teachers,” 124.

⁷¹ Minutes of Board of Managers Meeting, January 7-8, 1926, Minute Books, 1925-1927, Box 2.325/U120, Texas PTA Records, 76.

regarding education. One of the bills lowered the age of school admittance to the age of six, and the second required the addition of physical education. The Summer Round Up program continued and gained in popularity.⁷² She was also instrumental in the work of involving the Children's Code, a committee that was formed when Smith was the chair of the association's State Legislative Committee. Smith sought and was granted authorization to form a group of individuals that would examine the laws of the state of Texas "relating to the welfare, health, and education of Texas" and to draft any amendments that the group found necessary to improve the conditions. Smith organized this group to include those who had influence in the legislative arena. Members of the group included several judges and the Superintendent of Public Instruction, S. M. N. Marrs. Smith was the president of the association when the committee was completely formed and had its first meeting in September of 1928. The work of the committee helped ensure the passage of the school admittance age as well as made to provide a qualified educator to oversee the work of the rural schools, defined as any within a county with a population of 31,000 or less, in lieu of holding county institutes.⁷³

By the time Annie Wood took the lead in the administration in 1930, many educational improvements had been accomplished with the assistance of the organization. The schools

⁷² History of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 1909-1912, 1909-1929, 1929, undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 37-38; Moore, "History and Development of the Texas Congress of Parents and Teachers" 79-80.

⁷³ Resolutions of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Associations, November 15-19, 1926, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 3 (quote); History of the Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 1909-1912, 1909-1929, 1929, undated, Box 2.325/U119, Texas PTA Records, 37-38; Moore, "History and Development of the Texas Congress of Parents and Teachers" 79-80; SB 18, *Fixing Minimum School Age at Six Years*, 41st Regular Session, ch. 97 (1929). http://www.lrl.state.tx.us/scanned/sessionLaws/41-0/SB_18_CH_97.pdf (accessed November 11, 2016); HB 737, *Rural School Supervisors in Certain Counties*, 41st Regular Session, ch. 219 (1929). http://www.lrl.state.tx.us/scanned/sessionLaws/41-0/HB_675_CH_219.pdf (accessed November 11, 2016).

operated under a system of professional supervision rather than an elected or appointed one, compulsory education was the law and was enforced in more areas, free textbooks were provided, teacher education and the certification process had been instated, a retirement fund was provided to increase the attraction to the profession, and a system of rating and classifying the quality of the schools was utilized. Not only the normal schools provided teacher education; education had become a field of study in the colleges of the state, and some would even have courses available in the work of the parent-teacher associations. The association had worked cooperatively with educators to professionalize the field of education and to improve the function and monetary support of the schools. The association had played a key role in interpreting the needs of the schools to the public as well as providing education to parents on the best practices in raising a healthy child. The popularity and membership of the organization increased. By 1931, when it changed its name to the Texas Congress of Parents and Teachers, it had almost doubled from the membership number of 1926, going from 43,737 to 71,117. The organization served a vital role in working between educators and parents to improve the school system for the children in Texas.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ "State Bulletin, 1944-1947," Austin: Texas Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, December 1925, Box 2.325/U135, Texas PTA Records, 11.

CHAPTER THREE: BACKLASH AND REDEFINITION

Like much of the South, Texas teachers had tenuous positions during most of the nineteenth century. School districts varied in size and wealth, meaning that facilities and materials often lagged behind any ideal. Classrooms in the more rural locations had multiple ages of children at various levels of development and attainment, and the system of localized control meant that many teachers' positions were subject to the whims of the local supervisors. Situations in wealthier, largely urban, districts were better, but it was an uncertain profession at best. Some standards emerged in the late nineteenth century, but the profession as a whole was usually a thankless one with many demands, few rewards, and virtually no recognition as a profession, particularly since it was a field dominated by women. Only male administrators received recognition as professionals in terms of status and pay.

