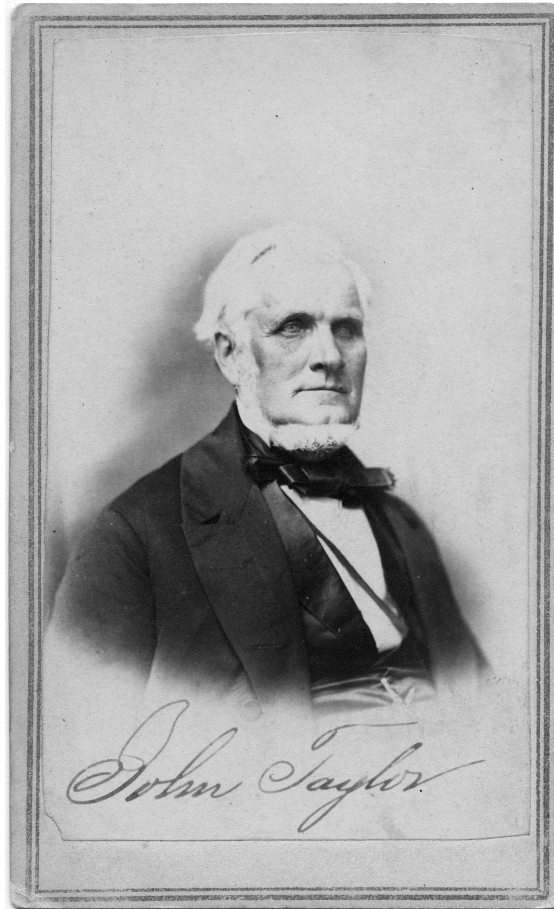




*Picture of John Taylor taken about the time of Brigham Young's death in 1877. John Taylor, who served from 1877 to 1881 as territorial superintendent of district schools, worked during troubled times to move the Church "far ahead of the outside world in everything pertaining to learning of every kind," making a valuable contribution to the educational legacy of the Church. (Savage and Ottinger, Church History Library.)*

Scott C. Esplin

13



## MOVING ZION “FAR AHEAD”: JOHN TAYLOR’S EDUCATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

ADDRESSING an assembled audience in Ephraim, Utah, in 1879, the Utah territorial superintendent of district schools audaciously predicted, “You will see the day that Zion will be as far ahead of the outside world in everything pertaining to learning of every kind as we are to-day in regard to religious matters. You mark my words, and write them down, and see if they do not come to pass.”<sup>1</sup> Bold in its assertion, the prophecy assumes added weight when one considers its source, President John Taylor, who served from 1877 to 1881 concurrently as territorial superintendent of district schools and President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and Church President. The statement reflects much about both the man and his educational philosophy. President Taylor worked during troubled times to move the Church “far

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## CHAMPION OF LIBERTY

ahead of the outside world in everything pertaining to learning of every kind,” making a valuable contribution to the educational legacy of the Church.

## EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Like other Church leaders of his day, Taylor’s educational philosophy is rooted in his personal experience. He was largely self-taught, a product of the limited educational opportunities available in the early nineteenth century. Born in Milnthorpe, England, on November 1, 1808, he was reared in an educated home by his parents, James and Agnes Taylor. The Taylors sent John to a local school until the age of fourteen, when he took an apprenticeship with a cooper in Liverpool. The business failed, so John worked as a carpenter for the remainder of his teenage years.<sup>2</sup> Though this ended his formal education, the importance of these practical skills is evident in the later statements by President Taylor regarding education.

