

ESSEX COUNTY.

Charles M. Davis, Superintendent.

To E. A. Apgar, State Superintendent:

Sir:—In accordance with law I have the honor to present the following report regarding the state and progress of public school education in Essex county.

The statistical tables show an increase of 4,461 (eight per cent.) in the school population, of 655 in enrollment, and of 315 in average attendance. There is also an increase of about 3,000 in the number of those who attend no school. The total amount of money from all sources for public school purposes during the coming year, is about \$2,400 less than last year.

Eight male and three female teachers more than last year have been employed. The average monthly salary of the former has been reduced \$3; that of the latter, \$2.54.

There have been one hundred and sixty-four candidates examined for teachers' certificates, eighty-two of whom were licensed.

Three new school-houses have been built, one in Newark, one in Montclair, (No. 8) and one in Ashland District (No. 37, E. Orange). One has been repaired, in Newark, and one ordered to be built in South Orange, (No. 28). The one in East Orange is about a mile from the main building, for the accommodation of small children in that part of the district. The one in Montclair is more particularly referred to in Dr. Love's report, which is herewith transmitted. A Roman Catholic parochial school has been opened in Bloomfield, and has drawn away nearly two hundred children from the public school.

The Institute held last spring in Caldwell, was attended by all the teachers, and produced both pleasure at the time and profit afterward. Two valuable lessons were learned: one, the importance of industrial drawing, and how to teach it; the other, that to make any lasting impression, the attention of our institutes and associations must be centered on one subject. With few exceptions, the teachers gave their attention faithfully to the work, and carried away with them new views and knowledge of the subject presented. I am looking for some fruit next year, as a mere earnest, however, of the valuable harvest to be hereafter reaped.

The sentiment of the people, and the condition of the schools in the weak districts, are about as usual; some are better, some are worse than they were last year. They serve in some cases as training schools for teachers without experience, who leave after a year or two for better positions. There are several schools of this class, however, which have been taught for many years by young women, natives, or long residents of the neighborhood, who are doing a valuable work in both schools and society.

In the larger districts a greatly increased interest in school matters has been manifest, caused by a desire on the part of some to lessen expenses; on the part of others to secure better work. To illustrate this you will please find herewith an extended account of the course pursued by the four largest, richest and most influential districts in the county, Nos. 7, 8, 36 and 37.

A very strong movement was made last spring by opponents of the school in Montclair, (No. 8,) to make a large reduction in the expenses. If successful it would have abolished the High School Department. The district was thoroughly canvassed by both sides, and the election, (which lasted till after midnight,) resulted in a complete victory for the school.

The following letter accompanied the report of Dr. J. J. H. Love, who has for many years very earnestly and ably served the district as Clerk, will be read with interest:

MONTCLAIR, N. J., August 26, 1879.

Mr. Charles M. Davis, Superintendent Public Schools:

Dear Sir :—I have the honor herewith to transmit the annual report of School District No. 8, for the year ending August 31, 1879; and in so doing, beg leave to call your attention to the following facts:

First, That the large balance due the district is in uncollected taxes the accumulated arrears of a “special district school tax,” levied regularly for ten years; and that the greater part of this sum, owing to the uncertain tax laws of this State, will never be collected.

Second, That the average daily attendance is lower this year than for several years, on account of an extensive epidemic of mumps and measles, which prevailed during the winter and spring months, in the bounds of this district, thereby preventing in many instances whole families of children from attendance on the schools for several weeks.

Third, That during the year the district has purchased a large lot in the centre of the district, (about an acre and a half) and erected thereon a two-story brick school-house, 40 by 54 feet, with four class-rooms, capable of seating 200 grammar pupils, or 240 primary children, at a cost, for land, of \$5,000, and for buildings, to date, of \$5,000. (It will probably require \$1,000 additional to finish the building, and make it complete in all particulars.) \$6,000 of these amounts (\$10,000) was raised by taxation during the past year, and the balance procured on bond and mortgage.

