

ESSEX COUNTY.

Charles M. Davis, Superintendent.

In obedience to law, I have the honor to present the following report.

The sentiment of the people of this county, in favor of educating the children in free public schools, has steadily advanced during the past year. This can be seen from what has been done, and from what is now under way, but not yet completed. A comparison of the present statistical report, with my last, will show a gain in the following respects:

There were then fourteen districts in which the schools were not entirely free; there are now but seven, and in most of these steps have been taken towards abolishing the rate-bill system.

The condition of the buildings has much improved \$25,000 having been raised for building, repairing and furnishing; an increase of \$4,000 over the sum raised last year. The value of school property shows an increase of \$18,250. The total amount of money raised from all sources is \$65,404.87; more than double that of the previous year.

The average attendance of scholars has increased 262. I do not know of a more suitable place than this, to mention the name of Florence Headly, a girl of twelve years of age, who is reported as having attended every session of the school during the year, in Irvington District, No. 31.

The number of teachers employed at any one time, during the year ending August 31, 1868, was 72; during last year, 94.

The average pay to male teachers has increased from \$60.55 to \$76.44, or 26 per cent.; to female teachers, from \$33.31 to \$34.92, scarcely 5 per cent. It is proper just here to remark, that school officers generally, feel that woman should receive as much pay as man, for the same work if done well; and this is the usual practice. But there are fewer male teachers than female (24 to 53) and as the highest positions are held by them, their average pay is much greater. The largest salary paid to any Principal, is that of Montclair district No. 8, being \$2,000; in the same school the Vice Principal, a lady, receives \$1,000.

There is an increasing inquiry for good teachers: the school officers are learning the value and scarcity of such, and examine more strictly into the character and qualifications of the candidates. The supply is not always equal to the demand. The name of a good teacher never remains long on any list of applicants, for the school officers are getting enlarged ideas of a teacher's value; and the teachers themselves see that the standard is rising. The examinations are much more strict. I never give or recognize a complimentary certificate. I regret that I have not yet seen my way clear to hold teachers' institutes. It would tell well on teachers and schools. There are under my charge, forty districts, in one of which, (Woodside No. 1,) there is no school house as yet; in another, (Bloomfield, No. 7,) there are three. The principle on which the latter district acts, is worthy of note. It occupies the greater part of the township, having 919 children of 1030, in the whole township. In the centre of the district is a school house, under the charge of a male principal with eight assistants. Near each extremity is a primary school, in charge of two teachers, for the smaller children of the neighborhood. The advantages of this plan are that the

smaller children do not go so far to school, fewer congregate in one building; and the people of each neighborhood become personally interested in a school which they consider their own. It is expected that the other district of the township will soon be united with this. No other district pursues this method. In East Orange, however, a somewhat similar arrangement is meditated, or rather an improvement upon it. It is to erect a high school building near the centre of the township, to receive scholars from the present schools, upon passing a satisfactory examination.

The public school at Montclair (District No. 8.) deserves honorable mention in my report. The value of school property in this district, is greater than that of all the districts in any other township in the county. It pays higher salaries, thus securing the best ability and attainments. And it gives to its scholars advantages not surpassed by the high schools of our cities. The example of such districts as those to which I have referred, is felt by those more remote, which though unable to compete with them, still are led to imitate according to their ability.

The districts lying near the cities of Newark and Orange, are rich, and able to sustain good schools; which, also, they are striving to do. Those remote have still some of the old spirit, which would observe the strictest rules of economy, opposing any district tax, and hiring the cheapest teachers. This spirit, however, is giving way, as is shown by my statistical report.

Newark has swallowed up two districts, containing not less than 700 children, so that although there has been an increase in the whole county of 1046, there has been, of those under my care, a decrease of 341.

A confidence that the system, as established by the present law, is permanent, encourages the people to invest liberally in buildings and furniture. Minor deficiencies are tolerated in consideration of its great excellence as a whole.

I have spent almost my whole time during the past year in official work, principally in visiting districts and trustees, and informing the people of the nature and provisions of the law. I have lectured, talked and written to the people, trustees and teachers. I have also held two county meetings of trustees, with great satisfaction and benefit to all parties. I have written 717 letters on official business since May, 1868; distributed over 300 copies of the Law and State Superintendent's Reports; and an equal number of circulars issued by myself in reference to school buildings, duties of trustees, and other information, or making inquiries as to the condition of the buildings, outhouses, &c., hoping thus to stir up thought and discussion. The practical effects have been positive and good. Particulars have been given in my monthly reports.

It is evident from the foregoing statements that the cause of education by free public schools, has made decided progress in this county during the year, and is becoming fixed in the hearts of the people.