REPORT
OF THE
SCHOOL COMMITTEE,
OF THE
TOWN OF AMHERST,
FOR THE YEAR 1863–4.

AMHERST:
HENRY A. MARSH, PRINTER.
1864.
REPORT.

In submitting the Annual School Report, we congratulate the citizens of the town, upon the general prosperity, which has attended the public schools, and the success which has crowned the labors of our teachers.

That the farm, the workshop, the mart of trade, the school-room and the sanctuary, have been unmolested, while so large a portion of our national territory has been desolated by the ravages of war, should call forth from us devout gratitude to Him, who has made us thus to differ.

That a new impulse has been given to the cause of popular education among us, since the introduction of graded schools, must be obvious to the most careless observer.

The Primary Schools, relieved of the older pupils, who necessarily occupied an undue share of the teacher's time, have been benefitted by the change.

The Intermediate and Grammar Schools, accessible from every part of the town, furnish means for studying the higher English branches far more advantageously than in the former mixed schools.

The High School, open to all who are qualified, affords facilities for acquiring a thorough knowledge of still higher English branches and the Latin, little, if any inferior to those enjoyed in the best Academies in the Commonwealth.

Our predecessors on the School Committee, by their judicious and persevering labors, in planning, maturing and so far perfecting our present system, have conferred a lasting benefit upon the town, and deserve to be held, by all classes, in grateful remembrance.

We ought not however to be satisfied with what has been done for the public schools.

We live in an age of progress. Advancement in the Arts and Sciences and the increasing diffusion of knowledge, render it necessary that the standard of popular education should be borne constantly upward.

We deem it unnecessary to enter into a labored argument in support of this position. If children are to be educated for the times, they must be educated up to the times.

To accomplish this, we must necessarily avail ourselves of the improvements that have been made in education. Among these the most important is the division of labor—a principle well understood and universally applied in the mechanic arts.

It is found that perfection, in any department of labor, requires exclusive devotion thereto. So in matters of education. That teacher will accomplish most and do his work best, other things being equal, whose labor is bestowed upon the fewest subjects.

Hence the importance of classification—the bringing together, in one class, all whose attainments and capacity are on the same grade.

A competent teacher may do as well, and even better, by a class of twelve, than by a class of two. In point of time, and consequently, economy, the advantage is as six to one in favor of the larger class.

Classification can be properly made only when schools are graded. Under the District System, gradation is very difficult, if not impossible.

Connected with this system, there seem to be many disadvantages, or positive evils, among which the following may be named:

I. Liability to have incompetent agents.

District committees are often chosen, not from any supposed fitness for the office, but with a view to equalize burdens.

II. Frequent changes. Committees are chosen, annually, and seldom serve the second consecutive term. With new laws come new lords. The incoming administration marks its advent by a change of ministers. There is always a loss in the change of teachers.

III. To equalize the number of pupils in the several schools, and secure like advantages to all is impossible, while district limits are to be observed. In one district, for example, with but one house, 176 pupils are calling for accommodations, while in an
other, the town has sustained during the last year, a school averaging not more than 10 scholars.

We are well aware that little more than the shadow of the district system now remains in the town. But we believe the removal of that even, would be promotive of the best interests of all the schools, and eventually give satisfaction to all the people.

There needs better attendance. The town makes liberal appropriations for the education of her children. Why should a fifth part of the money thus appropriated be lost? Yes, worse than lost. The absence of a few works injury to the many who punctually attend.

The cars wait not for the tardy traveller; but the class must hark for delay. They move at so slow a rate as to allow of their getting aboard.

If time is indeed money, in matters of education it is far better; the town can ill afford such a waste of its means. Much less can the parents of these children afford this loss of time and trouble. The parents of these children need not be urged to prove the seed-time of life? Is it not a man better than a sheep?

THOROUGHNESS.

What is worth teaching at all, is worth teaching well. It should never be taken for granted that the pupil understands what is taught him. And the best evidence he can give that he understands what is taught, is that he is able to reproduce the idea he has received. We never understand a proposition well enough, if at all, till we can communicate it. We would therefore make thoroughness—a clear and distinct understanding of what is taught—a test of ability to teach.

IDEAS.

Sufficient importance is not paid to the distinction between words and ideas. We use language as a medium of thought, and in education we teach the nature and use of words, as the artisan does the names and design of tools. With some teachers, this distinction is not observed, and their pupils learn words—words.

