

1881

# Town of Manchester Supervisor's Report, 1880-81

Manchester (Me.)

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# TOWN OF MANCHESTER.

## SUPERVISOR'S REPORT.

1880-'81.

The Supervisor of Schools of the town of Manchester, for the year ending 1880-81, submits the following report :

DISTRICT No. 1.—C. F. HEWINS, *Agent*.

Amount assigned, 1880-81,	\$231.84
Unexpended balance, 1879-80,	39.87

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Total,	\$271.71
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There were two terms in summer of eight weeks each, under the instruction of Miss Florence Hardin, a very earnest, faithful teacher. Her methods of instruction were excellent, and she succeeded in inspiring her pupils with a degree of industry and enthusiasm quite unusual in this district. The progress of the pupils was satisfactory except with those who were afflicted with chronic irregularity of attendance.

The winter term was commenced by Mr. E. W. Larrabee of Gardiner, continued about three weeks with fair prospect of success, when it was abruptly closed by the sickness of the teacher. The school was continued some seven weeks longer by the Supervisor, making a term of ten weeks. A portion of the pupils made creditable progress. Others whose attendance was interrupted by sickness, or whose attention was largely engrossed by other matters, received but little benefit from the school. It is to be regretted that the teacher who commenced the term, could not have completed it.

DISTRICT No. 2.—J. N. JONES, *Agent*.

Amount assigned,	\$133.26
Unexpended, 1879-80,	.16

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Total,	\$133.42
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There were two terms of school in this district. A fall term of seven weeks, commencing August 9, and a winter term of fourteen weeks, commencing October 25, both taught by Miss Nellie M. Benner of West Gardiner. Miss B. is a teacher of ample experience, ready attainments, and has rare skill in imparting instruction without weakening the self-reliance of her pupils. Some of the advanced pupils were away during the term attending the Friends' School at Providence, Rhode Island, which reduced somewhat the grade of examination, but there are some promising scholars in this little school. One fact I deem worthy of mention to the citizens of this district, which they will recognize as a thing hitherto unknown in their history,—that there are three boys in one family, from eleven to fourteen years of age, whose names do not appear on the register of the winter term. Comments are unnecessary. Fall term, whole number, 17. Average, 15. Winter term, whole number, 14. Average, 13.

DISTRICT No. 3.—L. M. PINKHAM, *Agent*.

Amount assigned, 1880,	\$111.94
Unexpended, 1879-80,	33.45
Total,	\$145.39

A summer term of eight weeks was taught by Miss Carrie A. Thompson; average attendance, four. The term closed without notice to your Supervisor and hence I am not prepared to speak of its success or value. It may be observed, however, however, that the average cost of the tuition of these four pupils would have hired their board in another district, and paid a reasonable sum for their tuition besides.

The winter term of fourteen weeks was under the instruction of Miss Flora E. McGlauffin of Hallowell. Miss McG. has taught in this town previously and is a well qualified, painstaking teacher, thoroughly educated in school studies and faithful to her pupils. So far as I could judge of labor in so small a school, there was lack of energy and enthusiasm in her work. Zeal and energy in a teacher naturally reproduce themselves in the school. Whole number, 6. Average, 5 1-2.

DISTRICT No. 4.—J. L. SPEAR, *Agent*.

Amount assigned,	\$159.06
Unexpended, 1879-80,	53.00
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Total,	\$212.06

During the summer two terms of eight weeks each, were held in this district under the instruction of Miss Carrie E. McCausland. At my first visit, from the general appearance of pupils and teacher, I anticipated a successful school. The teacher appeared earnest and competent, and her methods of instruction unobjectionable. The promise of the beginning was verified only in part. A portion of the school had made fair progress; but irregularity of attendance, the bane of this, as of some other schools in town, had rendered the school of little value to about one-third of the pupils. Whole number 22. Average 17.

The winter term was under the instruction of Alpheus Spear of West Gardiner, an old teacher of large experience, fertile in resources, and knowing just how to fix the attention and excite the interest of the pupils of this school. The intellects of many of them had evidently been awakened and had found *audible* voices. I regard this term as more successful than any with which I have had to do in this district for several years. The attendance however was far below what it should have been. Whole number, 25. Average, 19.

DISTRICT No. 5.—CHARLES C. CUMMINGS, *Agent*.