Fourth, That this heavy district school tax of \$19,000 imposed during the year was paid with a promptness hitherto unknown in the history of this district. The payments for land, to the mechanics, on the contracts for building, and to teachers, were, in every instance, made at the appointed time, from cash on hand, and the trustees were not compelled, during the year, to borrow from banks, or any one else, money to pay debts due or maturing.

Fifth, We beg to call your attention to the work done in this school in branches of study which we believe have not received the attention they deserve from public educators.

For example: the first class in the Grammar School, in addition to the study of the regular text-book in Natural History, have collected, mounted and preserved specimens of almost every bird, butterfly, insect and moth known to this locality. Two lessons per week have been given to all the classes of the Grammar School, in the elements of Natural Science, such as properties of matter, mechanical machines, light, heat, attraction, motion, sound, and the application of these subjects to every day life. Specimens of the woods of our forest, of the geological formation of our hills, and of the plants and flowers that so profusely decorate the highways, by-ways and fields of this section of our State have been collected, studied and laid up. In a word, every effort is made to cultivate the pupils' powers of observation and expression. To this end our worthy principal and the assistant teachers have devoted themselves during the past year with a zeal and a success meriting the warmest terms of approbation.

The people of this school district demand the best public school that the age can furnish, and the trustees, in all their efforts to this end, would be very thankful for a frequent inspection, and a rigid criticism of the methods in vogue in this school, by yourself and any educators who may favor us with a visit.

Very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,
John J. H. Love, D. C.

In Ashland, (No. 37, East Orange), the movement assumed a different phase, and was conducted in a different way. At a meeting of the citizens, held March 18, 1879, the following preamble and resolutions were adopted:

“Whereas the liberality of this district has been constantly evinced in the appropriations made for the current expenses of the school, and can be relied upon to vote whatever may be necessary to sustain a thoroughly good school: and

“Whereas diminished resources on the part of the taxpayers require a rigid regard to economy: and

“Whereas reduced rates of salary and decreased expenditures prevail almost universally:

Resolved that a committee of three be appointed to confer with the trustees, to consider the schedule of expenses and estimates for the ensuing year, to examine the matter of salaries and other expenses, and compare the same with such as are paid elsewhere, and to look into the course of study and management of the school: that the trustees be requested to give this committee access to the books and records of the district, and furnish them with all needed information, in order that a more thorough consideration may be given to the matter than is possible in a public meeting, and that said committee report to an adjourned meeting, to be held two weeks from to-night.”

The members of the committee are well-known citizens, intelligent, fair-minded men, earnest in their support of good free public schools, but in favor of economy in the use of school moneys. On the first of April, they presented a carefully prepared report, from which copious extracts are herewith given as their bearing upon the interests of education are by no means confined to the district for which they were made. In the beginning they say:

“It is apparent, from its language, that this resolution originated mainly, if not entirely, in a regard for economy. It, however, directs the committee not only to examine the financial question, but also “to look into the course of study and management of the school.” Indeed, the two inquiries cannot be separated. The value of a thing depends upon its quality.

The resolution neither asserts nor implies that anything is amiss in the management of the school. Nothing of the kind was said or intimated at the former session of this meeting. We have been at some pains to invite suggestions from persons interested in school matters, and have elicited some pertinent and pointed inquiries, which we shall try to answer, but we have heard little or nothing in the way of definite and intelligent complaint. Under these circumstances we have regarded ourselves as a committee of inquiry rather than as a committee of investigation. We have presumed nothing in favor of the school. We have kept our eyes and ears open. But, upon the other hand, we have presumed nothing against the school.”

The inquiries made by them in this view were:

- I. Whom does the school teach?
- II. What does it teach?
- III. How does it teach?
- IV. What does it cost?
- V. Does it pay?

In answer to the first it appears that the district contains more than eight hundred children of school age, and that more than half of these attend the public school, which is now three times as large as it was nine years ago, and employs three times as many teachers.