Leaving England for Canada in 1831, Taylor used his training in carpentry to support a young family. Introduced to the restored gospel by Parley P. Pratt, his personal and professional life changed forever upon joining the Church in May 1836. His life quickly became one of full-time service to God’s kingdom when he was called to the apostleship less than two years later. Recognizing his talent with language, the Prophet Joseph appointed John Taylor as editor of local newspapers in Nauvoo including the *Times and Seasons* and the *Nauvoo Neighbor*. Acknowledging the good accomplished through wise use of the media, Taylor continued his publishing efforts as a missionary in Europe in the early 1850s, editing a newspaper in France (*Étoile du Déseret*, The Star of Deseret) and in Germany (*Zions Panier*, Zion’s Banner).<sup>3</sup>

### *Moving Zion “Far Ahead”: John Taylor’s Educational Contributions*

Taylor continued to use his literary expertise in his assignment to proclaim the Church’s message by publishing the *Mormon*, a New York newspaper “devoted to the cause and interests of the ‘Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,’ and . . . the advocate of its claims, social, moral, political, and religious.”<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the paper’s prospectus declared that it would “treat upon all subjects which the Editor may deem interesting, instructive, or edifying to his readers, among which will be science, literature, and the general news of the day.”<sup>5</sup> This blending of religion, morality, literature, and current events typified the melding of the secular and the spiritual in John Taylor’s worldview. Praising the success of Taylor’s endeavors with the *Mormon*, President Brigham Young declared, “With regard to brother John Taylor, I will say that he has one of the strongest intellects of any man that can be found; he is a powerful man, he is a mighty man, and we may say that he is a powerful editor, but I will use a term to suit myself, and say that he is one of the strongest editors that ever wrote.”<sup>6</sup> These editorial experiences didn’t just endear John Taylor to President Young, however. They also molded Elder Taylor into a gifted wordsmith and staunch defender of the faith, two traits he would use in defending Church interests in education in Utah for the remainder of his life.

### ATTACKS ON UTAH’S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Returning from New York in 1857, John Taylor found in Utah a territory that was undergoing a significant transition. Isolated for the first decade of its existence, life in Utah changed due to increased religious diversity. The Utah War, the discovery of precious metals in the West, and the eventual completion of the transcontinental railroad ended forever the homogeny that

once dominated the region. A religiously diverse population demanded greater social participation, especially in the Latter-day Saint-dominated schools. Additionally, opponents of the Church saw education as a way to influence Latter-day Saint youth. Filling the void of secondary education in the territory, a series of Protestant mission schools emerged, causing one of their missionary educators to brag, "The Mormon people will send their children to our day schools, and Brigham and his bishops can't prevent it."<sup>7</sup> In some regards, the boast paid off, because from 1869 to 1890 as many as ninety of these mission schools operated in the Utah Territory, employing at their peak over two hundred teachers and enrolling over seven thousand students.<sup>8</sup> Significant impact was made by these private schools in Salt Lake City, which reported in 1878 the lowest percentage of public school attendance (29 percent) in the entire region. This figure, the *Deseret News* observed, was "undoubtedly attributable to so many children being sent by their parents to mission and select schools."<sup>9</sup>

Fresh off his defense of the Church with the editorial pen and heralded as one of the chief intellects within the faith, John Taylor turned to the pulpit in defense of Church interests in education. In fact, most of his familiar statements regarding education originate in this context of external opposition. For a period of nearly three decades, including a four-year stint in public office overseeing education, he consistently addressed the topic. After defending the faith abroad, education at home became one of his chief areas of defense.

## EDUCATIONAL CONTENT

Surprisingly, though opponents attacked the perceived spiritual nature of Church curriculum, one of the main topics addressed by Taylor in his messages on education emphasized the breadth of its content. Acknowledging his own lack of formal schooling, he stressed that youth in the Church were expected to be highly educated in things both spiritual and secular. As Church President, he autobiographically remarked:

Sometimes the Lord chooses such men as Brother Woodruff and myself to do His bidding, as He in former times called fishermen and others, and inspired them with intelligence sufficient, at least, to cope with and confound the wise. I think there is a Scripture that says that He chooses the weak things of the world to bring to naught the things that are, that no flesh might glory in His presence. That is true, . . . but we cannot expect the Lord to do this always, it is for us to do our part, that is to cultivate our intellectual faculties and to prepare ourselves to be used by Him.<sup>10</sup>

