

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 public schools of Essex county.

During the past year twenty-nine thousand two hundred and thirty-five children have been enrolled under the care and instruction of five hundred teachers. The average attendance has been nineteen thousand five hundred and seventy, not quite forty to each teacher. The average monthly salary of male teachers was \$132.13, \$3.31 more than the previous year. The female teachers received \$51.05 a month, an increase of two cents.

The number of children on the census rolls is fifty-eight thousand five hundred and ninety-two, an increase of one thousand four hundred and sixty-three; the increased attendance, one thousand one hundred and twenty-nine. The school property is valued at \$1,523,500; \$287,411.60 have been paid for teachers' salaries, besides janitors' wages, repairs and incidental expenses. A tax has been voted in all the districts but six; five of these had a balance on hand large enough to supplement the State tax and appropriation for the coming school year. The other is the only \$200 district in the county, being weak in property as well as children, and will have only \$274.74 for the maintenance of the school during the year. The average attendance in this district has been fourteen, and the monthly salary \$25, which is less than half the average salary of female teachers throughout the county.

One of the townships. East Orange, regularly raises a township tax of \$5 for each child of school age. This year the tax amounts to \$11,810.

The number of male teachers has decreased—fifty-two this year, fifty-four last; while twenty female teachers have been added to the four hundred and twenty-eight employed in 1882-3. It is pleasant to be able to add that there has also been an increase in their efficiency. The people are learning to value good work in the school-room, and are becoming more willing to pay for it. The result is that we have a fine corps of teachers, most of whom have been educated for their profession, and expect to continue in it. There is little or no mention any longer made of "promotion" in a teacher's position. One department is as honorable as another, and the pay is in proportion to the value of the work, and not to the grade of the department.

No new school-houses have been built outside the cities; one, however, is begun in Bloomfield, a fine structure of eight rooms; and in Montclair, four rooms have been added to the primary building. Brookdale has doubled her seating capacity. All these houses are of brick. The buildings throughout the county are in good condition; not one is marked "very poor," three are "poor," two "medium," seven "good," twenty-four "very good;" in the cities they are "very good." In this statement they are undervalued rather than overvalued.

Of the five hundred teachers employed, four hundred and seventy-seven are in that half of the county east of the First Orange mountain, leaving only twenty-three for the other half. Of these twenty-three, the borough of Caldwell has five; three schools have two teachers each, and there is one in each of the remaining twelve. This thinly settled region, in most parts of which the population does not increase, cannot afford the educational facilities of the eastern portion—rich, populous, looking to the public school for the education of its children, and willing to pay for it. And yet, with only now and then an exception, these poorer districts tax themselves according to their ability to support the schools. Naturally the small pay in several of these can engage only inferior ability, but in the majority of them good salaries are paid, and the teaching is of a high order.

In performing the duties prescribed by law, I have made three hundred and eighty-eight visits to departments, have held the regular quarterly examinations (at which sixty-one certificates have been granted, and thirty-nine applications rejected), have met the trustees at regular meetings, settled various disputes, re-arranged the boundaries of several districts, and carried on an extensive correspondence with all classes and conditions of men regarding school affairs.

The people of the county accept the present public school system as an established fact of the highest value, and they cheerfully contribute of their means to maintain it. School officers quite generally are faithful in discharging their duties, most of them giving liberally of their time and attention. The teachers deserve great praise for their earnest and successful work, and the children show the good results of the system and its application.