

Department of Public Instruction ^[1]

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by E. Michael Latta, 2006

Additional research provided by Wiley J. Williams.

In 1817 Archibald D. Murphey, a state senator from [Orange County](#) ^[2], submitted to the [General Assembly](#) ^[3] his report advocating a publicly financed system of education in North Carolina. Though this proposal was largely ignored by his fellow legislators, Murphey is nevertheless regarded as the "Father of the Common School" because he envisioned a state-operated public education system.

In January 1839 the North Carolina legislature passed the state's first common school law, establishing the principle of combined state and local funds to support schools. In 1852 the legislature created the Department of Public Instruction with the superintendent of common schools as its head. [Calvin H. Wiley](#) ^[4] was chosen to fill this position. Wiley served in that capacity from 1 Jan. 1853 to 26 Apr. 1865, when all state offices were declared vacant after the surrender of the Confederacy. As superintendent, Wiley worked tirelessly for the establishment of common schools and the improvement of education throughout the state.

The position of North Carolina superintendent of public instruction was created by the [Constitution of 1868](#) ^[5]. It is the only constitutional office in the state assigned duties related exclusively to public schools. Although the duties and powers of the position have been altered many times by the General Assembly, the superintendent of public instruction remains the secretary and chief administrative officer of the State Board of Education.

While the Department of Public Instruction's administrative structure has undergone certain changes since the department's formation in 1852, its primary mission-to ensure that a "general and uniform system of free public schools shall be provided throughout the state, wherein equal opportunities shall be provided to all students"-remains constant. Under the leadership of the [State Board of Education](#) ^[6], the department establishes and administers overall policy concerning educational curriculum and instruction, teacher training, budget decisions, and other areas. The superintendent of public instruction manages the department and administers the policies set by the board. The board-which includes the lieutenant governor, the state treasurer, and 11 gubernatorial appointees subject to confirmation by the General Assembly in joint session-adopts rules and regulations for the schools that are consistent with other laws enacted by the General Assembly. The superintendent of public instruction serves as secretary to the board. The department is organized under the state superintendent into three program areas: Instructional and Accountability Services, Information and Technology Services, and Financial and Personnel Services. Each area is headed by an associate state superintendent.

References:

E. Michael Latta, *The Constitutional and Statutory Development of the State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction* (1989).

William W. Peek, *The History of Education in North Carolina* (1993).

William S. Powell, *North Carolina through Four Centuries* (1989).

Additional resources:

NC Department of Public Instruction website: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/> ^[7].

Archived webpages, 2001-present. NC Department of Public Instruction. http://wayback.archive-it.org/194/*/http://www.ncpublicschools.org ^[8].

North Carolina State Government Publications Collection: <http://www.ncgovdocs.org/> ^[9]

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[Politics and government](#) ^[11]

Authors:

[Latta, E. Michael](#) ^[12]

[Williams, Wiley J.](#) ^[13]

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