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Undermining the Common School Ideal: Intermediate Schools and Ungraded Classes in Boston, 1838–1900

Robert L. Osgood

The common school movement has long constituted one of the defining themes and primary focal points of scholarship in the history of American education. Although this push toward a tax-supported, universal public education was a national movement, no state has been as closely identified with it as Massachusetts, and no individual recognized as taking a more important lead in the dissemination of common school ideology than Horace Mann. The region and the person, so closely linked with each other, were both crucial in advancing the common school cause throughout the nation and in stamping it into the American historical and cultural fabric.

In his seminal *Twelfth Annual Report* as the Secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education, Mann articulated a vision of the common school that served as a powerful inspiration to reformers in other regions of the United States. He wrote that the Massachusetts system of common schools “knows no distinction of rich and poor, of bond and free, or between those who, in the imperfect light of this world, are seeking, through different avenues, to reach the gate of heaven. Without money and without price, it throws open its doors, and spreads the table of its bounty, for all the children of the State. Like the sun, it shines, not only upon the good, but upon the evil, that they may become good; and, like the rain, its blessings descend, not only upon the just, but upon the unjust, that their injustice may depart from them and be known no more.”¹

This passage strongly conveys the rhetorical nature of much of common school ideology, reflecting the reformist, optimistic, and ultimately political impulses that characterized much of the educational thought in the United States during the mid-nineteenth century. As rhetoric, com-

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¹Horace Mann, *Twelfth Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board*, in *Twelfth Annual Report of the Board of Education* (Boston, 1849), 140.

mon school ideology sought to accomplish a most difficult task: convincing a skeptical American populace that it both needed and could benefit from tax-supported, government-operated universal education. Throughout his tenure as Secretary, Mann did, of course, tailor his rhetoric to suit a particular time, context, or audience. The *Twelfth Annual Report* was his last as Secretary and the one in which he drew “together all the themes of his earlier reports into one great credo of public education.” It aimed to appeal to the broadest possible audience at the most altruistic level because Mann believed, as Maris Vinovskis points out, that rhetoric appealing to the “loftier and more sacred attributes of the cause” would in the end constitute the most effective approach in generating acceptance for the heartfelt convictions of common school reformers. As a vision, common school rhetoric—present in the orations and writings not only of Mann but also those of James Carter, Henry Barnard, Calvin Stowe, Caleb Mills, Thaddeus Stevens, and others deeply involved in advancing the movement—ultimately proved to be quite powerful.²

Beyond the rhetoric and the vision, however, the common school movement also harbored expectations that common schools could and would accomplish important practical objectives. Joel Spring maintained that the movement’s fundamental tenets emphasized “educating all children in a common schoolhouse. It was argued that if children from a variety of religious, social-class, and ethnic backgrounds were educated in common, there would be a decline in hostility and friction among social groups. In addition, if children educated in common were taught a common social and political ideology, a decrease in political conflict and social problems would result. . . . The term *common school* came to have a specific meaning: a school that was attended in common by all children and in which a common political and social ideology was taught.” However, such expectations proved to be much less reliable as a realistic blueprint for common schooling than the movement’s rhetoric was as an instrument of persuasion. Spring and other historians have called attention to the complex nature of the common school movement as well as to a plethora of evidence that raises serious questions regarding the extent to which its ideals and objectives were realized. Ironically, one of the most instructive examples of this gap between rhetoric and reality emerged during Mann’s tenure as Secretary—and did so in his own backyard. The Boston public schools, lying at the heart of the geographic and spiritual source

²Lawrence A. Cremin, ed., *The Republic and the School: Horace Mann on the Education of Free Men* (New York, 1957), 79; Horace Mann, *Fifth Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board* (Boston, 1842), 120; Maris Vinovskis, *Education, Society, and Economic Opportunity: A Historical Perspective on Persistent Issues* (New Haven, Conn., 1995), 103. Vinovskis offers some excellent insight into Mann’s use of rhetoric to advance the cause of the common school in the chapter “Horace Mann on the Economic Productivity of Education.”

of common school ideology, for decades wrestled with and ultimately deviated openly from common school education as they sought to meet the intense challenges of an increasingly diverse student population within a steadily growing and rigidifying public school system. This article examines the development of *intermediate schools* and *ungraded classes* as elements of nineteenth-century public education in Boston that underscored this mismatch between the common school ideal and the rapidly changing world of urban public education in the United States.³

During the 1800s Boston grew from a small coastal port of about 25,000 inhabitants to a major urban industrial center of over 560,000. By 1900 the city had well over 80,000 children enrolled in its public school system. Rapid social and economic diversification marked this growth as tens of thousands of people from Europe and other parts of the world settled there, changing a town of almost exclusively English origin to a city of mostly first- or second-generation immigrants. Throughout this extended period of change, Boston's civic and educational leadership, following the lead of advocates for the common school, viewed public education as a crucial tool in their efforts to maintain social order and economic prosperity in the city. Consequently, the Boston public school system grew steadily and changed dramatically: pressures to make school organization more streamlined and efficient increased as the schools faced more complex administrative needs as well as the heightened expectations of a hopeful public. In addition, compulsory education laws in the state were strengthened frequently during the latter half of the century.⁴

Diversity among students as well as an ever growing concern for bureaucratic efficiency began to severely test the principles and practices of common school ideology in Boston fairly early in the nineteenth century. Soon after the city school system's founding, calls arose for separate instructional settings for certain children whose public school attendance was deemed desirable but whose presence in the regular classroom, for various reasons, was not. The establishment of intermediate schools, or "schools for special instruction," in 1838 initiated a decades-long process

³Joel Spring, *The American School, 1642–1993*, 3d ed. (New York, 1994), 63. For extensive discussions of challenges to common school ideology, see, for example, Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968); Marvin Lazerson, *The Origins of the Urban School: Public Education in Massachusetts, 1870–1915* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971); and Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York, 1983), ch. 7.

⁴For population data for 1800, see Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of the Population: 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population*, pt. 23, Massachusetts (Washington, D.C., 1963), table 5, p. 23-8; for the school enrollment data, see Robert L. Osgood, "History of Special Education in the Boston Public Schools to 1945" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1989), 54-55.

whereby school professionals, in response to the increasing diversity among students, targeted specific groups of children for segregated instructional settings, a differentiated curriculum, or both. Initially, diversity among students was located in categories such as age, cultural or linguistic background, and socioeconomic status; these descriptors in fact served as the basis for establishing and maintaining a segregated system of intermediate schools. But the intensified learning environments of these schools and their direct descendants, the ungraded classes—founded in 1879—as well as the specific demands of school work in all classrooms, contributed to a growing awareness of intellectual and behavioral *abnormality* as another aspect of diversity among students which could serve as a plausible justification for exclusion from the regular classroom.