God can, indeed, "pour out upon His people knowledge and inspire them with wisdom," Taylor continued, but "that time is yet to come." Until then, "we must prepare ourselves to act in that position," he concluded, "and the way to do it is to commence with our children."<sup>11</sup>

Emphasizing his point, Taylor went so far as to outline the various secular topics that must be blended with the spiritual to form a complete education. "We should seek to know more about ourselves and our bodies," he declared. "We should become acquainted with the physiology of the human system."

## CHAMPION OF LIBERTY

We must study from the best books. . . . Train your children to be intelligent and industrious. . . . They should also be taught regarding the earth on which they live, its properties, and the laws that govern it. . . . They should know how to cultivate the soil in the best possible manner; they should know how to raise the best kind of fruits adapted to the soil and climate; they should be induced to raise the best kinds of stock, and to care for them properly. . . . Again, the subject of architecture should receive attention from you; and your children should be encouraged to improve in the building of houses, and not be satisfied to merely copy after what their fathers did in the days of their poverty. . . . It is highly necessary that we should learn to read and write and speak our own language correctly; and where people are deficient themselves in education they should strive all the more to see that the deficiency be not perpetuated in their offspring.<sup>12</sup>

Summarizing his philosophy of blending both secular and spiritual education, Taylor concluded, "Improvement in all things relating to our spiritual and temporal welfare should be our aim in life, and we should encourage in our children this desire to improve."<sup>13</sup>

Though supporting the educational content of his day, Taylor's educational philosophy did differ on the question of priorities. He found fault, for example, with education that lacked eternal utility, observing, "That education which but amounts to a little outward appearance and applies only to a few conveniences of this life is very far short of that education and intelligence which immortal beings ought to be in possession of."<sup>14</sup> Attacking educational elitism, he said, "In relation to the education of the world generally, a great amount of it is of very little value, consisting more of words than ideas; and whilst men

*Moving Zion "Far Ahead": John Taylor's Educational Contributions*

are verbose in their speaking or writing, you have to hunt for ideas or truth like hunting for a grain of wheat among piles of chaff or rubbish."<sup>15</sup> Taylor called this education of the world "fried froth, . . . fried bubbles, or the bubbles of learned men."<sup>16</sup>

His attacks on the educational systems of his day offered specific examples. "Our lawyers, doctors, and priests," he observed, "make use of terms that nobody can understand but the initiated. If you study medicine, law, or botany, and many of the sciences, you must study Latin first, because the doctors and professors make use of that language to convey their ideas in; and the calculation is for all except men of science or linguists to be befogged and bewildered,—yes, all except the initiated few who have been able to bestow the same amount of time as they have in learning some of the dead languages. Whom does their learning benefit? Certainly not the multitude."<sup>17</sup> Emphasizing that "the education of men ought to be adapted to their positions, both as temporal and eternal beings," Taylor noted that "it is well to understand the arts and sciences; it is well to understand language and history; it is well to understand agriculture, to be acquainted with mechanics, and to be instructed in everything that is calculated to promote the happiness, the wellbeing, and the comfort of the human family."<sup>18</sup> However, he prioritized this philosophy, concluding, "We consider, as we are eternal beings, that things pertaining to eternity are of a great deal more importance than the evanescent transitory things pertaining to time and sense, which speedily pass away."<sup>19</sup>

As a remedy for misplaced educational priorities, Taylor advocated an education blended with the spiritual, aimed at enlightening all:

## CHAMPION OF LIBERTY

This is the difference between the system that we have embraced and the systems of the world—they are of man, this is of God. Among the Gentiles, they tread upon one another and ride into power and influence on the ruin of others; and they do not care who sinks, if they swim. The kingdom of God exalts the good, blesses all, enlightens all. . . .

