

Masonry and Public Schools

Throughout history, Masons have been connected to education

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| 1600s | Education was central to the fraternity, as master masons taught new stonemasons – apprentices – how to safely build castles and cathedrals. |
| 1700s | Many of the men who founded this country’s system of government were Masons, who drew upon fraternal values such as equality, knowledge, truth, and service to the community. They set a precedent for equal access to education, and paved the way for public schools. |
| 1740-50 | Grand Master Benjamin Franklin urged the adoption of a public school system in Pennsylvania and helped organize the University of Pennsylvania. |
| 1793 | A group of Masons laid the cornerstone for the University of North Carolina, the first state-funded college in the country. They were presided over by William Davie, a state legislator and grand master of North Carolina, today remembered as the father of the University of North Carolina. |
| 1800-10 | Grand Master DeWitt Clinton, governor of New York from 1817 to 1822, helped found a system of free education before the establishment of public schools in New York City. He became known as the father of public schools in New York. |
| 1840-60 | United States grand lodges founded 88 public colleges in 11 states, often offering free tuition to deserving students. They were among the first universities to accept students regardless of religious affiliation. |
| 1862 | John Swett, Mason and San Francisco school principal, was elected California superintendent of public instruction. He went on to organize teachers’ institutes, established a teacher certification system, won support for school taxes, wrote a revised school law, and provided for textbooks for California public schools. Swett is now referred to as the father of the California public school system. |
| 1892 | Francis Bellamy, a Mason, wrote the Pledge of Allegiance for a celebration honoring patriotism and public schools. In a speech for that same program, Bellamy referred to public schools as the “great American institution that united the nation.” |
| 1920 | Public Schools Month began when Charles Adams, a San Francisco attorney and grand master who was passionate about California schools, proclaimed Public Schools Week. During that week, Masonic lodges led community meetings to respond to the state’s critical teacher shortage. Each succeeding grand master in California has continued the observance of Public Schools Week, now Public Schools Month. |
| 1969 | The California Masonic Foundation was established to further the education of young people, from kindergarten through college. Today, more than \$1 million in scholarships is awarded by the Foundation every year, and lodges and other Masonic organizations contribute additional hundreds of thousands of dollars. |
| 2011 | The California Masonic Foundation launches a statewide initiative to support public education in three critical areas: school-based programs for elementary-age literacy; support for advancing instruction in middle school algebra; and expanding the Foundation scholarship program to include students for whom a college education has not been a choice. The strategic objective is to make a profound difference for California public schools. |