Intermediate schools and ungraded classes thus grew out of strong concerns over the advisability of younger children attending the same classroom as older children, of native-born children sitting side by side with immigrant children, of boys and girls who were seen as performing and behaving appropriately in the classroom learning alongside those who were not. By 1900 age, cultural and linguistic background, social class, and abnormality all constituted conditions on which school officials rationalized ignoring or abandoning much of the fundamental common school ideology so powerfully expressed by reformist rhetoric throughout most of the nineteenth century. The growth of these segregated settings in both number and importance provides a vivid portrait of how changing social and educational conditions and priorities eroded the underpinnings of the common school movement, contributing to the remarkable differentiation in organization and curriculum that came to characterize public schools in the United States by the early 1900s.

Founding of the Intermediate Schools

In 1818 the Boston School Committee (BSC) authorized a system of primary schools with an overseeing Primary School Board to provide instruction for boys and girls ages four to seven, complementing the existing grammar or “reading and writing” schools serving children from age seven. This action reflected the BSC’s belief that extensive public schooling was critically important to the city’s future. Within two years, however, serious debate had begun over a loophole in school legislation that effectively proscribed public school attendance by a significant segment of the school-age population: illiterate children between the ages of seven and fourteen. School regulations stipulated that children could not attend the grammar schools unless they were at least seven years old and capable of reading simple texts. While primary schools were formed to provide basic reading and writing instruction to younger students, the community still contained a significant number of children over age seven

who had either failed to get such education in Boston or who had come from other parts of North America or overseas and lacked basic literacy skills in English. Concern focused particularly on the “idle and vagrant” children whose numbers appeared to be growing at an alarming rate. In 1820 a subcommittee of the Primary School Board, expressing “great surprise and grief,” called attention to the many children unqualified for either the primary or the grammar schools in a passage that anticipated much of the reasoning of common school ideology:

Some of these are truants; some of them employed in street-begging, and all of them ignorant; and if nothing is done for them, they seem destined forever to remain ignorant, and vicious, and wretched.

These children, be it remembered, were born in as free and as happy a land as the earth affords, and have, as we believe, undeniable claims on the public munificence for such an education as will enable them to know, defend, and enjoy the civil, religious, and social privileges of which they are born the distinguished heirs; and not only so, but if they are permitted to remain in their ignorance, insubordination, and vicious habits, they will not only go quickly to destruction themselves, but by their pernicious example and influence, they will draw many others after them to the same deplorable ruin.⁵

The School Committee initially responded to such worries by introducing the Lancastrian System, or monitorial schooling, into several of its primary schools during the 1820s. Briefly stated, monitorial schooling involved a master teacher training several older pupils, designated as monitors, to teach specific skills to large numbers of students and to assist in administrative tasks, thus enabling a single teacher to “reach” hundreds of pupils. As a practical, low-cost approach to teaching large numbers of previously unschooled children, monitorial schooling had become a popular fad among American urban schools; by 1829 twelve primary schools in Boston used it. Nevertheless, monitorial schools did not take firm hold: the system fell into disfavor locally as well as nationally because it failed to prove itself a reliable means of controlling costs and imparting instruction. After the early 1830s school officials in Boston mentioned it only rarely, ultimately abandoning the approach altogether.⁶

The failure of monitorial schooling led school officials and concerned citizens to explore other alternatives for older, illiterate children. In the early 1830s a number of citizens petitioned the BSC to open “intermediate schools” that could offer primary instruction to these children but

⁵Subcommittee of the Primary School Board, Report, 25 Apr. 1820, quoted in Joseph M. Wightman, comp., *Annals of the Boston Primary School Committee, from Its First Establishment in 1818, to Its Dissolution in 1855* (Boston, 1860), 53–54, quotation 54.

⁶Standing Committee of the Primary School Board, 21 Apr. 1829, quoted in Wightman, *Annals*, 116.

would also “protect” and segregate them from the younger, mostly native-born students in the primary schools. The BSC showed great reluctance to create a system of such schools, mainly due to an entrenched fiscal conservatism that feared the specter of even greater expenditures for primary instruction. Between 1831 and 1837 the BSC vigorously debated the merits of such schools; on at least two occasions intermediate schools were opened on an experimental basis.⁷

In 1835 and 1837 the School Committee entertained but eventually denied petitions to create intermediate schools. The 1837 petition, filed on behalf of the Society for the Prevention of Pauperism, reiterated the belief that the city had to take steps to curb the idleness of children. Noting the “*juvenile* character” of participants in recent street rioting and asserting that “time has greatly increased . . . the difficulties and dangers to which all of them are exposed,” the petition requested the establishment of intermediate schools: “We would pray, then, that one of these schools may be established and tried, with such a teacher and under such provisions as the character of the children may seem to require.” In its December denial the BSC cited an earlier report that had argued that such schools would be needed for only a few months at most and would “encourage improvident parents in neglecting to send their children to the Primary Schools at a proper age,” boys and girls who then “would from year to year be found perpetuating these gatherings of prematurely vicious children, which, like unsightly excrescences, would destroy the symmetry [*sic*] of our harmonious and beautiful System of Public Schools.”⁸

Eventually, the City Council and the School Committee came to affirm the necessity of intermediate schools. Although the specific causes for this significant position reversal were not identified in the documents, it was likely due to the rapidly developing and finally overwhelming sense of alarm and urgency regarding the increasing number of such “vicious” youth in the city. In March 1838 a City Council order granted the Primary School Board permission to admit into one school in each of the districts “any child who is more than seven years of age, and is not qualified for admission to the Grammar Schools.” Because these segregated schools were designed “only for the accommodation of those . . . coming from abroad” or those suffering from “misfortune or neglect,” the Board decided that one school in each of four mostly immigrant districts, specif-

⁷City of Boston, Common Council (1837), document no. 3, 2–5, Government Documents Room, Boston Public Library, Boston, Mass. (all City of Boston documents cited are at this location); City of Boston, Common Council (1837), document no. 4, 2–11. For a useful discussion of the establishment of intermediate schools, see Stanley K. Schultz, *The Culture Factory: Boston Public Schools, 1789–1860* (New York, 1973), 268–71.