Do you repudiate education, then? No—not at all. I appreciate all true intelligence, whether moral, social, scientific, political, or philosophical; but I despise the folly that they hang on to it and the folly that they call education.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, a practical education that brought knowledge to all is one of the hallmarks of President Taylor’s educational philosophy. “I will tell you my idea of true intelligence and true eloquence,” he summarized. “It is not as some people do—to take a very small idea and use a great many grandiloquent words without meaning—something to befog and mystify it with—something to tickle the ear and please the imagination only: that is not true intelligence. But it is true intelligence for a man to take a subject that is mysterious and great in itself, and to unfold and simplify it so that a child can understand it.”<sup>21</sup>

## TEACHER SELECTION

While President Taylor frequently addressed educational content in his philosophy, he also recognized the influence of the teacher on the learning process. In fact, some of his most fiery remarks were reserved for the selection of educators themselves. Like his comments on content, these statements are best understood when considered within their historical context.

During Utah’s first decade as a territory, Church leaders including Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, John Taylor,

*Moving Zion "Far Ahead": John Taylor's Educational Contributions*

Wilford Woodruff, and George Q. Cannon dominated most aspects of pioneer life. Holding key ecclesiastical positions, they acted as economic and societal gatekeepers, influencing settlement patterns, private enterprise, and political thought. Education also fell within their purview. Under their direction a distinct, Latter-day Saint–dominated educational practice emerged. Schools existed, public in name because they served the general populace, but controlled by ecclesiastical leaders who held keys to the joint church and schoolhouse doors and who hired those that taught therein. From the lowest grade school to the territory's university in its capital city, all public education in Utah was a Latter-day Saint education.

As Utah became more diverse, some sought to break this power grip. Hoping to lure away Latter-day Saint youth, Protestant church groups led a charge to education. Formally trained teachers came to Utah, appealing to parents with their educational expertise. Parental support of these inroads caused John Taylor to react with some of his most emphatic statements regarding teacher selection. Leading the Church following Brigham Young's death, John Taylor declared:

We want to study also the principles of education, and to get the very best teachers we can to teach our children; see that they are men and women who fear God and keep his commandments. We do not want men or women to teach the children of the Latter-day Saints who are not Latter-day Saints themselves. Hear it, you Elders of Israel and you school-trustees! We want none of these things. Let others who fear not God take their course; but it is for us to train our children up in the fear of God. God will hold us responsible for this trust. Hear it, you Elders of Israel and you fathers and you mothers!<sup>122</sup>

Imputing evil motives to some of the designs of non-LDS teachers, Taylor warned: "Whatever you do, be choice in your selection of teachers. We do not want infidels to mould the minds of our children. They are a precious charge bestowed upon us by the Lord, and we cannot be too careful in rearing and training them. I would rather have my children taught the simple rudiments of a common education by men of God, and have them under their influence, than have them taught in the most abstruse sciences by men who have not the fear of God in their hearts."<sup>23</sup>

His preoccupation with the appointment of good teachers seems rooted in the experiences that had shaped him. An eyewitness to the brutal opposition faced by the Church during its early years, President Taylor and other Church leaders of his day developed a Church-versus-the-world mentality. This worldview, summarized in a favorite phrase, "The kingdom of God or nothing," influenced his perspective of education.<sup>24</sup> Sensing a threat to the children of the Saints, President Taylor lashed back. "Shall we allow them to destroy us?" he asked. "No," he responded. "Shall we allow our children to be taught by them? No, never by them, for they know not the way of life, and are enemies of God and his laws. God has given unto us children, and he not only expects obedience from us, but expects us, as he did Abraham, to command our children after us to obey the Lord. Then do not let us give them over to the powers of darkness to be taught by the enemies of God and His people."<sup>25</sup> Summarizing his rationale, President Taylor concluded, "Shall we, after going to the ends of the earth to gather people to Zion, in order that they may learn more perfectly of His ways and walk in His paths, shall we then allow our children to be at the mercy of those who would lead them down to death again? God forbid! Let our teachers be men of God, men of honor and integrity, and let us afford our children such learning as will

