

When Oregon was admitted to the Union in 1859, the State Constitution required each county to be segmented into school districts – in response, Coos County created 45. The Constitution also assigned to the Governor the initial duties as State Superintendent of Education. By 1872 the legislature created the independent State Board of Education consisting of the Governor, Secretary of State and the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Among other things, the legislature authorized the Board to determine the type of textbooks to be used in the schools, prescribe rules for school operations, and develop standards for granting diplomas to teachers.

In addition, a local school board would be elected to manage the finances of the school district and to annually appoint teachers. Each county would have a supervising officer called the county superintendent, to look after the interests and welfare of all the school districts within the county. The officer was to visit each school at least once a year, inspect the buildings and supervise the work of each teacher.

As mentioned, by the time Oregon was admitted to the Union in 1859, there were 45 school districts in Coos County. Isolation slowed the development of new districts and only two new districts were added over the next 28 years and by 1887 there were a total of 51 school districts within the county. The next ten years would see an explosive surge in school districts to 72 serving 4,025 students, matching the population growth in rural parts of the county. Another nineteen districts were created by 1913 – for a peak total of 91.

Dee Beatty, the salutatorian at the Myrtle Point High School graduation ceremony in 1939 took an unusual tact in her remarks to the student body and parents by deviating from the traditional “we are on the threshold of the future” theme and instead focused her remarks on the establishment of the education system in Oregon. A portion of her remarks clearly describe the structure of Oregon’s education system and distinguishes state, county and school district responsibilities:

“...To care for the organizing and maintaining of the schools, the state [of Oregon] has provided for specially created school districts, the state, however has laid down a number of rules for the regulation of schools. It requires the school districts to employ teachers who have been certified by the state and specifies the preparation upon which the certificate is based. It has made the attendance of all children between the ages of 8 and 16 compulsory and it requires that all persons between the ages of 6 and 21 to be admitted free to its schools...”

“...In the present system of organization, the central source of administrative authority is the state board of education, which shapes many of the general policies. The law also provides for a county superintendent of schools, elected by the voters of each county...”

“...the fundamental unit of administration is the school district. Each county is divided into school districts and the affairs of the school districts lie in the hands of the school board, which is elected by the voters of that district...”

Unlike the current school structure in Oregon where each school district has its own superintendent, the first 110 years of public education in Coos County were guided by county superintendents. The complete list of the early Coos County School Superintendents follows:

Freeman G. Lockhart	1854 – 57
G. H. Hodgkins	1857 – 59
Evan Cunningham	1859 – 60
C. Herman	860 – 63
William Thomas Perry	1863 – 65
Anson Rogers	1865 – 68
J. Henry Schroeder	1868 – 72
I. Hacker	1872 – 74
J. Henry Schroeder	1874 – 76
John S. Coke	1876 – 78
J. F. Moore	1878 – 80
A. B. Camp	1880 – 84
Dr. J. T. McCormac	1884 – 86
J. Sherwood	1886 – 88
William Hamilton Bunch	1888 – 92
A. N. Knight	1892 – 94
James Henry Barklow	1894 – 98
William Hamilton Bunch	1898 – 1912
R. E. Baker	1912 – 20
C. E. Mulkey	1920 – 25
Martha Mulkey Purdy	1925 – 52
Miss Lillian Farley	1952 – 62