

ESSEX COUNTY.

Charles M. Davis, Superintendent.

To E. A. Apgar, State Superintendent:

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

The schools of this county have been kept open the number of months required, with one exception, No. 2, in Belleville township, being open but 8 months; the reasons for this, however, were satisfactory. The average of all the districts is $10 \frac{2}{5}$ months, and this would be higher if it were made according to the number of departments in a township, or county, instead of the number of schools. Thus: in Belleville township there are two districts; one has 42 scholars enrolled, with one teacher; the other has 239 scholars and 4 teachers. The former was open 8 months, the latter $10 \frac{1}{2}$. The average for the township is $9 \frac{1}{5}$. If the average were taken according to the number of teachers, it would be 10; if according to the children, 10.1, instead of $9 \frac{1}{5}$. Many of our schools are large, having from 4 or 5 to 20 teachers each. These are open about $10 \frac{1}{2}$ months, and also have good attendance. The small district schools, which are the deficient ones in time and attendance, (when there is any deficiency), if counted as equal, reduce averages very seriously.

There has been an increase of 452 in the number of children on the census list; 870 in the enrollment, and 462 in the average attendance.

The district tax voted was \$15,734.74 less than last year. The following statement will show the amounts received from the State, and those raised by districts, since the free-school act of 1871 went into operation:

	State.	District.	Total.
1872	\$181,598 02	\$231,292 23	\$412,890 25
1873	188,033 42	330,796 80	518,830 22
1874	190,334 88	169,697 38	360,032 26
1875	194,664 38	176,147 00	370,811 38
1876	201,307 09	132,850 00	334,157 09
1877	204,713 71	132,296 29	337,010 00
1878	194,759 49	120,279 12	315,038 61
Total	\$1,355,410 99	\$1,293,358 82	\$2,648,769 81

The census and enrollment during the same years were as follows:

	Census.	Enrollment.
1872	40,150	20,714
1873	41,129	21,565
1874	43,337	23,092
1875	47,491	23,500
1876	49,819	24,419
1877	50,310	24,832
1878	50,762	25,602

From which it will be noticed that there has been a steady increase in the number of children in the county, and also in the attendance at school. The amount of money received from all sources has varied; sometimes increasing, sometimes decreasing. During the last year, however, it was smaller than at any other time during the seven years.

No new school buildings have been erected, although there is pressing need of more accommodations. Our rooms are crowded, and some children are kept at home, who would attend if there were room. The people know this, but do not feel able to build. In most districts the amounts raised for teachers' salaries and current expenses, have been reduced to the smallest sums that will carry on the work without seriously affecting its efficiency. The buildings are kept in good repair, and in some cases improvements have been made in or around them.

There have been 183 applicants for certificates, of which 113 were rejected. This increase of rejections is not due to a decrease in scholarship on the part of teachers. Although the standard continually rises, and the examinations are becoming more strict, the teachers keep pace with the requirements and pass with even higher averages. But there has been an unusually large number of candidates who have not chosen teaching as their profession, but wish to make it a temporary resort in the "hard times." Most of these find the requirements more severe than they supposed.

There are, also, pupils in some of our schools who intend to teach, and wish to hold a certificate, whenever an opening occurs. These, at their first examination, often fail in one or more subjects, or do not have time to finish them all. They are marked as failing, although they may pass at a subsequent trial.

But buildings, furniture and grounds, and teachers of good scholarship are not all that is required. As these have improved during the last ten years, another matter of higher importance has assumed a prominent place in the education of children in the public school. The ignorant teachers are becoming gradually weeded out, and their places supplied by those possessing at least fair scholarship. Our strict examinations and rigid rules, requiring every applicant for a position to be a holder of a certificate, keep out the ignoramuses. But something more is required. If scholarship is important, character is more important. If there is to be any comparison between them, the preference should be given to character. In our graded schools there is so much machinery, so many "methods," that the teacher's individuality is becoming lost to view. Is there any way by which it can be brought into greater prominence? The State board, by its wise regulations, has elevated the standard of intellectual attainments. Can it not devise some method by which character and aptness to teach may be tested? There are in the public schools of this county many teachers who are "ensamples to the flock:" intelligent, self-controlled, well qualified for their work, and enthusiastic in its performance. We hope for the day when all will be such, and when the school arrangements and methods will bring the teacher's individual influence more to the front.

To secure this in its highest sense, less prominence must be given to text-books, and more to the subjects themselves. I find comparatively few teachers who are not more or less fettered by books. I do not advocate the abolition of these from our schools, or from any department, but it is certain that "The letter killeth; the spirit maketh alive." Fewer books and rules, and more principles, will produce better scholars and better thinkers.

As to the subjects taught, Arithmetic occupies the first place; more time is given to it than to any other study, except in primary classes. Geography receives as much time (I do not say attention) as is its due. There has been great improvement in the teaching of Reading and Spelling in most schools, but the writing and speaking of our mother tongue receives but little attention anywhere. In

our graded schools a nominal place is generally assigned it, but the results are very discouraging. Hardly a graduate from our High School departments can write an essay or oration that shows any merit in the arrangement of its parts, or in its diction, to say nothing of its conception. If we judge by fruits, and there is no other just way of judging, there is great lack of attention to this subject, or else great lack of ability in our teachers. I believe it is the former. Our teachers, if they will, can succeed in this as well as in Arithmetic, but they do not appreciate its importance; and when they do, their efforts are not as well supported by the trustees as they should be. Every child on leaving school should be able to write a friendly or business letter, and the older ones should be able to describe easily and clearly any ordinary events of their daily life. This is seldom the case, and when so, is more likely the result of natural taste or home training than of school work.

Other subjects are well taught, with the exception, perhaps, of penmanship. There are complaints from parents in many parts of the county, that their children are not taught to write well; but such great improvement has been made in this respect within a few years, and such attention is now given to it, that it is hoped there will soon be no ground for such complaints.

To sum up this report, this county is holding its own in public school education, and in many respects advancing. It is ready, as soon as business prosperity returns, to make as rapid progress in the future as it has done in the past.