In answer to the second question they say:

“Among other studies it teaches those things which put boys and girls in possession of themselves by training and developing their physical powers,—music for the ear and voice, drawing for the eye and hand, reading and declamation for articulation and gesture, and calisthenics for general exercise and the carriage of the person.

The report then explains at length the various methods by which instruction is given in these subjects, from the primary classes to those of the high school. In the early years of the course more time is spent in spelling, reading, geography and arithmetic than on anything else; at about half way in the course history begins. Grammar and rhetoric are disguised in the agreeable form of “Language Lessons.” Then English compositions and algebra come next.

In the last year arithmetic, geometry, book keeping, and natural and mental philosophy are taught by the principal, and algebra, history, reading, and elementary and advanced Latin by the first assistant. Drawing, music, and gymnastics are continuous throughout the course. There is also an entertaining history of English literature, chronologically arranged, with biographies and extracts.

The committee expresses its opinion with no uncertain sound on the subject of reading, as follows:

Your committee have occasion to employ the English language a good deal themselves, and entertain a high regard for it, when properly used. It makes a vast difference whether we draw our supplies of the vernacular from the well of English undefiled, or from the sewer of dime literature. We ought to be heartily ashamed of our ignorance of the treasures of our own tongue. Those who know children best will be the last to say that we can give them good reading too early. It is a matter of congratulation that the school does something to point the right way. We are disposed to think that more might be done.”

“Greek is not taught and should not be. Latin is taught. Whether it should be is a matter of opinion.”

After giving the arguments on both sides, they conclude:

“In the opinion of the principal, no English study is slighted by the highest class in Latin, and a good literary taste is here developed. To use his own words. “We cannot get good compositions out of the scholars till they study Latin.” The reason for this is evident. The translation of a Latin author is almost as much an English exercise as it is a Latin one. To read Caesar or Virgil is simply to put into good English certain valuable ideas which, owing to circumstances over which the author had no control, were not originally written in good English. Your committee therefore say, in answer to the question “What does the school teach?” that it teaches those things which a common school should teach; that it is not an academy, nor a seminary, and that it does not aspire to be.”

In seeking an answer to the third question the committee referred, first, to the method adopted; secondly, to the results attained; thirdly, to the discipline maintained. As they were found in the main good, and impressed them favorably, we will pass to the fourth question. What does it cost?

“It necessarily costs a good deal—more than it did when it was only a quarter as large, and met, in the days of good Mr. Frisbie, in the dingy wooden building behind the Brick Church. Economy is a great revenue, but parsimony is not economy, and the Ashland District has never been parsimonious. The preamble to the resolution assumes, as an undoubted fact, that the district will pay, without grumbling, every cent that is necessary for a good school, and more than this would be too much. We have wisely spent \$40,000 for a first-rate lot and school-house, and very recently opened a new school at Elmwood, at an expense of \$5,000 more.”

Omitting all reference to the bonded debt, and its general management, of which the committee treat at length, I will give, as a matter of universal interest, their method of dealing with the subject of teachers' salaries.

The total estimated expenses for the next school year are \$10,608.60, of which the sum of \$9,175.00 is for salaries.

The items are as follows:

Principal	\$2,200
Assistant teacher	800
“ “	650
“ “	600
“ “	600
“ “	550
“ “	550
“ “	500
“ “	500
“ “	500
Elmwood teacher	550
Teacher of Music	250
Teacher of Drawing	350
Teacher of Calisthenics	100
Janitor of Main building	475
Janitor of Elmwood building	100
	\$9,175

Should these salaries be reduced?

The first remark to be made upon this subject, and it is a remark in which nearly all present will probably agree—is that teachers, as a class, are under-paid. They are to be compared with clergymen, who are also engaged in the work of instruction. That clergymen are insufficiently paid is notorious. But they are certainly better paid than teachers. It is hard to compare different forms of intellectual labor. No rude tests can be applied. The standard of time will not do. When Abraham Lincoln made his immortal speech at Gettysburg he did a good day's work in ten minutes. And yet there are measures of mental effort, and it might not be easy to show that a man who directs the education of three hundred and sixty pupils does less work in a week than he who preaches two sermons, conducts one prayer meeting, and fulfils a round of pastoral duty, nor are your committee prepared to say that the occupation of the schoolmaster is either less useful or less honorable than that of the minister. But there is hardly a settled clergyman in the district who does not receive from a fraction of the tax-payers more than the principal of the Ashland School gets from the whole of them.