Amount assigned,	\$131.26
Unexpended, 1879-80,	23.27
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Total,	\$154.53

Both terms of school in this district were taught by Miss Emily D. Creasy of Mt. Vernon. A summer term of eight weeks. A winter term of twelve weeks. Summer term, average attendance, five, which makes the tuition of each scholar one dollar per week, or twenty cents per day. Miss C. is a thorough scholar, and has great facility in imparting instruction, and I have no doubt in a school of reasonable

size, would prove a highly successful teacher. In this school however, she met the difficulty almost universally experienced by teachers in schools of from five to ten pupils, that of keeping up a good wholesome discipline, without repressing the school into a state of inanity.

It must be plain to every one familiar with the situation of affairs in this district, that the benefits derived are not, and in the nature of things cannot be, commensurate with the cost. The actual cost of tuition for each pupil has been during the terms, not less than one dollar and a quarter per week.

DISTRICT No. 6.—GEORGE L. FIFIELD, *Agent*.

Amount assigned,	\$210.43
Overdrawn 1879-80,	9.01

Total,	\$201.52
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The summer school in this district was taught by Miss Winnefred F. Snell of this town. The term was interrupted by a vacation of seven weeks, closing September 10. Whole number, 41. Average 32. Miss Snell is a very ripe scholar and unusually clear in explanation. Her system and methods of instruction leave nothing to be desired. Her experience however, was that of many others who step from the ranks and assume the chief command. They find trouble in maintaining a proper degree of discipline among their old comrades. The discipline was lax and the school noisy and disorderly. With suitable discipline the term would probably have been eminently successful.

The winter term was commenced by Mr. M. H. Davenport of Phillips. Very soon after the opening of the term, there appeared omens of trouble. The teacher was determined to maintain proper order and discipline, and the accomplishment of this in regard to those who had lived so long untrammelled by wholesome restraint seemed a hardship too severe to be borne. An old and bitter controversy in the district served also to aggravate matters. One of the most intractable pupils was expelled by the Supervisor. Some others absented themselves or were removed by their parents, until the school was reduced to about three-fifths of its proper number.

At the end of eight weeks the school was closed by the sickness of Mr. Davenport, resumed by Mr. Hewitt of this town and continued for three weeks longer. I do not feel to comment at length upon the causes of these untoward results. I look upon them as the legitimate outgrowth of the theory adopted by some of the parents in this district—that to please the scholars and secure for them a good time is more desirable than good order and proper discipline in school. Pleasing pupils is very well when they are pleased with *what is right, otherwise not.*

That the teacher influenced perhaps by the vaporings of overgrown boys, may have been indiscreet in some minor matters is quite probable; but the experience of nearly forty years of varied connexion with schools, has taught me that boys of fifteen to eighteen years are not safe persons to sit in judgment upon school management, nor are their statements of occurrences in school always reliable. A new departure both in sentiment regarding school management and in mutual feeling among the citizens of the district, is desirable.

DISTRICT No. 7.—————, *Agent.*

Amount assigned,	\$54.30
Unexpended, 1879-80,	20.
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Total,	54.58

A school was commenced in this district November 8, by Miss Cora A. Hewitt, and continued nine weeks. Whole number, 3. Average 2. The cost of schooling these two pupils was about three dollars per week each. The school was visited at its commencement, but not having been informed of its time of closing, I am unable to report the degree of its success. It is to be hoped that the two pupils received the value of the expenditure in their behalf; if so they at least have no ground of complaint.

I have thus, fellow citizens, given you a view in detail of the schools in the several districts for the past year, as seen from my standpoint, and it only remains to aggregate results and draw conclusions. The comparison of the successes or failures of one year, with those of the preceding, or with any

other year, amounts to but little. The important questions are—Are our schools steadily, unmistakably advancing, or are they retrograding? Are the funds raised from the taxation of our citizens and bestowed by the State, expended in such manner as to secure the best advantages to our children? If the answers to these questions are favorable, then a change of system would be a doubtful experiment. If unfavorable, then a change which promises better results is certainly desirable.

