PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT NUMBERING IN MINNESOTA

The numbering of public school districts in Minnesota varies greatly depending on the statutorily defined category of the district and the time period. This guidesheet highlights the most common practices and is not intended to be comprehensive of each variation. It also notes how the inventories of school district records in the State Archives are titled and cataloged. Three separate time periods reflect varying laws and practices: before September 1957, numbering was generally a county function and the types of school districts and their numbering sequences varied greatly; from September 1957 to June 1971, the state mandated a master numbering system and the types of districts were reduced; since July 1971 the types of school districts have again increased and the numbering systems have become more varied.

Before 6 September 1957:

Most school districts were defined either as common ungraded (rural) or graded.

Common ungraded schools were established by county board action, usually upon petition of freeholders in a certain area. These schools came under the direct supervision of the County Superintendent of Schools. Usually these were one-room, two-room, or occasionally four-room schools frequently located in rural areas or in small, populated places. Common ungraded schools were generally numbered in the order of their establishment, with the first one in the county being called School District No. 1. Especially before 1875, a county board may have decided at one point to renumber the districts extant in their county in a geographical sequence, beginning in one corner of the county and working logically to the opposite corner. In this case the new numbers would not correlate with the establishment dates.

School district records for common ungraded schools are cataloged in the Minnesota State Archives under the county and thereunder numerically by district number (e.g. Anoka County. School District No. 3, Bethel Township). Paper inventories are filed in the Local Records Notebooks similarly. For purposes of cataloging, the main entry is "Anoka County (Minn.). School District No. 3 (Bethel : Township)."

Graded schools were also generally established by county board action and are generally associated with incorporated villages or cities. In the first decades after statehood, these schools may or may not have been assigned numbers. Frequently, these school districts were simply known by the name of the city or village. Eventually, these districts also were numbered within the county, sometimes beginning with 1. Therefore, in some counties, it is possible to have two school districts with the same number, one graded and one ungraded. Other counties numbered their graded schools in the same numerical sequence as the ungraded. Graded schools had a less formal relationship with the County Superintendent of Schools and were not under the direct supervision of the county superintendent. They were governed by a larger, elected board of directors [school board] that hired a superintendent and/or principals to manage the school or schools.
within the district. As the population of some ungraded school districts grew, they 'changed their status to graded; this may, or may not, have resulted in a numbering change. Graded schools were grouped into several legislatively-mandated categories: independent consolidated, joint independent consolidated, consolidated. While these distinctions are important for legal purposes, they generally do not affect the numbering systems. Most of the graded schools eventually became known as Independent school districts.

School district records for graded schools are cataloged in the Minnesota State Archives under the county and thereunder numerically by district number. Paper inventories are filed in the Local Records Notebooks similarly. For graded schools whose corporate existence ended before September 1957, titling and cataloging follow the same paths as the ungraded schools above. For graded schools whose corporate existence continued beyond September 1957, see independent districts below.

Other numbering and titling procedures affect access to school records:

Occasionally the boundary of a school district crossed county lines. Such districts were known as joint districts. These districts could be graded or ungraded. Occasionally, these districts had only one number, usually the number assigned by the county with the major share of the district property. However, frequently, each county assigned a separate number to that portion of the district within its borders. The school district would normally be titled something like "Joint School District No. 65 of Houston County and No. 69 of Fillmore County (Black Hammer Township)." Paper inventories are filed in the Local Records Notebooks under the county with a majority of district property (the first county in the school district's title) and interfiled in numerical order with the county's other school districts. Subject headings are created for all counties and school district numbers represented in joint districts. There are examples in Minnesota where joint districts have at least three individual numbers.

If a portion of the county were not part of an organized school district, the county board of commissioners had responsibility for the education of students in that area. This territory was known as Unorganized Territory and the school district was the Unorganized School District. It was governed by county officials and under the direct supervision of the County Superintendent of Schools. Some unorganized districts were given numbers (e.g. Beltrami County School District No. 119 was the unorganized school district of that county; Mahnomen School District No. 0 was its unorganized district). Occasionally, the Unorganized Territory contained many schools; these schools may have been numbered or named. If schools in an Unorganized Territory were numbered, care should be taken to not confuse that number with school district numbers that existed elsewhere within the county. The boundaries of the unorganized school districts changed frequently as new school districts were organized (and the Unorganized Territory decreased in area) or as older school districts disestablished (and the Unorganized Territory increased in area). Native American reservation land was considered part of the Unorganized Territory. Paper inventories are filed in the Local Records Notebooks under
the county and thereunder numerically (if numbered), or following the numerical sequence under Unorganized School District.

6 September 1957 — 30 June 1971:

Effective 6 September 1957, the Commissioner of Education issued regulations assigning new numbers to nearly all existing school districts in the state (pursuant to Laws 1957, chapter 947). These numbers were assigned according to a statewide system so that duplication of numbers would not exist. The ungraded common districts became common school districts and the myriad of graded districts generally became independent districts. Existing school districts, except for the special districts identified below, were all renumbered into two sequences, one for common districts and one for independent districts. For common districts the extant districts were arranged first alphabetically by county and thereunder numerically by pre-1957 county-assigned number. These districts were then assigned new numbers beginning with Common School District 20 (formerly Aitkin County School District No. 2) and continuing through Common School District 2760 (formerly Yellow Medicine County District No. 106). Not every number in this sequence was assigned, as numerical gaps were left after a few counties. For independent districts the extant districts were arranged first alphabetically by county and thereunder alphabetically by place. The districts were then assigned new numbers beginning with Independent School District No. 1 (formerly Aitkin County Independent Consolidated School District No. 1 of Aitkin) and continuing through Independent School District No. 896 (formerly Yellow Medicine County School District No. 7 Consolidated of Wood Lake). Gaps in the numerical system were retained at the end of each county's districts, presumably for the addition of new numbers. As new independent districts were formed, these districts received numbers either at the end of each county sequence or after the Yellow Medicine County sequence.