The committee give the reasons why this is so, and are that “as compared with salaried officers in the legal profession, teachers are more poorly paid.” Then follows an extended comparison with the Eastern District, (East Orange) the Montclair and the Bloomfield Districts. The difference in salaries prove to be slight, except in the case of principals, which vary from \$2,750 to \$1,600. The only place where a reduction appears possible, is to take off \$200 from the principal’s salary; and this they do not recommend. On this subject they conclude:

After careful inquiry and examination, your committee cannot see any place where money can be saved except on this one item. The subject when looked at in a practical way, is seen to be insignificant, and by no means merits the prominence which it has assumed.

The fifth question is disposed of in a summary way:

V. Does it pay ?

Yes.

They then conclude:

Your committee have thus, without compensation, special capacity, or legal authority, tried, in a fitful way, to do a work of inspection which ought to be done regularly, systematically, officially, by a paid examiner, specially trained for the duty. The tendency of everything human is to become hide-bound. Our faults propagate themselves, and in the course of time come to be cited as arguments for their own existence. In the case of an individual it takes a moral effort, and in the case of a nation a revolution to break up this torpor and restore first principles. The right kind of supervision from outside is a good thing for any school. Every system of law which regulates eleemosynary institutions provides for visitation. The county superintendent is the official visitor of the public schools. But the county has outgrown the superintendent. And what we need is not an occasional visitor. A competent, well paid man, who should give his whole time to the schools of the township, exercising a constant supervisory power, to some extent from the outside, and be clothed with the authority of a general principal, might produce a valuable result in all three districts, and do it under such regulations that the total expense to the tax payers of the township would be no greater than it is to-day. We have been much impressed with the need and advantages of supervision. Even the visits of parents and friends are of real value to a school. But something more is needed, and that something will never be got unless it is paid for.

Signed,

John L. Roberts, Jr.,

Frederic Adams,

Edward M. Colie.

The Eastern District (No. 37) has held on the even tenor of its way, without the excitements that have agitated other districts. The trustees state that in their official action they steadily followed two maxims; the first: *That their school must be thoroughly good, and that to secure this, they must have thoroughly good teachers; the second and subordinate one: That it must be conducted on the most economical basis.* They have kept these before the people, until they have become the prevailing sentiment of the district. Their method of engaging teachers is peculiar and peculiarly good. They decide early in the spring what teachers they will retain; then if any vacancies are to occur, they look around, correspond, and visit schools where they know good work is done, whether in this State or another. When they have reached a decision, they make engagements for the next year; and thus two or three months before vacation, the teachers know whether they will be re-engaged or not; and the trustees know who are going to teach for them. The contrast between this district and those where teachers are kept in suspense till the middle or close of vacation, is too striking to need comment.

This district has escaped the excitement caused by discussion of salaries. Its attention has been directed to improvement in the already good work done in the school.

In Bloomfield, several elements not common to the other districts, entered into the contest. Under a special act, passed in 1849, five trustees had heretofore been elected annually; now, six were to be chosen, two each respectively, for one, two and three years. The election was to be held on the first Monday in June; the term of service to begin on the first Monday in July. I wrote a letter to the *Bloomfield Record*, calling the attention of the citizens to the character and importance of the election. In the words of the editor "this opened the ball," and the subject was discussed with more or less

warmth on both sides until June 2, the day of election. The large assembly-room in the schoolhouse was packed with citizens; the report of the trustees was read, and printed copies circulated among the voters. The meeting, without electing trustees, adjourned for two weeks. On the 16th, a denser crowd, if possible, was present. The Greenback-Labor party had prepared a ticket, which was supported by the Roman Catholics, and was carried, and no member of the old Board re-elected. This election not being legal I afterwards appointed the successful candidates.