⁸City of Boston, Common Council (1837), document no. 17, 2–4; City of Boston, Common Council (1837), document no. 4, 8–9.

ically “Nos. 2, 5, 7, and 8, will be sufficient for the present time.” Joseph Wightman, in his *Annals of the Boston Primary School Committee*, praised the passage of this order “after nearly twenty years unremitting effort.” Trepidation over the common instruction of older youth of mostly immigrant origin with younger, mostly native-born children had thus led to a direct departure from common school ideology. In order to achieve one goal of that ideology—to ensure proper development of morality and civility among students—the BSC saw fit to ignore another: bringing all children together in the same school regardless of origin or background.⁹

Intermediate Schools, 1838–1879

The Primary School Board assumed that about seven hundred children were “proper subjects” for the four new intermediate schools, or “schools for special instruction.” This figure proved to be a considerable understatement. Indeed, once the schools opened, their enrollment increased rapidly, coinciding with the dramatic increase in immigration, mostly from Ireland, during the 1840s and 1850s. As of November 1838, 963 students, or about 13 percent of the total school population, attended intermediate schools. Within five years there were ten such schools; by 1854 they numbered thirty-two with a combined enrollment of almost two thousand. By 1860 the number of schools for special instruction had apparently peaked. While complete data on them during this period are unavailable, a city document showed that in May 1857 thirty-one intermediate schools, including fifteen single-sex and sixteen coeducational, existed in seventeen districts. Most of them were located in heavily immigrant neighborhoods such as Fort Hill, the North End, and the West End. At that time intermediate schools enrolled 1,674 pupils (918 boys, 756 girls), 582 of whom were over the age of ten. Significantly, the School Committee distanced itself further from a common school ideal by establishing not only the single-sex intermediate schools but also one solely for children of African descent.¹⁰

⁹Order of the City Council, 22 Mar. 1838, quoted in Wightman, *Annals*, 173; *Report of the Subcommittee on Intermediate Schools of the Primary School Board, 1838*, quoted in Wightman, *Annals*, 173–74; Wightman, *Annals*, 173. See also Schultz, *Culture Factory*, 268–69.

¹⁰Wightman, *Annals*, 174, 304; Schultz, *Culture Factory*, 269; City of Boston, Common Council (1843), document no. 13, 6; *Annual Report of the School Committee of the City of Boston* (Boston, 1879), 9–10 (hereafter referred to as ARBSC); City of Boston, *Report of the Committee on the Supervision of Schools for Special Instruction* (1857), document no. 43, 4. The existence of an intermediate school enrolling only children of African descent raises an interesting question regarding its connection with Boston’s segregated subsystem for black children that existed from 1806 to 1855. That separate system was spotlighted by the famous lawsuit brought in 1849 on behalf of five-year-old Sarah Roberts to permit her attendance at an all-white primary school, a suit which Judge Lemuel Shaw

Few records exist that describe the nature of the intermediate school classrooms. However, John Philbrick visited some early in his tenure as superintendent. One he found “extraordinarily” successful, with “pupils . . . trained to cleanliness and good manners . . . really civilized and refined”; in another he discovered “slovenly urchins . . . little better than semi-barbarous.” Philbrick attributed the difference to the relative skills of the teachers in charge. The superintendent also suggested limiting intermediate class size to forty and recommended against a full introduction of the graded classification system into the schools because of their “peculiar” character. While some intermediate schools did experiment with graded instruction, most found that because of the wide range of background and preparation among students a less regimented approach was necessary. Philbrick described the materials used in the basic curriculum as “somewhat miscellaneous” and observed that “The teachers in these schools have an arduous and important task to perform, and they need special encouragement and assistance.” Teachers in fact resisted serving in the schools, causing the Primary School Board to consider in 1845 whether intermediate instructors “ought to receive a larger compensation than the others.”¹¹

Officially, school authorities expressed ambivalent attitudes toward the schools for special instruction. While some praised the schools for being “very useful” and “eminently successful,” others proclaimed the desire to promote students out of them as rapidly as possible and even do away with them altogether. The 1857 BSC report acknowledged the schools’ role in serving students “naturally dull and slow of comprehension” and in shielding the “tender and unsophisticated children of the Primary Schools” from older intermediate students. However, the same report commented that intermediate children should be transferred whenever possible to the regular grammar schools “so as to become in all respects the *subjects* of influence, and not the *leaders* of it,” as well as to keep them “in the regular march of promotion.” “The constant effort of the committee,” revealed the report, “is to dispense with [intermediate schools] as soon as it can be judiciously done.”¹²

denied. The school that Sarah’s father refused to have her attend was not the intermediate school, which was designated for much older children and may not have existed in 1849; rather, it was one of the two segregated primary schools then in existence. The intermediate school for black children was mentioned in the reports of 1854 but not those of 1857, suggesting the possibility that the school was disbanded along with the other segregated schools by state legislation in 1855. For a brief discussion of the Roberts case see Schultz, *Culture Factory*, 201–6.

¹¹John D. Philbrick, *Fifth Quarterly Report, June 1, 1858*, in ARBSC (1858), 25; *Tenth Semi-Annual Report of the Superintendent*, in ARBSC (1865), 123, and *Ninth Quarterly Report*, in ARBSC (1859), 80–81; *Second Semi-Annual Report*, in ARBSC (1861), 71; Wightman, *Annals*, 210.

¹²City of Boston (1843), document no. 13, 6; ARBSC (1857), 46.

The 1857 city report on intermediate schools agreed that they should be discontinued. It declared that the schools had somehow lost their original purpose of serving “overgrown and backward children, who, it was hoped, might . . . be prepared for entrance into the grammar schools, in the shortest possible time.” The document lamented that the intermediate teachers kept their better students from advancing to grammar schools in order to give the teachers “a good appearance at the examinations.” Then, in a most instructive passage, it claimed:

. . . the custom soon obtained of sending from Primary Schools all the backward and ill-favored children, as soon as they arrived at the age of eight years, into this class of schools. Teachers of Primary Schools have often been known to state that certain children, who were giving them more than ordinary trouble, would soon be old enough to be sent off to the Schools for Special Instruction. It is evident that the present system offers too great an inducement to Primary School teachers to neglect certain pupils, who may soon, according to the rules, be sent to an Intermediate School, and imposes upon the latter class of teachers an undue share of labor and trouble. The very existence of such a class of schools, composed of children whose early education and moral instruction have been neglected, or who have not been favored by an ordinary share of intellectual endowments, naturally tends to abuses which no regulations, however stringent, can prevent.