However, by the 1930s, teacher status had changed immeasurably. The education of teachers moved away from the state normal system with the introduction of education departments in state universities and the transition of normal schools into state colleges. There was a statewide system of teacher certification making a teacher's certificate usable throughout the state. A retirement system was in place. And school terms, attendance, and graded classes were becoming more commonplace, except for the most rural of areas. By the 1930s, the schools had mostly converted to district systems, and the professionalization of teachers was firmly established. New methods of training teachers were emerging, and while women educators were not receiving the same pay as male administrators, positions in administration were beginning to open for them. Increasingly, teachers and others in the educational administration began to take a different view of the activities of the parent-teacher organizations. Rather than being seen as

active agents in the political and educational activities of the school, the very purpose and usefulness of the Congress of Mothers-Parent Teachers Association came into question.

The field of education, as a whole, experienced a tremendous shift in the 1930s. Leading educational theorists, buoyed by the progressive movement, pushed for a new form of education. Individuals like Harold Rugg, an educational theorist with the Teachers College of Columbia University, began to see education as part of the overall social reform movement. Additionally, the new emphasis on the scientific method and its application to education meant that those with little education or preparation could not succeed as educators. Educators began to see their field and the knowledge required to be a successful teacher as more complex and intellectual than it had been in the past. Whereas the leadership and some members of the Congress of Mothers-Parent Teacher Associations had before possessed more advanced education than many public school teachers, that trend reversed in the 1930s. Prior to the changes in educator training, many teachers possessed only a high school diploma when they received certification. With the new standards of curriculum in the state teacher colleges or the full program of a university education, teachers, overall, were better educated than before and began to proclaim a level of expertise and professionalism that parents, many teachers felt, were lacking.⁷⁵

Evidence of this educational shift can be found in teaching publications of the period. Articles with titles such as “Training of Teachers for the New Education” argued that educators needed to learn techniques based on the latest research in child development, that enabled them to do more than just assign lessons. Teachers, argued the author, must be better equipped for the

⁷⁵ Harold Rugg, *Culture and Education in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1931); Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 182-83.

new progressive education. New forms of cooperative education were being proposed to bring the education field more in-line with other scientific fields by focusing on the actual physical space of the classroom as well as teaching techniques in order to address the needs of the whole child. The new classrooms and methods were critical to helping children see themselves as part of the larger social whole. The need for advanced education to meet the needs of the new education even led some to recommend the elimination of teachers' colleges altogether and for total responsibility of teacher education to be placed on liberal arts programs in the universities.⁷⁶

The better trained and more professional teaching force began to question the activities and roles that the parent groups played within the educational system. Where before teachers and administrators had relied on parent groups, particularly the Congress of Mothers-Parent Teacher Association, for financial assistance and lobbying support, they now attempted to define and limit their place within the system. Demands of the new education required trained professionals, and while the support of these parent groups was still encouraged for the most part, the question of the level of involvement became an issue for the first time.

William W. Cutler III, in *Parents and Schools: The 150-Year Struggle for Control in American Education*, indicated that the shift from "Advocates to Adversaries" happened in the post-WWII era, but it actually started much sooner. As early as 1928, the role of the Parent-Teacher Association was being questioned. Cornell educator, Julian Butterworth, noted in his book, *The Parent Teacher Association and Its Work*, "It is no secret that professional school people are not unanimous in their attitude toward this organization. Some, apparently, would have it eliminated, while others believe that, if properly directed, it may have an important and

⁷⁶ Frederick Bonser, "The Training of Teachers for the New Education," *Progressive Education* 6 (1929): 111-121; Lucy Sprague Mitchell, "A Cooperative School for Student Teachers." *Progressive Education* 8 (1931): 251-55; *Progressive Education* [Editorial] 8 (August 1931): 280-281.