*Moving Zion "Far Ahead": John Taylor's Educational Contributions*

place our community in the front ranks in educational as well as religious matters."<sup>26</sup>

One humorous incident shared publicly by President Taylor seems to illustrate the distrust he had in the educational motives of some. Hoping to drive home the point about hiring Latter-day Saint teachers, President Taylor revealed, "I heard a statement of a circumstance said to have transpired in one of those schools in Salt Lake City, which was something like this; A teacher interrogating the children of a certain school asked—Who is the great false prophet of the 19th century? In answering a child mentioned John Taylor. I was a little amused at it; although I suppose it was intended that they should have given the name of Joseph Smith, but the little one made a mistake." Though finding the exchange somewhat humorous, President Taylor concluded, "But what of the idea of our children attending the schools of people who teach and catechise them in this way? Don't you think it rather humiliating? I think we are descending very low when we can submit to their tuition. We do not want to partake of their feelings nor contract their ways, nor to be degraded with either their social or religious principles."<sup>27</sup>

President Taylor demanded not only the hiring of Latter-day Saint teachers but also their support. Speaking "with regard to [the] common schools," as both President of the Quorum of the Twelve and territorial superintendent of district schools, Taylor remarked, "When you get good teachers you should appreciate them, and you should co-operate with them in their endeavors to teach our youth; and then see that they are properly remunerated for their services."<sup>28</sup> In addition to their financial support, President Taylor encouraged the improvement of facilities. "I hope that this whole country will go at this matter in all good faith," he declared. "And where you lack good school-houses put

## CHAMPION OF LIBERTY

them up; and when you have already the school-house, but lack the furniture, get it and try to make the school-house comfortable for the children.”<sup>29</sup> Answering critics who argued against such excess, President Taylor countered, “We need to pay more attention to educational matters, and do all we can to procure the services of competent teachers.” Explaining his rationale, Taylor concluded, “Some people say, we cannot afford to pay them. You cannot afford not to pay them; you cannot afford not to employ them.”<sup>30</sup>

## EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS

Not only did John Taylor speak publicly regarding his educational philosophy, he also worked openly to implement it. As mentioned, Taylor served from 1877 to 1881 as territorial superintendent of district schools, a period overlapping with his leading the Church following Brigham Young’s death in 1877. Even after relinquishing the office because of his added burdens as Church President, Taylor maintained a hand in education in the territory through his successor, L. John Nuttall, his personal secretary and son-in-law. The detailed records of the Utah territorial superintendent of district schools created by John Taylor during this era reveal much about the development of education in Utah as well as the work he and others performed in overseeing its administration. They include fiscal records, statistics on student populations, teacher demographics, and details regarding school buildings.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to administering the finances and communicating with local school officials, a lasting component of Taylor’s work as territorial superintendent are the two biennial reports he produced, summarizing the years 1876 through 1879. These two publications of more than fifty pages each reflect the condition

*Moving Zion "Far Ahead": John Taylor's Educational Contributions*

of education in the region during his tenure. Importantly, in Taylor's day they helped inform the nation about the population of Utah, so that, as the *Deseret News* remarked, no "sane person can study [them] without coming to the conclusion that the people of Utah have been grossly misrepresented by their enemies in regard to their estimate of the benefits of education and their efforts to establish and maintain schools that all their children may receive the benefits of such tuition as will fit them for an intelligent assumption of all the duties of cified [sic] life."<sup>32</sup> That Taylor viewed the national reach of these reports is evident by his and Nuttall's exchanging copies with school officials in states across the Union.