Assuming as a basis the theory that the property of the town is taxed to educate the children of the town, I take it for granted that there is no person who pays a tax whether he has children or not, who does not desire that the money so raised shall be expended in such a way as to accomplish the best results. And it is a fact, unexplainable by any process of reasoning, that men who examine public expenditure in every other direction with critical and perhaps captious care, who cry loudly for economy and reform, will nevertheless look upon the palpable waste of school funds with undisturbed tranquility and resignation. When our present division of school districts was made thirty years ago, it was doubtless the best that could be made. Since that period great changes have transpired. Schools, which were then of fair size, have now become so small as hardly to furnish a row of pupils; and the amount of school money even when augmented by a liberal percentage of the money drawn by other districts, barely serves to furnish one or two short terms per year, and these being run on a basis of pinching economy, rarely result in a pronounced success.

It seems very evident to my mind that the present district system does not, and never will, permit a system of consolidation either of school terms or of general interests so plainly necessary to an economical expenditure of the moneys so liberally appropriated by the town. The average cost of tuition with a proper arrangement of terms and consolidation of interests, should not exceed thirty-seven cents per week in any school in town. What is the fact? The tuition per week varies according to locality, from forty cents to three dollars

per week. Under the present system I do not see how these gross inconsistencies, this senseless waste of school funds can be avoided. In some of our districts a portion of the pupils could be accommodated in adjacent districts, if the terms of school could be arranged for their convenience; but the assignment of terms being by vote of the district, no such arrangement can be effected.

I hold it to be correct in theory and in large measure possible in practice, that every scholar in town, between the ages of six and twenty-one years, is entitled to as many weeks of attendance on our public schools as any other scholar; and that the pupils of small districts, or sparsely settled localities, should not on account of their unfortunate location, be deprived of the usual amount of school term of more favored localities. Several years since I gave much thought and examination to the course pursued by quite a number of towns in this State, in abolishing the district system and adopting the town system, as it is called. Many towns year by year have pursued this plan, and I know of but one town or city in the whole State, that has gone back to the district system, after giving the other a fair trial, and that is Ellsworth, which by the way only adopted a part of the system, and only continued the mutilated substitute for one year. I have taken pains to ascertain the working of the town system where it has been adopted and in every case there has been not only a marked progress in the condition and prosperity of the schools, but a more general satisfaction of the tax-payers with the expenditure of their money.

As is well known, I have urged upon the town the adoption of this system, but hitherto without success. I have the satisfaction, however, of knowing that several of my fellow citizens formerly opposed to the project, who have incidentally become acquainted with its practical workings, have had their prejudices removed by the irresistible logic of practical success; and I cherish the hope that the sound sense that generally distinguishes our citizens in their private business, will lead them to ask themselves if it is absolutely necessary that the tuition of our children at home should cost three dollars each per week. I am sure that many of our towns-

men oppose this change, because they do not understand its workings. Many have gained the impression that having lately taxed themselves to build and furnish a new and comfortable school house, they will be called upon to help build another for some less enterprising locality. This can in no case be true. The law permitting towns to adopt this system, so regulates and equalizes this matter that no injustice can be done to any locality in this direction. Of one thing I feel morally certain that our schools are gradually but perceptibly deteriorating—in numbers,—in length of time, in energy and advancement of scholars, and in the decreasing interest in their welfare and success, among parents and guardians. It is too much to say that parents do not care whether their children are educated or not, but they have come into a way of throwing the entire responsibility upon the school officers, and solacing themselves in case of failure by berating the supposed delinquent. And this leads me to another consideration—another evil of the district system, which presents itself with much force to the Supervisor. The agent hires a teacher and informs him when the school is to commence. His only knowledge of the qualifications of the candidate, is what he gains from the teacher himself. On the Saturday before, and not unfrequently on the Monday morning when he is to commence his school and at the very hour when he ought to appear before his school, he presents himself to the Supervisor for a certificate. The examination conducted under these untoward circumstances, may or may not be satisfactory. The real question the Supervisor has to decide is, not whether the candidate is one he would recommend to teach the school, but whether if he should refuse a certificate the Agent, at that late day, would probably do better. The Supervisor, throwing himself upon uncertain fate, usually sends the teacher to the school, with a consciousness that the chances of failure are at least equal, and he must bear the entire blame.

This is no fancy picture, but a fact which recurs as regularly as the equinoxes. The holding of regular examinations is hardly a partial remedy for this evil. The only complete remedy is in making the labor and responsibility concomitant and placing both where they belong. Every experiment is not progress, but every advance is largely an experiment. Let something be done to arrest the retrograde tendency of our common schools and the unnecessary waste of our school funds.

ISAAC N. WADSWORTH, *Supervisor.*  
*Manchester, March 1, 1881.*