constructive influence in American education.”⁷⁷

Butterworth’s monograph examined over 700 parent teacher associations in nine states in an attempt to analyze the objectives and work of the associations and “their implications for educational practice.” He acknowledged the tremendous financial work of the association, and its contributions of everything from laboratory equipment and library books to playgrounds and furnishings, and, in some cases, teacher salaries and gifts to them when suffering from illness. As he stated, “Indeed, there seems to be little relating to the school for which money is not provided by some associations.” When discussing the amount of time spent on work dedicated to lobbying to school officials or making suggestions to teaching staff about the school, however, his tone became more cautionary, “It should be said that the wisdom of group action of this sort is much open to question, and if done at all should be very carefully guarded.” According to Butterworth, once the parent group made a suggestion to the school officers, any further action regarding that matter should cease since the educators had more professional expertise to determine the appropriateness of the remedies proposed.⁷⁸

Part of the aim of *The Parent Teacher Association and Its Work* was to lay out the objectives that the association should undertake. Butterworth identified six areas the association should work towards. These included translating to members an understanding of the school and educational methodology, learning how educational methods can be used outside of the school, letting administrators know about any success or shortcomings of the school “under certain conditions,” spreading the word about the school programs to the wider community, introducing

⁷⁷ William W. Cuttler, III, *Parents and Schools: The 150-Year Struggle for Control in American Education* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 164; Julian E. Butterworth, *The Parent Teacher Association and Its Work* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1928): v (quote).

⁷⁸ Butterworth, *Parent Teacher Association and Its Work*, v. (quote), 10 (quote), 13 (quote), 62.

parents and teachers, and raising funds “under special conditions.” A survey of over 300 superintendents and principals regarding their opinion of the proposed objectives showed that the majority of professionals agreed that the association should devote its time to translating the work of the school (74.9%), learning to apply educational theory outside the school (92.2%), inform the community as to school methods (92.3%), making sure parents and teachers knew each other (94.8%) and raising funds (71.4%). In other words, parents were welcome to learn about the school and how to supplement their child’s education, to raise funds, and to coordinate meetings between school staff and the parents, but when it came to matters regarding the quality of the school, a large number believed that there should be no involvement or only partial involvement (62.4%). Butterworth was overall supportive of the parent organization, but he insisted that it was important that it assume a defined place within the educational effort.⁷⁹

Butterworth was not the only educator to express concerns about the Parent-Teacher Association and to try to redefine the level and type of involvement. Carlyle Adams, in “The Parent-Teacher Movement—Its Place in Education,” framed his discussion of the organization with an emphasis on the changing social condition, changing family function, and the increased responsibility of the schools. He stated that the organization’s main contribution was reconnecting the home and the school. Parents, according to Adams, had “done the best they could with limited knowledge.” The organization’s best contributions would be making sure that the child was physically and mentally healthy prior to starting schooling, to impart “life truths” to the child and to provide a safe home, make sure the child has a good attitude towards gaining an education, and to make sure parents had adequate parenting and pre-natal care instruction.

⁷⁹ Butterworth, *Parent-Teacher Association and Its Work*, 65.

Administration of the school, though, should be left to the those trained in the profession: “It is generally conceded that the trained superintendent of schools knows more about school management than anyone else in his community.”⁸⁰

Another publication, produced in 1929, discussed the professionalism of teachers and increasing ambivalence of educators regarding the work of the parent-teacher association. The article quoted one educator as saying, “the association, amateurs, doesn’t realize that education has become a profession based on a complex science.” The author who had discussed Butterworth’s work, stated that many of the same school supervisors in an informal setting would express no serious objection to the organization. Parents, according to the author, had the strongest motivation to do what is best for the children, and outside evaluation and expectations of accountability are necessary to keep the schools in check. After having studied publications by the National Congress, the author noted that the work of the association can be very beneficial in the its role as trainer of good parenting in terms of the physical and moral wellbeing of the child as well as the importance of being a good student and upright person, and states that the goals and programs of the group are primarily aimed at this objective.⁸¹

Changing social conditions and the concern over vice was a convenient way to reassign the priorities of the organization. Here too, professional teachers would assume a more elevated place than before. The quality of the teachers was seen as positively critical to improving the mores of a community. According to Nat Barnhart, “The public lives cannot rise higher than the

⁸⁰ Seldon Adams, “The Parent-Teacher Movement—Its Place in Public Education.” *School and Society* 29, no. 746 (April 1929): 474-480, 478 (quotes), 480 (quote).