The meeting again adjourned for two weeks to give the trustees-elect time to learn the pecuniary wants of the district, and recommend a sum for the consideration of the voters. The late Board had stated that \$10,000 would be necessary to carry on the school as it had been managed the previous year. The discussion during these two weeks waxed warmer than before.

On the 16th, the citizens again met and the same party was triumphant, voting \$7,500 instead of the \$10,000 which the retiring Board had estimated necessary. The result of thus crippling the efficiency of our school will be seen during the coming year; at its close it will again become my duty to make a report concerning it.

Although my report is already unconscionably long, permit me briefly to call your attention to the closing paragraph in Dr. Love's report, and also to that of the Ashland Committee. Dr. Love says: "*The trustees in all their efforts to this end, would be very thankful for a frequent inspection and a rigid criticism of the methods in vogue in this school, by yourself, and any educators who may favor us with a visit.*" The Ashland Committee argue at length in favor of inspection and visitation. "The county superintendent," say they, "*is the official visitor of the public schools. But the county has outgrown the superintendent. And what we need is not an occasional visitor. A competent well-paid man, who shall give his whole time to the schools of the Township,*" is what is needed.

I have made one hundred and fourteen visits to schools, more than ever before during, any one year. A large part of my time has been given to public school work. Yet I feel that nothing short of all my time is needed, and that an assistant could be profitably added. As is seen by the above references this feeling is growing among the people. If the State cannot do anything to satisfy it, perhaps some of the townships will.

The decision of the New Jersey Supreme Court, delivered June 2d, 1879, in the case of Jeremiah Townsend versus School District No. 12, in the county of Essex, is one of such general interest that I give it herewith.

"The action was brought by the plaintiff in the Second District Court of the city of Newark, to recover three months' salary as a school teacher, at the rate of sixty dollars per month, under a contract dated August 21st, 1877, alleged to have been made by the defendant. By the terms of this writing the plaintiff was employed to teach the public school of said district for the period of ten months, commencing on the first day of September, 1877, for the compensation above mentioned, to be paid monthly. No services were actually rendered by the plaintiff under this contract, but for the period of three months he held and tendered himself to the defendants as ready to perform the services according to the contract. Judgment was rendered for the plaintiff for the sum of one hundred and eighty dollars in that court, which judgment in the Court of Common Pleas of the county of Essex, on appeal was reversed, and judgment of non-suit ordered. The writ of certiorari brings up that judgment for review."

"It appears in that case that the contract was on behalf of the school corporation, signed by two of the three trustees thereof, the other taking no part in the transaction, and so far as appears, was entirely ignorant of it. It was not acted upon at any meeting of the Board of Trustees, as none was called for

that purpose. The contract was drawn by the plaintiff, and the names of the signing trustees obtained separately by him; it was never presented to the other for his signature or approval; and no record of the transaction appears in the minutes of the trustees.”

The court held: I. that “The employment of teachers by school corporations is an act judicial in its character, and should be done at a meeting of the trustees, of which all should have notice, and in which all should have an opportunity to participate.”

“It appeared further, that before any action was taken by the members of the board who signed this writing, that the other member had tendered his resignation to the county superintendent, and had declared his purpose to participate no further in performing the duties of his office. The court held:

II. “That if his office had become vacant upon tendering his resignation, the fact still exists, that those who remained in office acted without legal conference in making this contract. It is an error to suppose that the mere tender of resignation vacated the office. An acceptance by the county superintendent of the resignation tendered, was necessary to that result.”

The question was raised, whether the District Court had jurisdiction of this action, it being against a corporation public in character. The Supreme Court decided:

III. “That a school district is a *quasi* municipal corporation, and as such, cannot be sued in a District Court.”

The judgment of the Court of Common Pleas was accordingly affirmed.