

ESSEX COUNTY.

Charles M. Davis, Superintendent.

To E. A. Apgar, State Superintendent:

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

Our schools, during the year just ended, have felt the stringent times, although not to such an extent as was feared at the beginning. The interests of education are felt to be so important that our people are willing to make great sacrifices to maintain the public schools.

The school-houses have been full, for although the number of children in the county has increased, we have not been able to build one new school-house. Three have been repaired; one in Newark, one in Orange, and one in the county, outside the cities.

The census returns show an increase of 491 children; there has also been an increase of 561 in the average attendance, but the enrollment was less by 491. Ten more teachers have been employed. The salaries of teachers in some cases, remained as formerly; very few were increased, and many lessened. The average decrease in salaries of males was six per cent.; in those of females, eight per cent.

The schools of Essex county may be divided into graded, partly graded, and district schools. Seven are well graded, and offer advantages equal to those of the Grammar Schools in cities; while some of them have High School departments, where pupils are fitted for classical or scientific colleges. The four that are partly graded have made arrangements to become fully so at the beginning of the next school year. The district schools have not generally improved; a few have gone backward. Still it should be said that some of our very best teachers are found in these districts; and where this is the case, the school presents advantages of a high order. But there are people—and they generally elect trustees who represent them—who think that in these hard times a teacher's wages should be about the same as a laborer's. As the profession is now crowded, teachers can be found who possess scholarship enough to get a grade of 70, (would that 80 were required), and against whose morality nothing is known. The Superintendent, therefore, cannot refuse a certificate, and incapable teachers are employed. We are thankful that the demand for such characters is not large, and that there is not much danger of its increase. Then, again, there are districts where the trustees feel the need of better schools, but the citizens will not vote a tax for their support; \$350, or thereabouts, must support the school for a year. The really good schools have not deteriorated on account of the times; their value has been too well appreciated by the people who consider good education as among the necessities of life.

The trustees of our best graded schools hold frequent meetings of their board; often visit the schools; and give careful attention to the course of study, the character of the instruction, and the improvement of the pupils. On the other hand, in some of the outlying districts, the trustees seldom hold meetings, never visit the schools, and know nothing about them except the size of the teacher's salary. The people are so well satisfied with them that they leave the whole matter in their hands—annual school meetings and everything else. Ten years ago there were many such districts; but the number has gradually lessened, until now it is almost a personal matter to make such a statement as the above. A few years more, and their history will be deemed fiction.

A meeting of the trustees of the graded schools, held in July, proved so interesting and profitable that they resolved to meet quarterly or oftener, to consult regarding; the interests of that class of schools.

The Annual Institute was held in the Ashland District, East Orange, during the first week in April. Only one teacher was absent, and that on account of sickness. The families of the district most hospitably entertained the members at their homes, and many of them attended the meetings; so that the assembly room was always full. The chief object of the institute was—not to instruct its members in any of the branches taught in our schools—these they are supposed to be acquainted with before beginning their work—but how most successfully and in the shortest time, to instruct and train their classes.

I have been able, during the year, to make more visits to the schools, and longer ones, than ever before during my term of office. I have, consequently, gained a more thorough knowledge of the districts, and of the sentiments of the people; the good points in the schools, and their defects; and I feel more and more, that my whole time could be profitably spent in their care and supervision.