⁸¹ J. McKeen Cattrell, ed., *School and Society* XXIX (January-June 1929): 712-753, 712 (quote).

teachers.” However, parental cooperation and assistance was needed to raise the standard of home life and to prevent problems with drunkenness, gambling, and licentiousness.⁸²

As financial conditions worsened during the Great Depression, the Parent Teacher Association’s role in fundraising was especially valued and encouraged. The emphasis of the organization, many felt, should be on providing resources for the children of families hit by the worsening economic conditions. One observer would refer to the organization as “the great other mother.” He concluded that their greatest contribution was in providing food for the cafeterias as well as minimizing the effects of the financial crisis.⁸³

By the latter part of the 1930s, parents and the members of the Parent Teacher Association responded to the attempts to define their place within the school system. An article by Alice Christensen discussed the remarks of teachers following a school superintendent’s introduction of a new form of report card. After questioning how to get parents to accept this new evaluation method, one of the teachers asked, “What shall we do about parents?” Parents present initially were dumbstruck at the teachers’ inquiries and “should have had the courage to tell them what to do about us . . . the answer is ‘cooperation and education’—in projecting not only the new report cards but every phase of advanced educational philosophy.” The author’s resentment over the new educational authority was obvious: “In the first place, parents are not, as some seem to believe a perverse, antagonistic species placed here for the express purpose of harassing school superintendents. It is a safe assumption . . . we parents would be found to be at least as intelligent as our children.” Christensen discussed the creation of the modern educational system and the cooperation that parent groups provided. She, too, recognized the importance of

⁸² Nat G. Barnhart, “Challenge of Tomorrow,” *Journal of Education* 111 (March 1930): 289.

⁸³ Harry Clark, “‘The Other Mother’ in Knoxville.” *Journal of Education* 112 (December 1932): 695-696.

their work in educating parents as to the most up-to-date information on child development as well as coordinating information sessions where educators could provide parents information on the current curriculum and the desired education outcomes. Reiterated also was the group's vital role in building appreciation for education and its expense to the larger community.⁸⁴

These same types of discussions were going on in Texas. Denton PTA president, Janice Prather Brickley, acknowledged the misunderstandings between the Board of Education and the Parent-Teacher Association and how both have been subject to criticism from the public that created both institutions. In her article, Brickley discussed the role of each of the organizations. Like many of the educators, she identified the priorities for the organization as ensuring cooperation between the home and school, educating the community regarding school issues, improving the overall wellbeing of the child, and to making sure laws were in place that protected children. While the Board of Education had the direct responsibility for the education of the child, it was imperative, according to Brickley, that the board "appreciate more fully the status and the program of the parent-teacher association." Cooperation between the two agencies had to be pursued. Unlike educators who felt it was the association that needed to adapt, she placed some of the responsibility for improving relations on the Board of Education. It was suggested that a representative of the Board attend meetings of the association and inform the members about the current problems facing the schools. Better knowledge of the direct needs of the school would ensure that the two were not working on objectives that were mutually exclusive. Brickley also suggested that money be provided to the Parent-Teacher Association to increase the efficiency of their outreach. Finally, parents needed to be informed of the financial

⁸⁴ Alice S. Christensen, "What Shall We do About Parents?," *Progressive Education* 13 (May 1936): 351-355, 351 (quotes).

status of the schools. Schools relied on the assistance of the association members in gaining increased appropriations. In return, the members had to be kept abreast of the current fiscal status to understand developing needs. The two could either serve as an impediment or a help to each other. The only way to achieve their stated goals would be through mutual understanding and cooperative relations.⁸⁵