School district records of Common Schools that continued into the post-September 1957 period and, therefore, that bear two numbers are cataloged under the county and thereunder numerically by the post-1957 number (if the records extend post-1957). An annotation of the post-1957 number follows the pre-1957 number (e.g. Isanti County. School District No. 33/675, Wyanett Township). Paper inventories are filed in the Local Records Notebooks under the county and thereunder numerically by the pre-1957 number. [The logic behind this filing is that the pre-1957 number was used for the greater share of the district's existence and most patrons will know the district by its pre-1957 number and not its post-1957 number]. For the purposes of cataloging, the main entry is "Minnesota. Common School District No. 675 (Wyanett: Township)."

School district records of Independent Schools that continued into the post-September 1957 period are cataloged under the post-1957 number (e.g. Anoka County. Independent School District No. 15, St. Francis). Usually this practice is followed even if the records currently held by the State Archives do not extend beyond 1957. An accompanying agency history record will document the
genealogy of district number changes, if one has been prepared. Additional subject headings are made for the various numbers that may have been used by the district in its history. Paper inventories are filed in the Local Records Notebooks alphabetically by county and thereunder numerically by post-1957 number. For the purposes of cataloging, the main entry is "Minnesota. Independent School District No. 15 (Saint Francis)."

**After 30 June 1971:**

Effective 1 July 1971, the Commissioner of Education was to assign to an independent district all common school districts that had not already consolidated into an independent district. This effectively ended the common school system. Independent districts continued the same numbers as before, except that when two or more independent districts consolidated they were usually given a new number.

As consolidations and alternatives to single independent districts emerged in the delivery of education new three and four digit numbers were assigned to districts that were involved in combinations and consolidations, to education districts whose jurisdiction overlapped several independent districts, and to other sorts of cooperative vocational, special education, or other educational service delivery entities.

*Records of independent school districts from this period continue to be identified, filed, and cataloged the same as prior to 1971.*

*Records of special districts are usually identified with the county of the headquarters of the district or entity (e.g. Kandiyohi County. Glacial Ridge Cooperative Center No. 951, Willmar). The paper inventories are filed in the schools section of that county's holdings in numerical order. For the purposes of cataloging, the main entry generally is "Glacial Ridge Vocational Cooperative Center No. 951 (Willmar, Minnesota)."

**Special districts:**

Special school districts were established directly by legislative act or by the granting of a home rule charter to a city that included authority to establish a school district. Some of these special districts were renumbered into a special district sequence by the Commissioner's directive of 6 September 1957. The following special school districts are known to have existed:

- Minneapolis Special School District No. 1 became Special School District No. 1 in 1957 and remains so currently.
- Special School District No. 1 of Ramsey County (St. Paul) became Special School District No. 2 in 1957 and eventually Independent School District No. 625.
Duluth Special District No. 3 became Special School District No. 3 in 1957 and eventually Independent School District No. 709.

Special School No. 8 of Olmsted County (Rochester) became Special School District No. 4 in 1957 and eventually Independent School District No. 535.

Winona Special School District No. 5 became Special School District No. 5 in 1957 and eventually Independent School District No. 861.

Special School District of Dakota County (South St. Paul) became Special School District No. 6 in 1957 and remains so currently.

Records of special school districts are cataloged in varying ways. The paper inventories for records of the Minneapolis and St. Paul school districts are filed in separate notebooks in the Local Records Notebooks after Hennepin and Ramsey counties, respectively. Inventories for the other special districts are filed numerically within the records of other school districts in the county under their latest independent or special district number. For the purposes of cataloging, most main entries appear something like "Minneapolis Public Schools."

Other Sources:

The conversion chart of old and new numbers issued by the Commissioner of Education renumbering extant districts in Minnesota in 1957 is available in the Weyerhaeuser Room of the MHS library, filed at the end of the State Agency Notebooks.

Numerous potential sources exist for data on school district numbering. Individual county histories may contain information on school districts that existed in the county (e.g. Isanti County, Minnesota, 1985: an illustrated history, [Reading Room F612.176B47 1985] by Vernon E. Bergstrom and Marilyn McGriff contains a list of all district organized in the county and when they were folined). The school district portion of the Works Projects Administration (WPA) Historical Records Survey [BC8.1 .W956 — boxes 276-282] may contain lists of the establishment dates, boundaries, and other data about individual districts. For any given county, these lists may be comprehensive, sporadic, or non-existent. The Annals of Minnesota in the same collection [boxes 218-225] may contain extracts of county board proceedings that frequently list the establishment dates of school districts. The Educational Directory of Minnesota (and its successor titles,, variously cataloged under LB2803,M6) list school districts in Minnesota from at least 1905. A series of school district maps, [1910]-[1940s], is separately cataloged in the Education Department records; these maps show school district boundaries. Finally, records of the County Superintendent of Schools, cataloged by county, may contain data on the organization or history of individual districts.