

**REPORT ON THE AMERICAN
SYSTEM OF GRADED FREE
SCHOOLS, TO THE BOARD OF
TRUSTEES AND VISITORS OF
COMMON SCHOOLS**

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Report on the American System of Graded Free Schools, to the Board of Trustees and Visitors of Common Schools by H. H. Barney

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COMMON SCHOOLS,
BY
H. H. BARNEY,
PRINCIPAL OF THE CENTRAL SCHOOL.

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Mar. 7, 1930

SCHOOL DEPARTMENT,

Cincinnati, March 21, 1851.

Extracts from the Minutes of the Board of Trustees and Visitors, Jan'y 7, 1851.

Resolved, That H. H. Barney be requested to report to this Board upon the History and present state of the different High Schools of the United States, their mode of government, and manner of being conducted.

January 21, 1851.

A Report of Mr. Barney on the History, condition, and mode of government of the different High Schools in the the United States, was received and referred to the committee on Central Schools for examination and publication.

W. LEUTHSTROM, Secretary.

To the Board of Trustees and Visitors of Common Schools:

GENTLEMEN:—The committee on Central Schools having examined the Report of Mr. Barney in relation to High Schools in the United States, find it to contain a wide range of information pertaining to the government, &c., of such Schools, and have therefore taken much pleasure in carrying out the order of the Board to have the same published.

WM. GOODMAN,
Chairman Com. of Central School.

CINCINNATI, March, 1851.

PREFATORY REMARKS.

Before giving an exposition of the topics embraced in the resolution of the Board, it may be proper to say a word concerning the origin of those efforts which have given such a wonderful impulse to the cause of general education in this country, for the last fifteen years.

Previous to 1830, the common schools had remained almost stationary for several years; or, as Hon. Horace Mann remarked in his first Annual Report, "the common school system had fallen into a state of general unsoundness and debility; a great majority of the school-houses were not only ill adapted to encourage mental effort, but in many cases, were absolutely perilous to the health and symmetrical growth of the children; the schools were under a sleepy supervision; many of the most intelligent and wealthy of our citizens had become estranged from their welfare, and many of the teachers were but poorly-qualified for the performance of the delicate and difficult task committed to their hands." The attention of the public had not been called to the importance of having teachers specially trained for their calling, nor of having some more effectual means for supervising their labors, and securing for them the co-operation of the public, as well as the powerful aid of the government. The grand idea seemed to have been overlooked, that the great end of public instruction was not merely to have schools, but to have *good* schools; schools which should awaken mind and cultivate good principles.

The great and all-important fact had been almost entirely overlooked, that a child has powers and sentiments which, when properly cultivated, predestine him to advance forever in knowledge and virtue, but powers which would be stifled and perverted in their very infancy without proper culture. Indeed, every body seemed to acquiesce in the belief that the common schools were doing well enough, or, at least, as well as they were capable of doing.

About this time, statesmen and philanthropists became impressed with the belief that our civil and religious institutions were in danger; that the political heavens were gathering darkness, and the moral sky becoming daily more and more obscured. Europe was full of commotion and fearful agitation. The iron heel of Russia was on the neck of prostrate Poland; France was a moral volcano; the German states were restless, and the Irish people were getting tired of England's five hundred years of tyranny and misrule. The consequence was, that Europe was pouring in upon our country an increasing tide of her ignorant, superstitious, degraded and oppressed population. Many thought a momentous crisis was at hand, and that something should be speedily done to countervail the baleful influences which appeared to be sapping the very foundations of our institutions.

Public attention was naturally turned to our common schools as the palladium of our liberties; but, upon investigation, they were found, as already stated, insufficient barriers against the destructive tide that was rolling in upon our country.

There was a want of interest in them on the part of parents and others; the change of teachers was quite too frequent; the pecuniary strength of the school districts was greatly impaired by an excessive multiplication of them; the diversity and frequent change of textbooks was legion; teachers were not qualified; school sessions were extremely short, and the vacations long; a regular system of supervision was either entirely wanting or inefficient and sleepy; and, above all, the schools were not distributed into *grades* or *departments*, nor was a suitable course of study prescribed and adhered to.

The deficiencies and evils in the system being ascertained, and the appropriate remedies clearly and eloquently pointed out by the great pioneers in the good cause, Horace Mann, Bishop Potter, Henry Barnard and others, the people began the work of reform in good earnest, and a very high degree of success has thus far crowned their efforts. A new and noble system has thus been wrought out within the last fifteen years, which may be denominated the "Republican System of Union or Graded Free Schools," and which will be considered first in this Report. The most marked change which has taken place in the educational system of this country during the period just referred to, and to which more of its improvements are owing than to all other appliances combined, is the distribution of our common schools into the following grades, viz: 1. Primary

Schools; 2. Secondary or Intermediate Schools; 3. Grammar Schools; 4. Central High Schools—the whole denominated a *Union School*, or a System of *Graded Schools*.