The biennial reports also reveal the amount of work Taylor put into his position, remarking, as the 1878–79 report does, on his personal visits to Cache, Box Elder, Weber, Davis, Tooele, Salt Lake, Utah, Juab, and Sanpete counties to attend to educational matters. Additionally, they record his enlisting the aid of prominent Utah educators, including Karl G. Maeser, John W. Taylor, Junius F. Wells, Milton H. Hardy, Louis F. Monch, and John R. Park, in visiting schools throughout the region.<sup>33</sup> Though Taylor's accounts detail more the labors of other men than his own, Nuttall's report for 1880–81 is less modest, praising Taylor by reporting, "My predecessor, Hon. John Taylor, has been very energetic in the discharge of his labors and in personally visiting the various parts of the Territory during the past two years." Nuttall continues, describing these visits:

On the 27th day of October last, in company with the Hon. John Taylor, my predecessor, and others, I started on an extended tour throughout the counties of Utah, Juab, Millard, Beaver, Iron, Washington, Kane, Piute, Sevier and Sanpete; on

## CHAMPION OF LIBERTY

which occasion I made it my duty, as also a pleasure, to become more acquainted and meet with the county superintendents of schools, with trustees, teachers and many of the leading citizens who are interested in the cause of education, and so far as possible, entered into the merits of the subject as pertains to their several counties and districts, their schools, schoolhouses, grounds, methods of teaching, necessities for competent teachers, etc., making special reference to the duties of the county superintendents, trustees and teachers in regard to the growth and further advancement of the children in their moral and educational training, also in making such recommendations as seemed most beneficial in the premises.<sup>34</sup>

In spite of reports to the contrary, it is evident from these records that the Church and its leaders, including John Taylor, worked diligently to improve education in the territory.

On these visits and through correspondence from school officials, Taylor learned directly about the challenges facing Utah education. In his 1880 report for Morgan County, for example, county superintendent James H. Mason informed Taylor, "Owing to the destitution caused by last year's drought, and grasshoppers, schools have been but poorly supported, several districts holding school but a few days. Diphtheria and measles, also kept the people at a disadvantage."<sup>35</sup> From similar reports, Taylor also learned about the failures he so frequently lamented in his address. In 1880, Superintendent W. P. Nebeker of Rich County wrote Taylor, "It has too often been the case that parties have been elected trustees against their will, who then have barely paid sufficient attention to the matter to secure the Territorial Apportionment and thereby avoid public censure."<sup>36</sup> However, Taylor also learned of successes like those reported from Cache

*Moving Zion "Far Ahead": John Taylor's Educational Contributions*

County: "A good frame school house has been completed this year in Smithfield. Wellsville has finished a good rock school house. Several others will be finished next year."<sup>37</sup>

Taylor's legacy also includes direction for the emerging Church schools of the era. Though Brigham Young's financial contributions established Brigham Young Academy in Provo and Brigham Young College in Logan and Wilford Woodruff's 1888 directive established the expansive academy system that included Weber, Snow, Dixie, and over thirty other academies Churchwide, Taylor's hand in Church education between these two pioneers deserves acknowledgement. In fact, holding public office, the overlapping nature of Taylor's spiritual and secular duties is evident in his annual reports themselves, each of which devote several pages to the progress of Brigham Young Academy and Brigham Young College.

After serving four years in public office, the burdens of Church presidency forced Taylor's resignation as a school official. Announcing the change, he remarked, "While I fully appreciate the kind consideration and confidence which have prompted the placing of my name for this position, . . . in view of the many other responsibilities which devolve upon me, I deem it better for me to respectfully decline the nomination."<sup>38</sup> Relinquishing the office to his secretary, L. John Nuttall, Taylor found that opposition continued to increase against Church influence in politics. In connection with the antipolygamy legislation of the decade, the territorial office of superintendent of district schools was made appointive rather than elective with the Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887. Doing so removed control of public schools from the hands of elected officials like Taylor and placed it instead in the hands of federally approved overseers.