The report went on to say that it could find little evidence suggesting intermediate school students enjoyed “rapid development of the intellectual powers.” It added that the schools’ disadvantages were “sufficiently obvious” and that their “unfortunate” students could surely benefit “from the association with children of active intellects and good manners.”¹³

These two reports clearly reflected a fundamental contradiction between common school ideology and operative social mores in Boston: the desire to bring all children under the same influences of public schooling without having certain children in close contact with certain others. Ironically, the reports also reveal a strong sense that close association of different types of students could be beneficial, at least to those whose character was questioned. George Emerson, a prominent Bostonian deeply involved in public education, expressed this irony in a well-known citation from the School Committee’s annual report of 1847: “Our system was contrived and adapted to a small city, peopled by persons born in New England. . . . Now there are great masses coming in upon us who are not educated, except to vice and crime. . . . Unless they are made inmates of

¹³*Report of the Committee on the Supervision of Schools for Special Instruction*, 4–5.

our schools, many of them will become inmates of our prisons.” To Emerson, the common school ideal was grounded in an earlier, almost nostalgic era, one that was rapidly giving way to developments both fearsome and urgent. Immigrant children needed to be in school, needed exposure to the proper ways and ideas of the native population; the difficulty was to realize that goal without having unwanted influence flowing the other direction as well. School leadership in Boston would struggle with such sensibilities for decades.¹⁴

Although intermediate schools remained an official component of the school system (as specified in chapter IX, section 4, of the 1865 regulations), they were rarely mentioned in official records through the 1870s. As noted earlier, attendance in the schools had apparently peaked before 1860, with the number of schools having fallen to “about twenty”; the wave of Irish immigration had eased significantly by then, and the school system through experience may have become more adept at accommodating Irish students in regular classrooms. Then, in 1879, the School Committee announced that the schools for special instruction had undergone a thorough review as part of a major restructuring of the schools and the School Committee during the latter part of the decade. In summarizing that review, the BSC underscored the negative reputation with which these schools had become saddled. While praising them generally, the committee commented that the schools “were peculiarly unfortunate in occupying an isolated position” and did not have “a recognized place in the school system.” The BSC also asserted, in another most instructive passage, that the schools contained “in general, only the less promising children” and that “the selection of teachers for them seems to have been made, in some cases, with less than usual care. Add to this the fact that they had been sometimes turned into a kind of Botany Bay, to which transgressors were banished from Primary and Grammar Schools, and it is not surprising that they were found to be in an unsatisfactory condition, and that a radical change appeared to be needed.” At the end of 1879 the intermediate schools were reclassified into a new category, that of “ungraded classes of [the] Grammar Schools.”¹⁵

Ungraded Classes, 1879–1900

During the four decades of intermediate school instruction, the image of the typical intermediate student as a culturally, morally, and intellectually inferior and impoverished immigrant youth powerfully informed the opinions and observations of school authorities. The discontinuation of the

¹⁴George B. Emerson, quoted in Schultz, *Culture Factory*, 269–70.

¹⁵ARBSC (1879), 9–10.

intermediate schools did not change this, nor did it constitute a move to abandon segregation of older children from younger primary pupils. Rejecting previously advanced notions that common education might be beneficial, the BSC wrote that “there are grave objections, which all parents will appreciate, to the intimate association with very young children of those much older and more mature, and the separation, therefore, provided for and secured by the Intermediate Schools was an excellent thing.” Rather, the reorganization into ungraded classes reflected a desire to place the education of intermediate students under much closer supervision—a manifestation of larger efforts to streamline supervision throughout the school system as well as redistribute power and redefine roles among school authorities. As part of the grammar schools, the ungraded classes came under the immediate control of grammar school principals—an arrangement thought “certain to secure a more steady and effective supervision” that would rectify the schools’ problems. The School Committee believed that “this change will commend itself to all whose judgment is of any value.” It was also hoped that the closer association (but not direct contact) with the grammar schools would encourage ungraded class students to work harder and emulate the regular students, thus providing “a healthy moral incentive.”¹⁶

The next two decades proved to be a period of steady growth for the ungraded classes. Statistics from 1881 showed 665 ungraded class pupils, or 2.7 percent of the just over 25,000 grammar school pupils. Of the fifty grammar schools in the city, fifteen had an ungraded class. Both single-sex and coeducational ones existed, usually depending on the pattern of their host grammar schools. By 1885 there were 850 ungraded students, or 3.2 percent of the grammar school population; the number of classes had increased to twenty-one. Between 1885 and 1900 the ungraded classes grew to thirty-three in fifty-seven grammar schools, serving over 2,300 students—just under 6.2 percent of grammar school enrollment. Table 1 summarizes the growth rate of ungraded classes between 1886 and 1900. According to available statistics, ungraded classes enrolled children mostly between the ages of ten and thirteen, with a few fourteen or older. In 1894 the statistics began listing the ratio of male to female students. The majority were boys, ranging from 54.4 percent male in 1896 to a high of 65 percent in 1894, standing at approximately 60 percent male in 1900.¹⁷

¹⁶Ibid. For a detailed account of the restructuring of the Boston schools during this time, see Michael B. Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America* (New York, 1971), 56–104.

¹⁷All data in table 1 was compiled from the June statistical appendices to the respective ARBSC of the years cited.

Table 1
Ungraded Class Enrollment, 1886–1900

<i>Year</i>	<i># Classes</i>	<i># Students</i>	<i>% Grammar Population</i>
1886	23	918	3.3
1887	23	934	3.3
1888	23	981	3.4
1889	26	1171	3.9
1890	25	1247	4.2
1891	23	1226	4.2
1892	23	1415	4.8
1893	25	1646	5.5
1894	28	1568	5.1
1895	28	1669	5.2
1896	28	1842	5.6
1897	30	1867	5.5
1898	34	2058	5.8
1899	35	2232	6.2
1900	33	2318	6.2

Ungraded Class Placement

The regulations covering the ungraded classes extended eligibility for attendance significantly beyond those for the intermediate schools. In 1885 admission regulations stipulated that ungraded classes were “for the instruction of children who, from age or other reason, are unqualified for the regular classes of primary and grammar schools.” Thus, a student of any age could be placed in an ungraded class for a variety of reasons other than simply to acquire literacy skills. The selection process itself was only vaguely defined, probably consisting of a teacher recommendation approved by the school principal. This expansive, broadly defined approach toward eligibility and selection made it easier for teachers and administrators to use the classes as a placement option for students who for an ever widening range of reasons were not wanted in regular classrooms.¹⁸