The professionalism of the field led many Texas teachers to share the same ambivalence toward the help of the parent group, but it seemed especially prevalent among newer teachers. An examination of the attitude of classroom teachers toward the Parent-Teacher Association was conducted by a graduate student of one of the new education divisions of a Texas university. Catherine Adams conducted the study due to the conflicting comments she had heard in discussions which ranged from declarations that the association could be eliminated with no real loss to the school system or to the greater community to beliefs that the teacher's work would be increasingly difficult without the aid of the organization. Using a survey created by a Perdue psychology professor, the author distributed them to teacher summer sessions and to school administrators to pass along to their staff. One of the striking findings was that most professional educators' sentiments and attitudes toward the association improved as their years of experience increased at all levels of education—elementary, junior high, and senior high. New teachers' advanced knowledge of pedagogy and child development led many to conclude they were superior to the parent groups when dealing with children. However, once the teachers had some experience in the field, they seemed more welcoming to outside assistance. Adams's data indicated an overall positive attitude toward the association by most of the teachers.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Janice Prather Brickley, "P.T.A. and the Board of Education," *Texas Outlook* 21 (August 1937): 17-18, 17 (quote).

⁸⁶ Adams, "Attitude of Classroom Teachers Toward the Parent Teacher Association," 1, 15, 19, 22.

The changing attitudes in the 1930s about the relevance of the parent organization also appeared in conjunction with a tremendous change in the organization's emphasis. The administration of both Annie Wood and her successors, Mrs. M.A. Taylor, and Jane Wessendorff, focused much of their work on parent education. Wood, in particular, did a tremendous amount of outreach to expand the organization's reach. Publications of the organization were translated into Spanish for the groups in areas where it was the predominant language, and she even developed radio messages. The Texas organization was one of the few nationwide that would have a slight increase in membership during the Depression era. The group still encouraged direct assistance and involvement by the local chapters. To this end, the Taylor administration created a Service Bureau at the state level which would provide additional support to the local units. Her recommendation led to the development of Parent-Teacher libraries in the teachers' colleges and the state colleges for women.⁸⁷

Although decreasing its emphasis on official legislation, the organization did not cease to work towards improvements at the systemic level. Formal recommendations to the Department of Education regarding expanding the curriculum were frequent, particularly in areas of vocational education. They pushed as well for the inclusion of the new humane education, which emphasized the interconnectedness of all living creatures and encouraged treating others with respect and kindness, to be incorporated into the schools' work. Work seemed to focus less on system building and more on improvement and expansion of state curriculum.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Annie Wood, letter to author, in Moore, "History and Development of the Texas Congress of Parents and Teachers," 120-121; Jane Wessendorff, letter to author in Moore, "History and Development of the Texas Congress of Parents and Teachers," 122; Moore, "History and Development of the Texas Congress of Parents and Teachers," 81-86.

⁸⁸ Mrs. J. J. Devoti, "Recommendations for the Department of Education," National, state, and local convention material, 1931-35, Box 2.325/U123, Texas PTA Records; Committee on Human Education, Plan of Work, 1937-1940, State and local convention material, 1935-1938, Box 2.325/U124, Texas PTA Records.

Within the span of a single decade, the work of the Parent-Teacher Association had gone from being a critical factor in the development of a standardized school system to being subject to questioning by school authorities. More and more teachers and administrators attempted to define the role that the organization would play. Eventually, this shift led to an increased social program agenda rather than one of direct lobbying of elected officials and garnering public favor for measures that improved the public schools.

Observers of the organization place this shift as occurring later, such as following World War II or even *Brown v. Board of Education*. One has even attributed this shift to gender since most of the individuals in the administration of education were male, whereas members of the Parent-Teacher Association were primarily mothers. These explanations fall short, however.

As this thesis demonstrates, criticism and discussion of the organization and its work in Texas actually started long before the Second World War. Further, women, who had the most interaction with the association, had long dominated the teaching field. A woman had served as Superintendent of Public Instruction, and an increasing number of women were assuming leadership within the school districts as principals and many were teaching at the collegiate and university level. For example, Jessie Sayers was a principal at a small school before moving to a teacher college to instruct in math as well as French. Edith Clark, an educator from Corpus Christi, would later become a Dean for one of the teachers' college after several years of providing English instruction. In Nueces County, several women served as principals. One district's supervising board of trustees was made entirely of women. And, in Corpus Christi Independent School District a woman was serving as superintendent. Many of these women had

been the driving force in creating Parent-Teacher Associations within their individual schools.⁸⁹