## CHAMPION OF LIBERTY

In preparation for the loss of Church control over education, Taylor spent his final years encouraging separate Church-run private schools among the Saints. A year prior to his death in 1887, President Taylor and his counselors in the First Presidency issued two epistles regarding education, both encouraging a separate Church system. In the first, similar to his earlier statements outlining his philosophy of education, President Taylor declared:

One of the latest movements has in view the revocation of all certificates given to school teachers who are members of the Church of Jesus Christ, which means the placing of our children, by the help of our taxes, under the tuition of those who would gladly eradicate from their minds all love and respect for the faith of their fathers. The duty of our people under these circumstances is clear; it is to keep their children away from the influence of the sophisms of infidelity and the vagaries of the sects. Let them, though it may possibly be at some pecuniary sacrifice, establish schools taught by those of our faith, where, free from the trammels of State aid, they can unhesitatingly teach the doctrines of true religion combined with the various branches of a general education.<sup>39</sup>

The second epistle, delivered in October 1886, even more clearly outlines Taylor's final vision for education among his people. "It is pleasing to notice the increased feeling of anxiety on the part of the Saints," he observed, "to have their children educated in schools where the doctrines of the Gospel and the precious records which God has given us can be taught and read. Our children should be indoctrinated in the principles of the Gospel from their earliest childhood." Discussing again his philosophy regarding educational content, he continued, "[Our children] should be made familiar with the contents of the Bible,

*Moving Zion "Far Ahead": John Taylor's Educational Contributions*

the Book of Mormon and the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. These should be their chief text books, and everything should be done to establish and promote in their hearts genuine faith in God, in His Gospel and its ordinances, and in His works. But under our common school system this is not possible." In response to this concern, President Taylor offered his solution:

In Salt Lake City, we understand, an effort is now being made to establish a school of this character, and, we are informed, the prospect for its success is very encouraging. The Brigham Young Academy, at Provo, and the Brigham Young College, at Logan, are both doing excellent work in this direction and should be patronized and sustained by the Latter-day Saints. In no direction can we invest the means God has given us to better advantage than in the training of our children in the principles of righteousness and in laying the foundation in their hearts of that pure faith which is restored to the earth. We would like to see schools of this character, independent of the District School system, started in all places where it is possible.<sup>40</sup>

While he didn't live to see its complete establishment, Taylor's desire for schools independent of the public system was begun in earnest a year after his death by his successor, Wilford Woodruff.

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY  
AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Though not as well recognized in educational history as Brigham Young, Karl G. Maeser, and Wilford Woodruff, John Taylor left a lasting mark on the face of education within the Church. For a period of nearly thirty years he spoke repeatedly on the subject, emphasizing the need for students trained in the

## CHAMPION OF LIBERTY

secular and the spiritual, with a priority first on those things that would further the kingdom of God. In addition to discussing the content, he also encouraged the hiring of teachers who would model, through testimony and action, the ideals of the restored gospel, a practice championed by later Church educational leaders. Leading by example, he served the territory in public office, shaping the public and private school systems of the region by his administration. Finally, as the Church lost influence over public education among its people, he laid the groundwork for a separate Church-sponsored educational system. That system continues to influence thousands of students in the form of institutions such as Brigham Young University–Provo, Brigham Young University–Idaho, Weber State University, Snow College, Dixie College, College of Eastern Arizona, and dozens of high schools across the Intermountain West that had their beginnings as Church-sponsored academies. As superintendent of district schools and more importantly as a prophet, seer, and revelator, John Taylor prophesied that Zion would be as far ahead of the outside world in education as it was in religious matters. Spending his life trying to achieve this prophecy, John Taylor passed along a vision of educational excellence that the Church and its members still seek to bring to pass.

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*Moving Zion “Far Ahead”: John Taylor’s Educational Contributions*

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## CHAMPION OF LIBERTY

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