Consequently, ungraded classes often contained a highly diverse amalgam of students. A Board of Supervisors report observed that ungraded class students “have simply lacked opportunities. They have become advanced in age without the corresponding mental development; they are new arrivals from foreign shores, where they have had no educational advantages, or they have been thrown back by sickness, and need much help and encouragement. Some of them, as is often the case in other classes, may be morally as well as intellectually weak.” As the 1800s drew to a close observers used some vivid terminology to describe ungraded class

¹⁸8th Annual Report of the Board of Supervisors (hereafter referred to as ARBS), in ARBSC (1885), appendix 175.

pupils (many of which echoed terms applied to intermediate school students): “backward and peculiar,” “troublesome,” “dull . . . yet honest and industrious,” and students “who, from laziness, irregularity in attendance, or viciousness, have become obnoxious.” Although school regulations specifically stated that “no pupil shall be placed in an ungraded class for misconduct,” the BSC acknowledged in 1890 that “there are reasons for believing that many pupils who are unruly, irregular in attendance, and troublesome to their teachers are placed in these classes.”¹⁹

Like the schools for special instruction before them, the ungraded classes enrolled for the most part children who either came from overseas or were born to immigrant parents. Most ungraded classes were organized in the grammar schools of Boston’s impoverished immigrant communities, especially the North End, West End, and around Fort Hill. The Eliot and Hancock schools, enrolling boys and girls respectively, were located in the heart of the North End and always had the largest number of ungraded pupils; in 1881 almost one-third of such students were in these two schools. In 1893 40 percent of all boys at the Eliot School and 37 percent of all girls at the Hancock School attended ungraded classes. By 1899 ungraded classes enrolled more students than any one of the other six traditional grades in the Hancock, Eliot, and Bigelow schools, all of which were located in immigrant neighborhoods.²⁰

With large numbers of immigrant children being placed in the ungraded classes, the “Americanization” of foreign-born pupils and instruction in the English language became fundamental goals of the ungraded class experience. By 1887 the Board of Supervisors was suggesting that the classes represented a possible means to acclimate immigrant children to the schools and introduce them to the language. Two years later the Board wrote that “some of these classes are made up of children of many nationalities; a fusing and unifying motive is at once essential; we must Americanize them.” In 1890 the School Committee communicated its belief that a primary function of the ungraded classes was to provide a suitable place for immigrant children to learn English.²¹

Supervisor Walter S. Parker, whose district included the Eliot and Hancock schools, showed considerable interest in this aspect of ungraded class instruction, offering comments and suggestions that exhibited a mixture of enthusiasm, sympathy, and condescension. He asserted that “the masters and teachers, without exception, testify to [ungraded class students’]

¹⁹10th ARBS, in ARBSC (1887), appendix 151–52; 12th ARBS, in ARBSC (1889), appendix 135; *Report of George Conley, Supervisor*, supplement to ARBSC (1895), appendix 134; ARBSC (1890), 13.

²⁰All data compiled from the ARBSC, esp. the statistical appendices from June 1881, 1890, 1893, 1897, and 1899.

²¹10th ARBS, appendix 150–51; 12th ARBS, appendix 134; ARBSC (1890), 12.

great eagerness to learn our language, and to their earnestness of purpose to become Americans. They are for the most part docile and tractable. They need and deserve able, skillful instruction.” In a series of reports in the 1890s Parker argued for strict enforcement of the thirty-five pupil maximum; instructional materials specifically tailored to immigrant students, including special reading texts and materials “common to all created beings”; coursework heavily weighted toward English language instruction; and implementation of a flexible course of study, responsive to individual needs, which allowed departure from the basic curriculum “whenever and wherever the exigencies of the case require or the needs of the pupils demand.” The extent to which Parker’s recommendations were realized is not clear. Nevertheless, by the turn of the century the “Americanization” of immigrant children and English language instruction were fundamental activities in many if not most ungraded classes.²²

Diversity in the Ungraded Classroom

The considerable diversity found among students in most ungraded classes proved quite challenging to teachers, administrators, and students. As the Boston public schools became more experienced in ungraded class instruction, descriptions and observations regarding the classes grew more attentive to issues of individual student performance and behavior. Comments regarding inappropriate classroom behavior and poor academic performance of some children had been recorded as early as the 1850s; these had been used to explain or justify placing certain children in the intermediate schools. Such comments grew more frequent by the 1880s and 1890s, and the actions and abilities of “trouble-makers” as well as “backward,” “dull,” “peculiar,” or “feeble-minded” students became oft-cited factors in justifying the placement of children in ungraded classrooms.

During the intermediate school era, student difficulties in the classroom typically were considered a predictable function of the character of children of immigrant background. However, as school behavioral and academic problems began to appear more often throughout all elements of the student population, the notion that such problems actually reflected abnormality—or even disability—which required not only specialized placement but also specialized instruction, rather than a generalized character flaw, gained greater acceptance. In 1885 the Board of Supervisors for the Boston schools reasoned that a segregated ungraded class was an entirely appropriate setting for such children: “Here, in charge of a teacher who has not more than thirty-five pupils, they can receive the individ-

²²*Report of Walter S. Parker, Supervisor*, in ARBSC (1895), appendix 166; *Report of Walter S. Parker, Supervisor*, in ARBSC (1896), appendix 137; *Report of Walter S. Parker, Supervisor*, in ARBSC (1898), appendix 130–32.

ualized attention they need and, if they have the capacity, be brought up to the standard of the Grammar class where they naturally belong. Their mental and physical condition demands a consideration that they cannot receive in a Primary classroom.” Fourteen years later, Superintendent Edwin Seaver reiterated the Board’s conclusions. For Seaver, the ungraded class “is made small—thirty-five pupils—so that the teacher may be able to give more attention to individuals. The pupils are all supposed to be, for one reason or another, unable to do the regular work of the grammar grades. Exceptionally old and backward children are moved from the primary schools. . . . Other abnormal children already in the grammar school are also placed in the ungraded class. Here they all receive special attention, that they may be fitted soon to join the regular classes, or that they may get what little instruction they are capable of before reaching the age where they must leave school.” Both statements reflect an embedded assumption that “abnormal” or disabled children did not belong in, nor could they contribute to, the regular classroom. Thus, abnormality in student performance joined age, social class, and cultural and linguistic background as justifications for the segregation of thousands of Boston’s public school students. (This also set the stage for the eventual development of special education programs for students with identified disabilities, as will be discussed later.)²³

These complex and diverse instructional settings essentially represented a significant compromise of common school ideology at the elementary level. As ungraded class instruction became more entrenched in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, documents and other commentary from school officials clearly suggest that the classes were considered separate educational worlds demanding unique policies and practices for large numbers of marginalized students. In particular, discussions about class size, instructional quality, and reputation within the school system reveal just how different the classes were from traditional elementary classrooms and just how extensively the goal of a common education in a common setting for all children had been surrendered in Boston.

