

ESSEX COUNTY.

Charles M. Davis, Superintendent.

To E. A. Apgar, State Superintendent:

In obedience to law I have the honor to present the following report:

The workings of the school law in this county, during the past year, present little that is new or striking. We have held the ground previously gained, and there has been steady progress in nearly every particular. An examination of the statistical tables will show an increase on the previous year of nearly \$106,000 in the total amount raised for school purposes; of \$345,550 in the value of school property; of 979 children on the census roll; of 851 in attendance at school; and of two weeks in the length of time the schools have been kept open. There are no "very poor" school houses in the county. Last year there were reported seven "poor" ones; this year there are three. Three new ones have been built, and four enlarged or repaired. In No. 38, in East Orange township, a building has been erected at a cost of \$20,000, including the land. Montclair, (No. 8,) has enlarged its former house at a cost of \$15,000, No. 34, (Waverly,) has built a new one at a cost of \$3,000. Nos. 13, 17 and 18, in Caldwell, have been united into one district, and are building a house to cost \$15,000; the lot, containing about three acres, was purchased for \$3,000. Other districts are making arrangements to build or repair, so that in a few years every school house in the county will be reported "good" or "very good."

The character of the schools has kept pace with that of the buildings. This is due, in no small degree, to the influence of a handsome and well-furnished house, upon teachers, pupils, and the parents themselves. But other causes have tended to produce this result. Normal and training schools are supplying better teachers than most of those who formerly taught in the district schools, and the lower departments of our graded schools. Salaries, too, are advancing, and trustees require a corresponding advance in the qualifications of the teachers. To these must be added an increased strictness in the examination of candidates. I reported in 1872, the examination of fifty-eight candidates, forty-five of whom were licensed and thirteen rejected. This year ninety-seven were examined, fifty-one licensed, and forty-six rejected. Many of the rejected were young women, who considered the teacher's calling as more honorable than manual labor, but who did not bring to it that scholarship and maturity of character which alone can make it honorable. The board of examiners feel that the limit of sixteen years of age should be advanced to at least eighteen. We are sometimes told that these examinations are no real test of a candidate's fitness for teaching, for a good scholar is liable to failure through timidity, or for some other cause; and that scholarship itself is not the only or the most important element in a successful teacher. While we assent to this, we say that scholarship is essential; that judicious examiners can, after a few trials, become well acquainted with a candidate's knowledge in spite of his timidity; and that an examiner, if he is fit for his office, does not form his opinion of a teacher's qualifications solely from the written results of the examination.

The county institute which was held in March last, in East Orange, was very successful. Only four teachers were absent, and three of those sent satisfactory excuses. Four days and evenings were occupied in the exercises. With one exception the trustees of the various districts made no deduction in the teachers' salaries, and in that one case, the clerk alone was responsible for the refusal, which act was indignantly repudiated by the district.

The influence of this gathering on the members was soon seen in an increased interest and earnestness in their work, and a more intelligent performance of it. One immediate result was the formation of a county teachers' association, which has held two meetings since then, both of which were well attended, and the proceedings conducted with great spirit.

The high school question is settling itself in our county. Two of our districts have established each a high school department, under the care of a college graduate. Two others have preparatory classes; and as soon as the number of members will admit, the regular departments will be established. This course is practicable in many of the districts east of the mountain, the population being dense enough to admit of it; the time does not seem to be very near when such departments will be needed in the rest of the county.

While a superintendent's report is expected to contain only a statement of the actual condition of educational matters in his county, permit me to present a subject that is beginning to demand our attention, and to make some suggestions in reference to the education of our younger children. There is an increasing feeling on the part of many parents, and most teachers, that our schools, as now conducted, are not suitable places for children under seven or eight years of age. The close confinement to one room and one seat for so long a time; the mechanical character of the instruction; the failure to gain the attentive eye and ear of the child; and quite often the teacher's positive ignorance of a young child's nature, all these cause our children to lose several years, during which most valuable instruction might be imparted, and useful habits of observation attained.

Our attention has been called to the claims of the Kindergarten system. There are several schools in the county conducted on this plan, with more or less success; and we are examining, inquiring and reading, that we may know whether it is desirable and practicable to connect it with our public school system as at present arranged. Our association will give it careful examination.

I would also beg leave to mention the valuable aid afforded to the cause of education by William P. Lyon, A. M., publisher and editor of the *Saturday Gazette*. This journal has a large circulation in the county, and is sent free by the publisher to every teacher under my charge. Being associate editor with him, I am brought into weekly communication with the teachers, and many of the officers and parents. Items of interest regarding the schools, buildings and districts; communications from teachers, and educational matters of general interest, are regularly published in the educational department, on which much care and attention are bestowed.

The foregoing statements and the statistical report show conclusively, that during the past year there has been steady and healthy progress in our educational affairs—in the number and condition of school houses; in the character of the schools and the instruction imparted; in the general sentiment of the people; in almost everything that pertains to our system of public instruction. There remains, however, much to be done—the improvement of the intermediate departments; a new system of instruction in most of the primary schools; the establishment of more high school departments; and a renovation of the district schools. We aim at all this, and judging from the past, we have high hopes and anticipation of future success. Supported and encouraged by a corps of teachers, many of whom possess high intellectual powers, an unusual faculty for imparting instruction and enforcing discipline, and an earnest zeal in their calling, the superintendent should attempt and expect great things.