

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 concerning the public schools of Essex county.

The statistical tables show an increase of eight hundred and sixty-seven in children of school age, and a decrease of forty-four in the enrollment; but the average attendance at school shows an increase of three hundred and seventy-six. The number attending no school is nine hundred and fifty-nine more than last year. The total amount of money from all sources, for public school purposes, during the year beginning September 1, 1880, is \$9,400 more than was raised last year.

There have been employed fifty-four male teachers, a decrease of five; while the number of females teachers was three-hundred and sixty-four, an increase of four. The average monthly salary for male teachers in 1879, was \$122; for female, \$47.22. In 1880, \$118.32 for the former, and \$54.90 for the latter.

Three new school-houses have been built; one each in Newark, South Orange and No. 9, (Washington District,) Montclair. The one in South Orange is a model in almost every respect. Particular attention has been paid to proper ventilation, besides the modern conveniences for both teacher and pupil. The citizens of No. 9 deserve great praise for the liberality they have shown in erecting their school-house. The district is small, and not wealthy; yet it has put up a handsome wooden house, two stories high, furnished with the best kind of desks, and other conveniences, and heated by a furnace. It will seat two hundred and forty children comfortably.

The institute held in East Orange, in April, was fully attended. The subject of Reading, as presented by Prof. DeGraff, was of great practical value, and was received by the teachers with close attention throughout the course. Happily, the teachers of Essex were well prepared for his instruction, as they have for several years past shown an increasing interest in the subject, particularly how to teach it in the primary classes. Elocution in the grammar and high school departments has also received much more attention than formerly, and teachers are putting themselves under the training of the ablest instructors. An impetus has been given to this matter by the efforts of Miss Belle Boree, whose time during the past year has been given to writing, lecturing and instructing classes. Miss Boree was formerly a teacher in the grammar school of Montclair, where she attained a marked success in teaching her pupils how to read well. After an experience of about seven years, she put herself for two years under the instruction of Prof. Lewis B. Monroe, of Boston. She is now engaged chiefly in instructing teachers and private classes in Essex county.

School officers, also, are showing a deep interest in this subject. As illustrating this I may quote a passage from the report of Dr. J. J. H. Love, Clerk of No. 8, Montclair. The Doctor reports that in November, 1879, the trustees decided that more time should be given, in the primary and grammar school departments, to the teaching of reading, and in instructing children to express

their thoughts both orally and in writing. About one-fourth of the school hours was given to this work; supplementary reading and writing received particular attention; more work was done in composition, more written spelling, less oral.

“As to results,” I quote his own words, “in the advanced grammar classes, these methods have been in use in the school for many years, and no perceptible change is noted in results, except an improvement in composition; and no loss in the accomplishment of the other necessary work was observed. In the primary school the improvement was perceptible, pupils not only increased their vocabulary of words, but read more fluently and naturally; they manifested greater interest in their reading lessons, and readily took up new matter; and they read script as easily as they formerly learned to read print. A few seeming objections were shown. While scholars have more practice in writing, those who have not yet acquired a formed style, are, by the rapidity with which they must write, confirmed in their faults, i. e. in the mechanical execution. The increased time devoted to writing lessens the opportunity for oral recitations, and while pupils exhibit greater freedom with the pen, they betray an increasing awkwardness in ‘telling what they know.’ It would seem to be an axiom that anything learned by calling into use as many senses as possible, is most thoroughly learned; so both sight, hearing and hand are required, and oral work should be continued in connection with written.”

The “seeming objections” can be easily remedied by able and judicious teachers, as the Doctor intimates at the close of the passage quoted.

In several of our graded schools, for two years past, script has been taught with success and decided advantage, at the very beginning of primary work.

There is cause for regret in the fact that comparatively little interest has been taken in “establishing” and maintaining” libraries. Since 1872, when the first payment was made, Newark has been entitled to five hundred and fifty-two payments, twenty-eight of \$20 each, and the rest at \$10, a total of \$2,800. She has accepted five payments, or \$80. Orange was entitled to thirty-six payments, four of \$20, the rest at \$10, amounting to \$400; she has applied for and received \$60. The rest of the county might have received three hundred and fifty payments, forty-one of \$20 each, the rest at \$10, a sum of \$3,910; she has received \$910.

In Newark, the High School applied twice, the Webster street school twice, the Chestnut street school once; the rest not at all. In Orange, the High School alone has applied, receiving five installments. In the county outside the cities, eight districts applied once, and seem to have been satisfied with the dose, for they did not try it again. Seven districts exhausted their powers in two attempts, and then ceased; four tried it three times. Only Montclair, Livingston, Millburn, South Orange and Hilton have applied for aid during the present fiscal year. And through the State aid, and gifts of books from individuals, several valuable libraries have been formed, particularly in Bloomfield and Montclair. Of the smaller districts, East Franklin, Livingston and Millburn deserve special mention for their constant addition of books or apparatus, and for the good care taken of them. There are still, outside the cities, eighteen schools that have made no effort to secure libraries.

A very full, and a very important meeting of the trustees of the county, was held in Bloomfield, August 29th, 1880. The members generally took part in the debates, which discussed finances, reports, teachers, scholars, school buildings, health, libraries, methods of instruction, and educational matters in general. A full account of its proceedings would fill the whole space allotted to this report. The trustees unanimously favored the petition for the repeal of the two-mill tax, and the substitution of a per capita tax of \$4 a child. It was found on inquiry, that there was still one district in the county which paid its teachers in twelve monthly installments. For the sake of uniformity, this district voluntarily promised to make the payments ten instead of twelve.

At the close of the meeting. Dr. Love, of Montclair, offered the following resolution, upon which remarks were made by a number of trustees, showing their earnestness in the matter, and which was passed unanimously:

*Resolved*, That the interests of the schools of this county demand the full time of the County Superintendent, or some person to act as Inspector of Schools, and to this end the trustees would request those in authority to so amend the present law, as to make the compensation of the County Superintendent such that he can give his whole time to the school matters of the county.

In my last report, I had occasion to mention particularly the condition of school matters in No. 7, (Central Union, Bloomfield.) In 1879, trustees were elected, under whom the expenses of the school were reduced about one-fourth, the number of teachers lessened and the Classics abolished from the High School. One year's experience of that kind was enough for the citizens of the district; and at the last election, trustees of different views were chosen, and the High School is now restored.

At the Institute, held at Caldwell, in May, 1879, a Botanical Club was formed, which has now reached a regular membership of over sixty, besides a large number of corresponding and honorary members. The President, Mr. Henry H. Rusby, a native of Franklin, in this county, and for several years a teacher in Verona, is now in New Mexico, collecting the plants, of that region. This club is doing valuable work in several ways, among others by the weekly gatherings of its members in classes in different parts of the county, for the thorough and systematic study of botany. Teachers and others not connected with our schools, are thus continually receiving valuable aid and a healthy stimulus in the study of this interesting branch of natural science.

Through the resignation of Mr. J. Henry Root, for nine years the able and successful principal of No. 7, the largest school in the county, we have lost the services of one whose influence was felt for good by pupils, teachers and citizens. He is now principal of an academy in Connecticut.

Permit me to ask, in conclusion, whether there could not be printed enough copies of the Report of the State Board of Education, for each citizen who will read it, to have a copy?