Class size constituted a major concern of ungraded class instruction from the beginning. The regular public school classroom generally had sixty or more children; by the late 1800s regulations stipulated a maximum of fifty-six per class, but that was often ignored. Administrators and teachers agreed, however, that the ungraded classes had to be smaller because of the diverse characteristics of their students; in the early 1880s the ungraded class maximum consequently was set at thirty-five. In 1887 the supervisors maintained that because the ungraded class students “may

²³8th ARBS, appendix 175; 19th *Annual Report of the Superintendent* (hereafter ARS), in ARBSC (1899), appendix 64.

receive more personal attention, be more sympathetically treated, and the sooner and better prepared for the other classes of the school . . . [t]he number of pupils in the class need not, and should not, exceed thirty-five. The teacher is thus enabled to do for them individually what cannot be done in the graded classes.” The comments of the Board of Supervisors in 1885 and Superintendent Seaver in 1899 noted above also emphasized a perceived need to keep ungraded class size relatively small. This goal remained an accepted tenet among school officials for the duration of the classes’ existence. Nevertheless, the number of students in ungraded classes often exceeded thirty-five, as some authorities pointed out and as yearly statistics suggest—undoubtedly making a difficult teaching situation even more so for ungraded class instructors.²⁴

The constant discussion surrounding the search for competent ungraded class teachers underscored the presumed need for specialized, segregated instruction in the ungraded classes. Officially, administrators agreed almost unanimously that the unique nature of the ungraded classroom demanded a highly qualified instructor who could identify and address the varied needs of its students. Philbrick’s position that the “arduous and important work” of the intermediate schools necessitated “special encouragement and assistance” for the teacher foreshadowed similar statements regarding ungraded classes from school leaders in the late nineteenth century. In 1887 the Board of Supervisors answered its own question, “What sort of teachers should be given charge of these classes?” with, “The answer may well be, The very best that can be obtained.” The board dismissed the notion that teachers who have shown themselves incapable of handling a regular classroom should be assigned to an ungraded one:

The different conditions of the various pupils, the peculiar obstacles to be overcome in the case of each, the arousing the sluggish, winning an interest in worthy things, training to habits of sustained effort and carefulness of behavior, awaking the moral consciousness, demand the best efforts of the brightest, the most skilled and devoted teachers.

The improvement in the character of the ungraded classes, and the increase of their worth to the schools, must depend on the improvement in the spirit, the methods, and the ability of the teachers.

The board concluded that teaching an ungraded class required a selfless, positive attitude, insisting that teachers “who are by nature adapted to these positions . . . , never even dreaming that their lot is harder than that of

²⁴10th ARBS, appendix 151–52. On overenrollment in ungraded classes, see, for example, the comments from the reports of Walter S. Parker in ARBSC (1895), appendix 166, and ARBSC (1898), appendix 131.

other teachers, will occupy a high place in any just scale of values, and be worthy of the highest rewards."²⁵

In 1890 the board, still searching for ideal ungraded class instructors, proclaimed that "The teachers of ungraded classes should be selected because of their superior qualifications for the work required. . . . [U]nfortunate children in ungraded classes are in need of teachers who are not only apt to teach, but who, from superior mental and moral gifts, are kind, gentle, patient, industrious, and long suffering." Using less effusive language, a subcommittee of the BSC reported: "We heartily concur in the opinion of the Board of Supervisors that the teachers of these classes should be specially well qualified for the work"; Supervisor George Conley stated in a report that "none but the ablest, the most skilled and devoted teachers should be assigned to the charge of these classes"; while Superintendent Edwin Seaver acknowledged that ungraded classes "ought to be taught by the most skilful [*sic*] teachers." Such commentary exemplified the great extent to which ungraded classes had been differentiated from typical patterns of schooling and were seen as an especially difficult assignment.²⁶

The problem of recruiting and keeping qualified teachers reflected the generally negative image of the classes themselves, an image magnified by their intense, complex, and challenging learning environments. Thus, despite the hopes of the 1879 reorganization, the ungraded classes continued to suffer from a system-wide reputation as difficult, undesirable places in which to teach and learn. This was so even though the Board of Supervisors did its best to put the classes in a positive light. In 1885 it labeled them "a most important aid" as well as "a real benefit." Its 1887 report stated that the classes were "taking a somewhat better position than was once accorded" them. The board optimistically, and rather defensively, maintained that "the purpose for which the ungraded class was established was purely beneficent, and there is no more disgrace attaching to membership of that class, when it has its right place in the school organization, than to membership of any other class. Pupils are sent there as a favor, not as a punishment. . . . This class has a rightful place in the school organization, and it should be considered as worthy of honor as any other class."²⁷

Nevertheless, the board admitted that "the [ungraded] class is not viewed in the spirit of this purpose in all schools. The teachers of graded classes are too much influenced by the old idea of it as a 'Botany Bay'

²⁵10th ARBS, appendix 152.

²⁶13th ARBS, in ARBSC (1890), appendix 144; *Proceedings of the Boston School Committee* (1894), 394; *Report of George Conley, Supervisor*, 132; 22nd ARS, in ARBSC (1902), appendix 57.

²⁷8th ARBS, appendix 175; 10th ARBS, appendix 151.

class, or a class for the 'feeble-minded.'” The board then revealed that teachers “sometimes sarcastically suggest to laggards and the ill behaved that they should be sent to the ungraded class. Their tone and manner give the class a bad character in the estimation of their pupils.” The situation had not improved three years later when the board observed that ungraded class students were among the most troubled in the school system, receiving children “who, from laziness, irregularity in attendance, or viciousness had become obnoxious to the teachers in other classes. . . . They may have been utterly discouraged in attempts to measure themselves in their studies with their more fortunate schoolmates.” And it once again referred to the classes’ negative reputation, emphasizing that regular class teachers banished misbehaving students to them. “For certain reasons,” understated the board, “these ungraded classes have never been popular either with teachers or pupils.”²⁸

Evidence directly documenting ungraded class teachers’ voices with regard to their perspectives on their students, classroom conditions, or the nature of their work is, regrettably, extremely scarce. Nevertheless, the evidence strongly suggests that effective teaching in an ungraded classroom—even one with “only” thirty-five students—must have been difficult almost beyond imagination. The unanswered pleas for better teachers; the daunting variety of linguistic, cultural, intellectual, physical, and behavioral abilities among students; the apparent lack of respect or concrete support from other teachers and administrators; the classes’ function as repository for the unwanted, the detested, the poorly understood—all point to ungraded class instruction of even the most basic skills and content as being a profoundly challenging and draining job. At a time when the school system was striving toward a mechanistic efficiency and professionalism, the ungraded classes collected the pieces of the machinery that just could not fit, and the teachers were expected to make do with whatever resources they had.

