

ESSEX COUNTY.

Charles M. Davis, Superintendent.

To E. A. Apgar, State Superintendent:

In obedience to law, I have the honor to make this report concerning the state of public instruction in Essex county, not including the cities of Newark and Orange.

The closing words of my report for 1882 may be repeated with emphasis for 1883: "The year has been one of marked progress in all respects in the schools of Essex county." Four new school houses have been built at an expense of \$17,500, the seating capacity being increased four hundred and forty-six. The increase of children of school age is one and one-half per cent.; of enrollment, one and one-fifth per cent.; of average attendance, five and one-third per cent. Two more male and three more female teachers have been employed, at an average monthly salary, for the former, of \$100; and for the latter, of \$48.56. This is an increase of \$7 for male teachers, and \$3 72 for female. The highest salary received by the former is \$3,000, the lowest \$450.

The teachers' examinations have been well attended. Six first grade certificates have been granted; nineteen of the second; and sixty-two of the third; a total of eighty-seven. Seventy-one candidates were rejected.

There are one hundred and thirty-four teachers in the schools; of these, sixty-two are engaged exclusively in primary work, while sixteen others (in ungraded district schools) having no assistants, spend part of the school hours in instructing the little ones. Only fifty six of the one hundred and thirty-four are employed exclusively in grammar and high school work. It must be remembered that more than half of the children enrolled leave school by the time they are twelve years of age; and that the progress of those who reach the grammar departments depend, in a great degree, on their previous training. It is the part of wisdom, then, to grant every facility to primary teachers; that is, to those who have charge of the children during the first four or five years of their school life.

The great business of little children is to grow; nothing at school should interfere with this. Uncomfortable position, enforced quiet, vitiated air and other like things in the school room prevent the natural development of the body, and in an equal degree retard mental progress. A report made to the House of Lords, England, a few years ago, on the subject of "Education," used the following language: "Struck by the frightful disproportion between the powers of childish attention and the length of school hours, we directed questions to many distinguished teachers. Mr. Donaldson, head master of the training college of Glasgow, states that the limits of voluntary and intelligent attention are, with children from five to seven years of age, about fifteen minutes; from seven to ten years, about twenty minutes; from ten to twelve years, about fifty-five minutes; from twelve to eighteen years about eighty minutes. 'I have,' he adds, 'repeatedly obtained a bright, voluntary attention from each of these classes for five, or ten, or even fifteen minutes more, but observed that it was at the expense of the 'succeeding lesson,'" Another teacher said, 'I will undertake to teach one hundred children, in three hours a day, as

much as they can by any possibility receive. As soon as the receiving power of the children is exhausted, anything given is useless, nay, injurious.”

In some of our largest and most wisely managed schools the time of attendance has been shortened for the whole school, and the little ones are allowed frequent recesses and dismissed before the others. But there are still too many places where the hours, for large and small alike, are from nine to twelve A. M. and from one to four P. M.

The kindergarten system, pure and unadulterated, is not suited to the nervous American child; but much of it can, in a modified form, be introduced into our methods, and adapted most happily to primary work. This is done with great success in five or six of our best schools.

District No. 8 (Montclair), ever foremost in educational matters, never hesitating to investigate new ways, though not hasty to adopt them, has tried the “Industrial” problem; with what success will appear from the following extract from the report of the trustees to the annual meeting:

“Last year the district appropriated the sum of \$1,000 toward an industrial school, of which sum \$630.86 has been expended to this date. A shop was fitted up in the basement of the Primary building, with necessary appliances for wood-working, and such boys from the second and third classes of the Grammar department as chose to avail themselves of the opportunity were sent to this shop and taught (by a competent person selected for the purpose) the proper use of tools and the manner of working in wood. About fifty boys entered, and the success of the experiment can best be determined by comparing specimens of their first and of their last work. They have lost no ground in their regular studies, and appear to enjoy the exercise.

“While the boys have been engaged in wood-working, the girls have taken up the study of household economy, using the manual prepared by the Kitchen Garden Association of New York. They have evinced so great an interest in the subject as not to be satisfied with learning from the manual what to do, but have frequently appealed for the same opportunity offered the boys, viz.: a properly appointed room, where they may by practice learn how to do. Sewing has been the only branch taught practically in the school room. Arrangements have been made for practical work by the girls next year.”

I trust the day is not far distant when simple industrial work of some kind shall be taught in every school in the county, not interfering with the regular studies, but in reality advancing them. To accomplish this, great caution, good judgment, and hard, earnest work will be necessary.

In August last the cause of public school education in this county suffered a great loss in the death of Professor Theodore Blumé, of Seton Hall College, East Orange. Professor Blumé was township superintendent before the enactment of the present school law; from that time to his death he was clerk of the district in which he lived. Earnest in promoting the efficiency of the schools, he never rested until the district had erected the fine buildings of which it is now so justly proud. After the dedication he wrote, “I am now ready to retire and say ‘Nunc dimittas.’”