The proper object of instruction is two-fold. 1st. Mental development. 2nd. The acquisition of knowledge. The last, though the ultimate end of education, in a course of school discipline is of but secondary importance.

The mind is not to be regarded merely as a receptacle of facts, but as a laboratory—an engine for the production of thought. The amount of knowledge imparted, in a given time, is not the best test of a teacher's success, or the pupil's proficiency. It is the manner in which it is accomplished—the degree of intellectual attainment arrived at.

When this matter is better understood, our children will be better educated.

The cooperation of parents is essential to success. The teacher stands in place of the parent. Whatever control the parent may properly exercise over the child while under the parental roof, the teacher may and should exercise, in and about, the schoolhouse. That parents and teachers should sometimes entertain conflicting views, on matters of education, is not to be wondered at. Teachers do not claim exemption from foibles and errors in judgment—it is not to be supposed that they always pursue the wisest and most judicious course; nor does it seem reasonable, on the part of parents to regard the teacher as an enemy—became, forsooth he endeavors to enforce such rules as he deems essential to the welfare of the school, to assume, at once, an attitude of antagonism and do their word to destroy his influence, even at the expense of the school. The parent who thus interferes to shield his son, from lawful and proper restrictions, inflicts lasting injury upon his child and upon the community.

As teachers are engaged in doing the work of parents, they may reasonably expect their cooperation.

Let parents and teachers unite to secure punctuality—to promote good order—to elevate the standard and perfect the system of popular education, and then may be realized the wishes and expectations of the friends of public schools.

The Committee are under the necessity of asking for an increased appropriation to carry on the schools for the ensuing year. The chief reason for this is that the increased expenses of living renders it impossible to procure adequate teachers, at the price heretofore paid. During the past year, some valuable teachers have left us, on this account, and have taken other situations where their services, if no better appreciated, are more highly rewarded. We are liable to similar losses in other instances, and
besides the evil of frequent changes thus incurred, there is danger that this may result in lowering the standard in instruction and deteriorating the character of the schools. We are therefore obliged to request the town to appropriate $4500 to meet the next year's expenses of the schools.

But we ought not to forget that, even with this appropriation, the expenses of the schools are lower than the same quality and amount of instruction would cost, if furnished in any other way. It is very easy to talk of the large amount required by taxation for the support of our schools, and some may be deluded by the notion that it is a costly machinery, which had better not have been adopted, and which we might now profitably abandon. But no one will entertain such a notion who has given the subject any thought. The system of gradation in schools, and the division and classification of labor which such a system requires, is both the cheapest and the best way in which the same labor can be performed. We have our divisions of labor in other departments; no one thinks it desirable e.g. that the work of the farmer, the carpenter, and the blacksmith should be done by the same hands; every one sees that such a procedure would be not only the most costly but the most inefficient way to do such work. The difference between a civilized and a savage state can be in a great degree characterized by the perfection with which this division of labor is secured. But it is just as true of the work of instruction as of any other work. The best and the cheapest instruction can undoubtedly be furnished where each instructor has a separate department to which he or she can give undivided attention. It may be a question whether our school system as at present adopted may not be further perfected by making the gradations and divisions more complete, but whether we should give up the system is not a question which a wise man will entertain for a moment. It is a remarkable fact that the High School alone has saved to the town, during the last year, an expense greater than the entire appropriation for all its schools during that period. The number of pupils in the High School averages about fifty. But for this school these pupils must have been sent out of town in order to gain the better advantages than they have here reserved. But upon a very moderate computation this would have involved a cost for each pupil of not less than $100 per year. In other words, the actual cost to the town of the instruction furnished in the High School during the last year, had this instruction been gained in any other available way, would have been at least $500, or one thousand dollars more than the expenses of the town for all its schools for the same time. This problem is a very simple one and a similar calculation made in reference to the Grammar Schools would show similar results. The fact is the schools of Amherst are not an exorbitant expense, but are a true and great saving of expense to the town. We cannot do without the instruction, and we cannot gain it so cheaply or so well in any other way. Because the expense comes to us in the form of taxation, it may seem heavier, but is in reality much lighter. We pray the town therefore to continue what it has so well begun, and be not satisfied till it has made perfect that which is already good.

R. B. HUBBARD, J. H. SHELLEY, M. B. GREEN,

AMHERST, March 7, 1874.