The image of the ungraded class as a repository for the school system’s most difficult and least capable children thus persisted. The 1890 Supervisor’s report lamented that “too frequently . . . the teachers assigned to these classes have been such as, for various reasons, were not considered fit for the graded classes; and thus a stigma has been placed upon all the teachers in the ungraded schools.” In 1895 Supervisor George Conley noted that the classes had indeed become a dumping ground for students who exhibited mental abnormality in school: “from the regular classes [to the ungraded] are removed the slow and backward children as well as those who are troublesome and hinder the progress of others by robbing them of their time and opportunities.” In brief yet evocative lan-

²⁸10th ARBS, appendix 151; 13th ARBS, appendix 143–44.

guage he summarized the classes' plight: "even the most capable teachers shrink from assuming a charge which makes such large demands upon their patience, strength, and skill."²⁹

Response to Diversity: Segregation and the Erosion of the Common School Ideal

The intermediate schools, or schools for special instruction, and the ungraded classes arose and persisted within the context of a growing public school system seeking to accommodate and respond to an ever increasing diversity among its student population. This diversity challenged the system both administratively and pedagogically: it presented students who, it was believed, could not or should not be treated in a common fashion due to dramatic variability in their cultural, linguistic, or socio-economic background, classroom behavior, or academic progress. Diversity had of course existed in schools before, but the increasing structural complexity of urban public schooling along with greater demands for efficiency in all aspects of public education made such diversity more obvious and problematic. The struggles of, as well as ambivalence toward, intermediate schools and ungraded classes over their life span reflected discomfort with diversity and an uncertainty about how best to cope with it. As the public school structure grew more stable, and perhaps more self-assured, its responses to a heterogeneous student population became more organized and definitive. Such responses seemed to follow two general patterns: first, isolation of students seen as malevolent if not dangerous; then identification of students whose presence in any way significantly inhibited efficient instruction and administration.

The original impetus of the intermediate schools lay in the Primary School Board's desire to isolate older, impoverished, mostly immigrant children from younger, mostly middle-class native children in the new primary schools. The board clearly feared having "vicious," "wretched" youth, eight years of age or older, come into direct contact with four to seven year olds coming from presumably more stable, respectable backgrounds. The decision to initiate the schools did not derive from any recognition of special instructional needs of certain students or the belief that a differentiated curriculum or instructional methodology was necessary. Instead, these schools manifested the growing beliefs that all children should come under the influence of public schooling and that segregated settings for certain students were entirely defensible and necessary—even as these students pursued a curriculum designed under the common school ideal to unify

²⁹13th ARBS, appendix 144; *Report of George Conley, Supervisor*, appendix 133–34, 132.

and meld all public school children into young, civilized Americans. Segregated settings thus clearly served one element of a diverse student population: immigrant and other impoverished youth whose character and background was deemed malevolent and/or incorrigible. This was quite obviously an important function of the intermediate schools, which “effectively restricted enrollment to the native and foreign children of poverty,” becoming “almost exclusively provinces of the poor.” Native perceptions of immigrants as culturally and morally inferior, so starkly expressed by George Emerson in 1847, helped solidify the perceived necessity of intermediate schools.³⁰

As the pressures of a rigidifying school system increased, the intermediate schools and ungraded classes evolved into “omnium gatherum” settings to which were sent students who for a wide variety of reasons were seen as serious impediments to efficient administration and instruction. Two decades after their founding, intermediate schools, according to observers, hosted large numbers of “dull,” “backward,” “ill-favored,” “peculiar” children who were “giving more than the ordinary trouble,” children who only nominally if at all suited the original description of the appropriate intermediate school student. These settings became safety valves or dumping grounds which eased—if only a little—some of the pressures and expectations placed on the standard classroom. Students whose behavior was seen as especially detrimental to the smooth operation of the classroom were sent there; so were students who could not speak English well enough for school purposes, a rapidly growing segment of the student population (especially after 1880). Also placed in ungraded classes were those who just could not seem to master the subject matter to even bare minimum standards. These included many from the categories just noted, but also those who were seen as abnormal: the “feeble-minded,” “intellectually deficient,” or “morally weak.” The wide range of intellectual, linguistic, cultural, and behavioral diversity within the public schools became magnified and concentrated in these isolated settings. And the persistent ambivalence toward and ultimate poor quality of intermediate schools and ungraded classes reflected the schools’ and the public’s suspicion and contempt, if not outright fear, of the diversity magnified therein.

Ultimately, then, it was the complicated *reality* of diversity that worked most powerfully against fully realizing common school ideology in the Boston public schools. In philosophical terms, school officials clearly feared the presumed negative influences of poor and/or immigrant children on the respectable sons and daughters of Boston more than they valued the potentially positive effects of all children learning the same

³⁰Schultz, *Culture Factory*, 270.

predetermined ideology in a common setting. In practical terms, coping with large numbers of children who varied widely in age, lacked literacy skills, struggled with the language of instruction, did not conform to accepted standards of behavior, or could not keep pace with either the day-to-day curriculum or the programmed march up the educational ladder proved too daunting a task for teachers and administrators.

For the Boston public schools, the primary long-term response to these realities was segregation: isolating students whose diverse backgrounds and behaviors disconcerted an educational leadership hoping to fashion the public school experience in their own idealized image. Had the effects of one group of students on another been seen to flow only in the desired direction, or if the nature of the school population had been more uniform, the common school ideal in Boston may well have lasted longer or been more closely approached. Instead, the city's educational leaders found solace in their belief that participation in segregated public schooling per se, and some exposure to a relatively standardized elementary education, could achieve the fundamental goals of common school ideology without risking too much.