The origin, design, and advantages of a Union School system will constitute the second topic in this Report, and, in discussing it, we shall consider, at some length, the deficiencies and evils of the old *District* system, and then endeavor to show how the *new* system affords a remedy. As a Central High School is only a branch of the Union or Graded School system, and as they originated about the same time, and were designed to accomplish the same ends, we shall discuss them together in this Report. A Union School, with all the departments in one building, is particularly adapted to populous rural districts, and towns and cities not exceeding six or eight thousand inhabitants; and a Central High School, occupying a separate building, to the larger class of cities, such as New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Cincinnati, Providence, &c. A Union School is nothing more nor less than a graded system of common schools, with a High School Department attached; and they are generally preferred in those villages and cities in which the pupils pursuing higher branches are not numerous enough to warrant the expense of a separate building, and a separate corps of teachers. In a Union School, one teacher, and sometimes two, are employed in the High School Department. A Central High School usually occupies a separate building and is in charge of a distinct corps of teachers, as is the case in the Cincinnati, Columbus, Providence, and other High Schools.

There is a difference of opinion among those who are posted up in such matters, in which of the eighty cities in the United States having Central High Schools, the best model of a school system, and especially of a Central High School, is to be found. So far as I have been able to gather up expressions of opinion on this subject, I am inclined to think that the system of Providence, R. I., taken as a whole, has generally received the preference. An outline of its organization is subjoined to this Report. In some particulars, however, several gentlemen experienced in such things, and from eastern cities too, have awarded the palm to the Cincinnati School system; I allude to the "Classification and course of study for the Common Schools of Cincinnati," the manner in which promotions are made from one department to another, and to the organization and general regulations of the Central School. There is no Central School in the United States organized precisely like that of Cincinnati. In Provi-

dence, male and female pupils, though occupying the same building, never recite in the same class. They are, however, brought into the same room together for the purpose of certain general exercises, and to receive lectures on some of the natural sciences. The plan of organization is the "Horizontal System." The pupils remain in the school three years. During the first year they occupy the first story of the building; the second year, the second story; the third year, the third story; and each class during the year makes all its recitations to the same teacher. Hence the origin of the term "Horizontal System;" the school being divided, as it were, into three grades, by *horizontal planes*, and each grade moving to a higher plane once a year until it graduates. Female pupils recite exclusively to female instructors.

In the Hartford High School both sexes not only recite in the same classes and to different teachers in different subjects of study, but are even seated in the same grand room, from which they deploy to the different recitation rooms during the day. In this school there is a mingling of male and female pupils in the most extended sense of the word. They enter the building, however, by separate yards and doors, and have separate play grounds. The system of classification and recitation is the "Departmental."

In the New York Free Academy and the Philadelphia High School, the admissions are semi-annual, and the system in each is the "Departmental." In Boston, Mass., the High School is virtually two schools, viz: the Classical High School, and the English High School. In the former the pupils are fitted for College, in the latter for the various avocations and industrial pursuits of life. The pupils are admitted on examination, at stated periods, from every part of the city, whether they come from the common schools or not. The system is partly "Horizontal" and partly "Departmental."

The organization and arrangement of the Cincinnati central school differs in some respects from them all. Male and female pupils attend the same school as in Hartford, are seated in separate rooms, as in Providence, but, as in the Hartford high school, they recite in the same classes, when the number of each sex pursuing the same study, renders it practicable. In the distribution of the several subjects of study among the teachers, and in the general organization, the "Departmental" system, as in the New York Free Academy and in the Philadelphia High School, has been preferred and adopted.

It seems proper in this connection to specify some of the peculiar advantages claimed for each of these systems by their respective advocates. It is argued on behalf of the "Horizontal" system, that the pupils, occupying the same rooms, reciting continually to the same teacher, and subject to the same rules and principles of discipline for an entire year, can be better managed than where they move from room to room for the purpose of reciting to different teachers, as is the case in the "Departmental" system.

"That having the High School thus divided into *six* small schools," says the Principal of the Providence High School, "produces a *quietness* favorable to the cultivation of good *manners*, correct *taste* and thorough *discipline*; each pupil being desirous of promotion to a *new* room and a *new* teacher, makes greater efforts to do well. Each teacher being responsible for the cleanliness and order of *one* room, he is more likely to be efficient, than when all are seated in one grand room. We think we can, in this way, educate our pupils *quicker*, *cheaper*, and *better*. Other teachers entertain different opinions on this point."

The advocates of the other system contend that, where the pupils remain constantly in the same room, and recite to the same teacher, there is a great tendency to relapse into dull and monotonous habits; that the ability to impart instruction in a lively and impressive manner, is, to some extent, a natural gift, and that teachers often possess this gift in a high degree, in teaching some subjects, but are quite destitute of it in others; that the "Departmental" system enables the Superintendent of the school to take advantage of this fact in detailing the business for his assistants; and that a change of rooms and teachers imparts variety and spirit to the exercises, and promotes the vivacity and energy of the pupils.