

ESSEX COUNTY.

Charles M. Davis, Superintendent.

To E. A. Apgar, State Superintendent

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

Our county, during the past year has experienced the proverbial happiness of the people that has no history. There has been the same steady progress that has characterized our work for several years past, with little variety to mark its course. In most districts the citizens attend the school meetings in large numbers, discuss the reports with earnestness, elect good men—often the best—as trustees, demand good schools, and vote enough money to conduct them. They are beginning to appreciate the qualifications desired in a trustee; and the trustees themselves, in our large districts, are spending not only hours, but days, every week, in visiting their schools. The effect on teachers, scholars and people is very evident.

The increase of children attending the schools, makes more room necessary; but the stagnation of business, felt in every district and every family, prevents the erection of new buildings, or the enlargement of the old ones. In this strait, each district makes such temporary arrangements as best it can, hoping for better times, when full accommodations can be had for all the children of school age. The only new school house that has been built during the year is in No. 5, West Franklin, to replace the old one destroyed by fire last spring. It is a fine brick building, two stories high, and in its erection regard has been shown for the prospective, as well as present needs of the district.

The schools have been open ten months or more, with one exception, and in this case, the required nine months were observed. Circumstances justified the trustees in closing the school at the time, and not opening it again. At a meeting of the trustees of the county, held July 3d, the subject of uniformity of school terms and vacations was discussed, and the following schedule recommended to be followed, as far as possible:

Begin Monday, August 30 ; close Friday, December 24, 1875.

17 weeks	85 days.
Less two days for Thanksgiving	2
	83 "

Begin Monday, January 3, 1876; close Friday, March 25.

12 weeks	60 "
Less Washington's Birth Day	1
	59 "

Begin Monday, April 11; close Friday, July 1	60 "
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Total	202 "
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This will give two hundred and two days of actual school work; leaving a margin of two days for teachers to visit other schools, and still securing the desired ten months. Two weeks are allowed at holidays, and one in the spring; one of the latter is devoted to the institute. If any of the districts desire to begin a week later, the holiday vacation, or the one in the spring can be shortened. The schedule will be generally followed in the county, except where other arrangements were made at the closing of the schools. Among the important advantages secured by this action, is that of uniformity in the reports of attendance. At present, in some districts, holidays are reported as school days, and every scholar as in attendance; while in others, only those days are counted, on which school is actually held. The latter, I think, is the only correct course, and hereafter will be followed. In this connection it is proper to refer to an error in the report of the attendance in the the Orange schools. The whole number in attendance is reported as one thousand two hundred and eighty-five; the number of months the schools were open, ten; number of children who attended ten months, six hundred and fifteen; thus making forty-seven per cent, of the children not absent one day. The error is due to the method of counting attendance; there were six hundred and fifteen scholars present during part of every month, but not during the whole twenty days. The error was discovered too late for correction, but will not occur again.

There has been during the year a large and constantly increasing number of teachers applying for schools. The supply being so much in excess of the demand, we have been better able than ever before to engage good teachers. As fair salaries are generally paid, and trustees watch more carefully their teachers' work; as, too, our strict examinations weed out the poor scholars, we have obtained a body of well qualified and earnest workers, whose influence is felt in society as well as in the school room.

The annual institute is recognized by the people of the county as an established and valuable part of school work. It is attended by all the teachers, excuses being asked only in case of sickness, or for some equally good reason; the citizens of the district where the institute is held most hospitably entertain the teachers, and attend the meetings in large numbers, and the effect is felt in the community in calling the attention of people to the magnitude and character of the educational work of the county. And not only is interest aroused in the place of meeting, but school officers and parents from other parts of the county are present in considerable numbers. Two weeks vacation are allowed in the spring; one for the institute, the other for the teachers to rest, as the labors of the institute are as fatiguing as the work of the school room.

I have again to report the removal from our county of one of its most able and successful principals. Col. J. B. Baker, of No. 36, the eastern district of East Orange, was called last spring to a larger field of labor, in the public schools of Hartford, Connecticut. All who knew the good work which he was doing in his own district, as, also, in the county, could not but regret the separation. He was also becoming known in the state as one of its most valued educators. His assistance as a member of the board of examiners, his cheerful cooperation in the work of the county teachers' association, and his ready response to every call towards advancing educational matters, are well known and appreciated, and make his loss the more deeply felt. We should, and do, rejoice that his change is to a much larger field of labor.

Having retired from the Newark Academy, I shall, during the coming year, have more time to spend in visiting schools. In fact, the schools of the county demand the whole time of the superintendent ; the district schools, in particular, would be greatly benefited by his presence two or three times a month. This demand is more pressing than ever before.

I would invite the attention of our citizens to the statistical report, a careful study of which will show the present condition of our schools, and the progress made since the passage of the free school act. We have reason to be thankful and proud, when we consider what has been done and is now doing for the full and thorough education of our children.