Postscript: The Advent of Differentiated Education

Around the turn of the century the Boston public school system began to establish a number of more specialized educational settings designed to cope with the tremendous variety of cultural, intellectual, physical, and behavioral characteristics of its students. The earliest such setting—the Horace Mann School for the Deaf—had commenced in 1869, but it was the only one of its kind for decades. In 1895 a Parental School for boys with significant disciplinary problems opened, and in 1899 the first special class for children labeled mentally retarded commenced in the city's South End. Then, between 1907 and 1913, a series of special instructional settings was established: prevocational programs for older elementary children who, it was assumed, were capable of securing employment only in a manual trade or semi-skilled industry following completion of their schooling; “special English” or “steamer” classes for non-English speakers; “open-air” classes for the chronically ill; “rapid advancement” classes for high achievers; “conservation of eyesight” classes for students with serious vision impairments; and “speech improvement” classes and centers for children with speech difficulties. The addition of such settings effectively removed the ungraded class clientele over a period of time. Superintendent Franklin Dyer wrote in 1914 that this “vigorous reorganization” of the ungraded classes had reduced their number and enabled them to escape their “omnium gatherum” character. In 1908 ungraded classes still enrolled over three thousand students, yet by 1915 that number stood at just 686—a 52 percent decrease from 1914 alone. Enrollment declined steadily there-

after, lingering on with decreasingly small numbers until the ungraded classes ceased to exist in 1938—one hundred years after the founding of the intermediate schools.³¹

By creating this series of segregated, specialized settings, Boston school authorities acknowledged the day-to-day tensions generated by the almost overwhelming cultural, intellectual, and behavioral diversity found in the school system in general and the ungraded classes in particular. They also institutionalized, if not finalized, the ultimate failure of the common school ideal in the face of the realities of urban public education at the turn of the century. As noted above, large numbers of ungraded class students were siphoned away into the “special English or steamer” classes designed to offer intensive English instruction to recently arrived immigrant children. Others found eventual placement in the prevocational centers, first established in 1907, for those students, mostly of immigrant background, thought to “belong to the distinctly motor or practical-minded type” and therefore requiring training for an “industrial” as opposed to a “cultural” vocation. By 1914 more than thirteen hundred girls and boys were enrolled in special English classes, and in that same year prevocational programs existed in twenty-two districts for girls and in three much larger centers for boys. Such differentiation patterns clearly manifested significant linguistic and vocational tracking practices at the elementary level based on ethnic background and anticipated post-school employment.³²

Also noteworthy was the formation and entrenchment of the specialized settings designed to address specific disabilities found among Boston’s public school students, the most problematic of whom had historically been placed in ungraded classes. Abnormalities in terms of intellectual function and school behavior had been recognized in the intermediate schools, with observers contrasting students “naturally dull and slow of comprehension” or “not favored by an ordinary share of intellectual endowments” with those possessing “active intellects.” While definitions of and standards for identifying disability remained extremely vague and subjective throughout most of the 1800s, more sophisticated recognition and understanding slowly emerged from the experience of ungraded class instruction. The concrete hardships and complications of addressing intel-

³¹33rd ARS, school document no. 11, 1914, 36; 1908 data from “Semi-Annual Statistics of the Boston Public Schools,” school document no. 6, 1908. Data from 1915 to 1939 are summarized from the respective years of the “Annual Statistics of the Boston Public Schools” in the bound volumes of the *School Documents* (Boston, Mass.) for those years. For a detailed chronology of the establishment and evolution of these programs, see also 47th ARS, school document no. 7, 1929, 91–126.

³²33rd ARS, 1914, 42; ARS, school document no. 10, 1910, 6; “Annual Statistics of the Boston Public Schools,” school document no. 6, 1914, 14–15; 33rd ARS, school document no. 13, 1914, 42–43.

lectual, physical, and behavioral disabilities in these crowded, extremely diverse classrooms brought the notions of abnormality and disability more directly to the attention of teachers and administrators, who commented openly on the difficulties of working with such conditions. By the early 1900s recognition of disability—manifested early on by the Horace Mann School for the Deaf, accelerated by regional and national developments in the medical and psychological understanding, treatment, and education of individuals with disabilities, and rooted in the desire to maintain efficiency and control in the schools—convinced school authorities that the system would best be served by isolating such children in the specialized programs noted above. The advent of tracking and special education thus rendered the ungraded class—once the only resort for a public school system lacking the ability to specify or address effectively the cultural, intellectual, physical, and behavioral diversity that has always characterized public school children—functionally irrelevant and philosophically obsolete.³³

Common school ideology persisted for decades after its originating frame of reference—a homogenous, agrarian, early-nineteenth-century United States—began to fade, yet the intermediate schools and ungraded classes manifested that ideology's ultimate unsuitability to a much different American society. While a hortatory rhetoric certainly stimulated nineteenth-century educational reform through the common school movement, the movement itself foundered when confronted with the actual conditions of urban American society and culture. In Boston, common schooling struggled dramatically in the context of both the realities of urban public education as well as the ingrained sensibilities of the city's leadership. This long-term, persistent struggle eventually solidified a guiding assumption that a common education for all was neither possible nor practical in such a diverse, efficiency-oriented school system. Conse-

³³Boston seems to have been ahead of other systems in establishing special education programs in terms of both time of establishment and complexity of structure. See, for example, Joseph L. Tropea, "Bureaucratic Order and Special Children: Urban Schools, 1890s–1940s," *History of Education Quarterly* 27 (spring 1987): 29–53; Barry M. Franklin, "Progressivism and Curriculum Differentiation: Special Classes in the Atlanta Public Schools, 1898–1923," *History of Education Quarterly* 29 (winter 1989): 571–93; Steven A. Gelb, "'Not Simply Bad and Incurable': Science, Morality, and Intellectual Deficiency," *History of Education Quarterly* 29 (fall 1989): 359–79; Marvin Lazerson, "The Origins of Special Education," in *Special Education Policies: Their History, Implementation, and Finance*, ed. Jay G. Chambers and William T. Hartman (Philadelphia, 1983), 15–47; Seymour B. Sarason and John Doris, *Educational Handicap, Public Policy, and Social History: A Broadened Perspective on Mental Retardation* (New York, 1979), 261–320; R. C. Scheerenberger, *A History of Mental Retardation* (Baltimore, Md., 1983). Several professional and scholarly journals are particularly rich sources for a variety of articles on education and disability during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, esp. the *Journal of Psycho-Assthenics*, *Mental Hygiene*, and the *Training School Bulletin*.

quently, a city long considered the primary center for advancing the common school ideal in fact exposed many of its shortcomings and contradictions, ironically helping to explain why it failed in the end to realize the fondest ambitions of its most ardent supporters.