

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:

Nothing unusual has marked the progress of our schools during the past year. There has been an increase of 2,328 children in the county, and of 919 in the enrollment on the school registers. There has, unfortunately, been an increase also of 1,091 in the number attending no school. Three more male, and ten female teachers have been employed. The salaries have not been seriously affected by the "hard times," although reductions have been made in a few cases.

The efficiency of our teachers increases year by year, partly in consequence of experience, and partly by the removal of the poorer ones that better ones may take their places.

Most of the schools have been open ten months—200 days; in two districts, nine months; in one, nine and one-half; and in another, only eight. Circumstances, not likely to occur again, seemed to justify the trustees in the last case. Care has been taken that the reported 200 days should not include any holidays, but represent 200 days of absolute teaching. This is now fully understood in the county, and both officers and teachers are careful to observe this regulation.

One new school house has been built in District No. 41, (West Orange), at an expense of \$5,000, including the land. The other buildings in the county have been kept in good repair.

One hundred and seventeen candidates for teachers' certificates have been examined; of these, two obtained first-grade certificates, fifteen, second grade, and fifty-seven, third grade; forty-three were rejected. The subjects in which candidates are found to be most deficient are orthography and reading. This is the more to be regretted, as these are the subjects in which almost every teacher is required to give instruction.

The work for the Centennial Exhibition engaged the attention of our schools during the winter; every school and every department contributed something towards this work. The herbarium, containing nearly 500 specimens of plants native to Essex county, contributed by one of our teachers, Mr. H. H. Rusby, received honorable notice from the judges of the exhibition.

This being the Centennial year of our republic, and the decennial of the present public school system in our State, it is an appropriate time for noticing what we have done during this decade.

Essex is one of the smallest, but, at the same time, the most populous and the most compact of all the counties in the State. It forms one of the seven Congressional Districts, Hudson being the only other county that forms a district by itself. The history and present condition of our schools have been influenced very much by our geographical situation. The Passaic rising half way across the State, runs northeasterly as far as Paterson, then bending to the south, it continues its course until it reaches Newark Bay. This river was formerly the boundary of the county on the west, north and east; but a strip has been cut off from the north to help form Passaic county. That singular geological formation known as Orange mountain, running north-east and south-west, divides Essex into two nearly equal parts. Newark city, at the mouth of the river, and also

extending along the bay, occupies a considerable part of the eastern section. This city as regards population is the thirteenth in the Union; as regards manufacturers, it is ranked third. Orange, at the foot of the mountain has about 12,000 inhabitants, and is increasing rapidly. The rest of this section is mostly covered with pleasant towns and villages, the homes of thousands whose places of business are in the neighboring cities of New York and Newark. The western part of the county is thinly settled, containing about one-sixteenth as many inhabitants as the eastern.

When the present school law was passed, in 1866, the schools of Newark had been free for ten years. Their influence upon the county outside of the city has been constantly felt, and has had its weight in the rapid organization and growth of our schools. Some of the districts near Newark rival her in the size, beauty and furnishing of their buildings, and in the character and qualifications of principals and teachers. In some of the districts on the outskirts of the county the friends of free schools have found it difficult to make much headway against the old notions of economy in such matters. Yet there is not a district in which there has not been progress. Honorable mention should be made of Caldwell, which, though lying “over the mountain,” still has surpassed all her neighbors there, and has erected and furnished a handsome building, which with its ground is valued at \$20,000.

In comparing our present condition with that of ten years ago, reference will be made only to those districts lying outside of Newark and Orange.

Following is a comparison of the condition of school houses in 1866 and 1876:

	1866	1876
Very Good	None	13
Good	6	12
Medium	8	10
Poor	17	3
Very Poor	8	none

SEATING ACCOMMODATION

	1866	1876
Good	6	28
Medium	1	1
Poor	32	9
Number of Rooms	74	153

OF WHAT CONSTRUCTED

	1866	1876
Wood	31	23
Brick	5	10
Stone	3	3
Seating Capacity	3,238	7,065
Value	\$88,280	\$336,000

These figures require no comment; the simple statement that the school property is now worth four times as much as it was ten years ago, shows that earnest work has been done. Nor has it been easily accomplished. The friends of education have had a hard contest to establish so firmly our free school system; but now very few, even of those who hindered the work, can be found among its opponents.

But buildings and furniture are of small value compared with the purpose for which they were procured. It is, therefore, with pride that we can refer to the character of our schools. Trustees seek to employ good teachers; and our teachers are generally well qualified for their positions; many of them possess very superior attainments. The result is that private schools are gradually disappearing, and the public school is becoming the place where children of all classes and conditions attain their education for citizenship of our beloved country.