

ESSEX COUNTY.

M. H. C. Vail, Superintendent.

To Addison B. Poland, State Superintendent:

Sir—In this my second annual report I am able to state that the public schools under my care are in excellent condition. Although the year has been somewhat broken into by the Columbian anniversaries, the educational results compare most favorably with the past.

Teachers.—I am indeed fortunate in the very superior corps of teachers in this county, to all of whom a deep debt of gratitude is due for loyal devotion to their work. That many of the teachers of Essex county are following teaching as a life calling is evident in the magnificent results obtained.

The close proximity of Essex county to schools of pedagogy in New York City and Brooklyn has given opportunity, which many of our teachers have availed themselves of, to study the science and art of teaching under gifted masters.

Pride in the Profession.—A growing pride in the profession of teaching is clearly manifest. Every year shows a marked decrease in the number of teachers who engage in teaching for the want of something else to do. The sooner the places of all such are filled by those who do take a pride in teaching, the better it will be for the cause of public education. Now, while I would not advise proceeding to the extreme in the matter of depriving any of the privileges of using the teacher's calling as a stepping-stone by which to reach other learned professions, I would certainly discourage the practice. Experience teaches that the love for the work, so essential to success, is rarely found among those the trend of whose thoughts is away from the teacher's calling.

Our Trenton normal graduates, wherever employed, are proving to be excellent teachers. They are doing honor to their alma mater. While I have not a word to say in derogation of the graduates of normal schools of other sister States who are teaching in the schools of Essex county, I am gratified indeed to be able to say that they no longer carry off all the honors. The graduates from our own State Normal School are worthy competitors, who broaden out under the influence of their school-room experience and daily give evidence of their excellent training. I regret that the supply of teachers from our own State Normal School will not meet the demand.

School-Houses.—Although I am able to report but a single new building erected during the year, yet never before have the schoolhouses, taken as a whole, been in such excellent condition as at present. The new high school building of Montclair was completed last year at a cost of more than one hundred thousand dollars. The visitor cannot fail to see that in this elegant school-house the people have a generous fulfillment of all their wishes and expectations.

“No steps backward” still continues to be the motto of District No. 33—Lyons Farms. And “none forward” says Dr. Ward, the efficient district clerk, since owing to the impossibility of obtaining money for the erection of a new building the little “Stone Jug” yet stands, representing the old and menacing the new in progressive school-house architecture.

The honestly earned reputation which the public schools of East Orange enjoy is due, in a large measure, to the ability of its superintendent. So, also, of the school in Montclair. From these schools hundreds of young men and young women go forth into the world with a thorough preparation for life.

In Upper Montclair a new building has been erected, which will be ready for occupancy by December 1st. This building will cost, when completed, nearly \$25,000; it will be a credit to the people who have so generously paid the heavy tax which its erection imposed. It will accommodate the higher grades which Principal Thompson has already in preparation.

In Bloomfield, some of the already large and convenient buildings have been repaired, keeping them close up to the front in the advancing line of school-house reform. The same safe and steady-going policy which has been in vogue in the Bloomfield schools since Mr. John B. Dunbar took the reins as principal is still the rule. It is safe to say that few schools in the county show better results. Like Montclair, East Orange and several other schools in this county, Bloomfield has secured a man qualified in all respects to fill the important position of principal, and is supporting him nobly.

Indeed, I am able to report harmony between school boards and teachers in all districts of the county. The rule that trustees should command outside of the school-house and the principal be supreme within, prevails so generally that it is the rarest exception for trouble to arise.

I am unable to report progress towards the building of a new school-house in Millburn, but the prospect is now brightening. Obstacles to the erection of a new building have been removed, and there is now no doubt that my next report will record the fact that the proposed new school-house at Millburn has been completed. Maplewood and Vailsburgh have caught the progressive spirit. They propose to make the school children comfortable with hot-air furnaces, and have adopted the method of heating by steam.

Free Text-Books.—It is now becoming the rule for districts to furnish free text-books. This is indeed gratifying to me. From the day of my entrance upon the duties of my office I have not ceased to urge upon clerks and trustees the necessity. In carrying out this system I have advised that no obstacles be placed in the way of any purchasing their own books who desired to do so.

Truancy.—While there is yet much to be done in securing the entire removal of this drawback to our schools, I am able to report some improvement. Although I have had little opportunity of carrying out a systematic plan for the abatement of the evil, I am yet buoyed up with the hope that the time is not far distant when a satisfactory plan may be devised and put into effect. There are more than 70,000 children of school age in the county of Essex, to all of whom the State is generously extending educational facilities that are absolutely free. Yet, there are many of these who scorn the proffered training and prefer to grovel on through life's journey in the very lowest walk, clothed mentally, as bodily, in the dirty rags of filth and ignorance.

Physical Culture.—I am pleased to report the most gratifying results in this very important branch. In a large percentage of the schools systematic calisthenics are practiced; elsewhere improvised exercises are given. A close observation of the effects, both mental and physical, of a

carefully regulated and scientifically applied system of exercise will satisfy even the casual observer. The sparkling eye, the glowing cheek, the expanded chest, the supple muscle and erect form of those who enter heartily into the daily exercises, demonstrate clearly their great value.

Manual Training.—In this report I can only supplement what I said last year concerning the value of manual training as a branch of school instruction. In all the schools where manual training has been introduced the results are excellent. No visitor to workshops, kitchens or dining-halls where lessons are being given, can fail to be delighted. President James L. Hays, of the Newark Board of Education, and City Superintendent Barringer, upon my invitation, visited the workshops and kitchens attached to the Montclair public school.

The very excellent work shown at Chicago (not only in manual training, but in all other branches) by the schools of Montclair, South Orange and East Orange, received great praise from all who inspected it.

Teachers' Institute.—The great usefulness of the teachers' institute is easily inferred from its growing popularity. Close attendance upon its sessions has now become the rule. This very desirable state of affairs has been brought about to a great extent by the efforts of the superintendent to please, entertain and encourage as well as instruct. Instead of evading attendance upon its sessions, teachers are now anxiously awaiting it. It would not surprise me if in the near future teachers should come up with a request (almost a demand) for more time to be given to the county institute.

Our Public School System.—Every year the numbers of those who wish to be classed as opponents of our public school system are certainly growing less and less. This is but natural and to be expected, as the evidences of its beneficence are being piled up. Such a warm place do our public schools hold in the affections of the people, it needs but a whisper of danger to rally them as one. 'Tis indeed the "apple of the people's eye," this inestimable gift of the State, the best of man's devisings. Go where you will throughout the cities, villages, counties and townships of the State, the magnificent results of our public school system shine resplendent everywhere. Thousands and tens of thousands of those who now conduct the business, professional and politics of the country are proud to call the public school their alma mater.