The pivotal point in the relations between the organization and the educational system seems, instead, to be the creation of the professional work force and the formalized educational system, both of which the organization was key in creating. The evidence is probably best supported by Adams' thesis, where she uses quantitative measures to show that newer teachers tended to be more skeptical of the organization than those that had several years of experience. As they started their profession, many inexperienced educators assumed that the parents could be of little benefit or could even be a hindrance since they lacked knowledge of the latest research in child development or in teaching methodologies. However, once an instructor had a few years of experience in his or her profession, the assistance of the organization and its ability to aid with everything from raising funds to encouraging the voters to allocate more tax money or additional resources began to be seen as indispensable. Even so, there is no denying that the very professional, modern model of education that the Parent Teacher Association helped create eventually began to exclude the organization from ever again wielding its former influence.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ For examples of current histories regarding the Parent-Teacher Association see William W. Cuttler, III, *Parents and Schools: The 150-Year Struggle for Control in American Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Christine Woyshner, "Race, Gender, and the Early PTA: Civic Engagement and Public Education, 1897-1924," *Teachers College Record* 105, no. 3 (April 2003): 522, 523 (quote); Christine Woyshner, *The National PTA, Race, and Civic Engagement, 1897-1970* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009); Winnie Ouida Davis, "Women Leaders in Texas Education Since 1860" master's thesis. University of Texas, 1936: 89-90. 113-118; Deskin D. Snow, compiler, *Illustrated Book of Public Education in Nueces Co, 1930-1932* (Corpus Christi: Nueces Printing Co., n.d.).

⁹⁰ Adams, "Attitude of Classroom Teachers Toward the Parent Teacher Association," 1, 15, 19, 22.

CONCLUSION

A modern system of education was not easily created in Texas. It took the work and cooperation of a variety of stakeholders. Philanthropists provided funds for improved facilities and teacher training, and a number of organizations lobbied and advocated for measures that made attendance compulsory, divided the school into defined grades, and standardized school terms. The Texas Congress of Mothers – Parent Teacher Association participated in every aspect of these reforms, and helped make teaching a professional occupation with adequate pay and funded retirement programs.

Surprisingly, the historical record virtually excludes the organization from any serious discussion of school reforms. Worse, in many cases, it makes it seem as if the association was nothing but a nuisance to educators. Nothing could be further from the truth. They not only participated with professional educators in the effort to improve public education, including drafting legislation, but often coordinated their plans along the lines of those measures prioritized by the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Once the modern school system was established throughout the state and teaching became a more established profession, educators started to restrict the activities of the organization. More and more they wanted the group to limit its focus to help with educating parents and fundraising. No longer did they seek the group's assistance with curriculum issues or legislative issues. The system the members created, no longer wanted to answer to or cooperate with the organization, preferring rather to dictate the level of involvement.

This changed relationship between the organization and the educational system is regretful. Texas even now continues to lag the nation in educational matters. Statistics show that the state still trails in educational completion. Texas was tied with California as having the

lowest percentage of adults 25 or older with a high school diploma or equivalency as recently as 2010. Texas 4th and 8th graders rated at basic (the second to the lowest level) for proficiency in reading for the years 2012 and 2013. Cooperation between all possible stakeholders should be encouraged to help Texas students succeed. It may be time for educators to reevaluate the limited inclusion of parents in their efforts at current reform.⁹¹

⁹¹ Texas Workforce Commission, “Texas Interagency Literacy Council Report,” November 1, 2012, accessed November 28, 2016, <http://www.twc.state.tx.us/files/partners/texas-interagency-literacy-council-report-twc.pdf>; National Assessment of Educational Progress, “Mapping State Proficiency Standards Onto the NAEP Scales: Results From the 2013 NAEP Reading and Mathematics Assessments,” accessed November 28, 2016, http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/studies/pdf/2013_Mapping_Factsheets_TX.pdf.

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