

**TRANSACTIONS OF THE
COMMONWEALTH CLUB OF
CALIFORNIA, VOL. XII, NO. 10,
DECEMBER, 1917, PP. 415-479:
SCHOOLS OF SAN FRANCISCO**

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VARIOUS

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OF THE
COMMONWEALTH CLUB OF CALIFORNIA

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TRANSACTIONS
OF THE
COMMONWEALTH CLUB
OF CALIFORNIA

VOL. XII

SAN FRANCISCO, DECEMBER, 1917

No. 10

SCHOOLS OF SAN FRANCISCO

At the request of the Board of Governors, the Club's Committee on Education turned from its study of the general problem of instruction to the particular phase afforded by the reports on the survey of the San Francisco Schools. This survey had been arranged through the San Francisco Public Education Society and the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, the expenses being paid chiefly through a popular subscription. The survey was placed in charge of the United States Commissioner of Education, Dr. P. P. Claxton and agents covered different parts of the department during several months of 1915 and 1916. The written reports of the investigators were not, however, received until July, 1917, and the final chapters not until October, 1917.

The Committee on Education was thereupon reorganized to include a majority of laymen and many meetings were given to an analysis of the data included in the survey report. The committee membership which took part in the investigation was as follows:

A. B. Anderson, Chairman

Edward O. Allen
Brainard C. Brown
G. W. Dickie
George H. Evans

John H. Hopps
Sol. Hyman
Samuel Langer
Russell I. Wisler

At the committee's request a special meeting of the Club was held on October 24, 1917, to present a digest of the material furnished by the Survey, and to consider the reasons for and against a bond issue of \$3,500,000 proposed for the purpose of increasing the school accommodations in the city.

The digest of the survey was presented by Dr. Samuel Langer, and discussion postponed to the regular meeting of November 14, 1917.

The reasons for the proposed bond issue were presented by Miss Agnes Regan, a member of the San Francisco Board of Education. No member being willing to argue against the bond issue, the committee presented a statement of the reasons collected from citizens who intended to vote against the issue. Discussion was participated in by the following members and guests: Alfred Roncovieri, Supt. of Schools; David R. Eisenbach; J. M. Kepner; E. B. De Groot; Donzel Stoney, and C. E. Grunsky. At the election held October 30th, the bond issue was ratified by a vote of 37,619 to 7,485.

The meeting of November 14th was held with dinner and the occasion was made Ladies' Night. About 210 members and guests attended the discussion. The report of the Committee on Education was read by Chairman Anderson and brief addresses on the survey were made by Alfred Roncovieri and A. A. D'Ancona of the Board of Education. The subject was then thrown open to discussion from the floor, under the 5-minute rule.

Meeting of October 24, 1917

A special meeting of the Club was held at the Hotel St. Francis on the evening of Wednesday, October 24, 1917, to afford time for the presentation of a digest of the report of the Survey of the San Francisco schools. The survey had been conducted by a Commission under the direction of P. P. Claxton, U. S. Commissioner of Education, and reports made to the San Francisco Board of Education. The Club meeting was called to order by President Hodghead with a few remarks, after which Dr. Samuel Langer was introduced and presented the following statement on behalf of the Committee on Education:

The San Francisco Public School System

A Digest of the Claxton Survey by Dr. Samuel Langer.

DR. LANGER: The report of the Survey Commission organized by the United States Bureau of Education is designed to reveal facts and results in the San Francisco public school system as they exist here and now; to which is added enough information on results and standards elsewhere attained to enable us to judge our own worth.

It is a dispassionate study of the San Francisco schools and of the San Francisco school system. It is nowhere carping, captious or vituperative. While it is frequently condemnatory, it is at the same time characteristically genial, and, where occasion offers, sincerely laudatory.

The members of the Commission are all people of training and experience, experts of acknowledged authority, removed by position, by connections and by the special rules of procedure laid down for this investigation, from partisan bias or prejudice.

Their report is a graphic sketch of our public education as it actually exists. With the city itself as a background, it depicts the school system, showing in detail the "human plant" of student body, teaching staff, caretakers, supervisors and administrators; the artificial plant of buildings, equipment and materials; and the legal plant of constitutional, charter and administrative provisions under which the system operates.

In addition to this delineation, the report presents a series of recommendations based on these findings, designed to guide the community in its efforts to increase the social efficiency of its schools, both by better use of its present organization and apparatus, and by improving the organization and the apparatus themselves.

The report is not yet complete. Two chapters, the one on high schools and the editor's final summary of recommendations, are miss-

ing. The fifteen chapters at hand, containing in all over a thousand typewritten pages, were sent on in somewhat crude condition of form and arrangement. But, except as to the high schools, all the facts to be presented are in our possession.

In preparing a digest for the information of the layman in education, it has been necessary to rearrange the order of chapters and topics. But no material has been used which is not contained in the report, and no conclusions drawn which are not based on the material presented.

"The city of San Francisco and the county of San Francisco are coterminous. The same persons constitute the population of both. Under the school code of the State of California, San Francisco is a city and county school district, and is organized as such.

As citizens of the county, the qualified voters of the district, as provided by the constitution of the state, elect quadrennially a superintendent of schools who, under the state school code, appoints such deputy superintendents of schools as may be authorized under the law. Under the provision of the charter of the city and county of San Francisco, the county superintendent of schools elected by the people, and the deputy superintendents appointed by the superintendent, become the superintendent and deputy superintendents of schools of the city. The charter of the city and county of San Francisco places the schools of the district under the control and management of a board of education of five members, four members appointed by the Mayor of the city and county, and the county superintendent of schools, who by virtue of his office as county superintendent, is a member of the city board on equal footing with the appointive members." (Chapter III, opening paragraphs.)

From this it is clear that the board of education has no responsibility for the selection of the superintendent and his deputies, and no effective control over them. The superintendent and his deputies owe no loyalty to the board of education and would have no fear of a demand for an accounting of their results. The duties assigned to the board of education and those required of the superintendent are co-ordinate, duplicating and competitive, and power to force an issue is held by neither. The judgment of the Commission is expressed in the following words:

"Out of the complications, uncertainties, and lack of proper subordinations of this dual organization and control come, directly or indirectly, many—perhaps most—of such evils as may exist in the public school system of San Francisco."

This prime cause and this final judgment are not hypothetically evoked, but are based upon a substantial foundation of expert personal observation, of statistics obtained from the most authentic sources, of carefully guarded tests, and of historically and scientifically confirmed standards. To present the data thus collected will be the largest part of this digest.

The City

The geographical, topographical, climatic and business characteristics of our city need not be rehearsed here. The resources in population and wealth, however, are important enough in their bearing on the problem to demand special mention.

San Francisco is a cosmopolitan city, in which eleven different racial groups of foreign-born people are represented by numbers sufficient to constitute from 1.1 to 5.8 per cent of the total population. We have very much less than our share of children under 15 years of age—18.9 per cent as against 32.1 per cent in the United States—and very much more than our share of persons 25 to 44 years of age—41 per cent as against 29.1 per cent. With a much smaller proportion of children of school age than the average city, and with a larger proportion of productive adult population, the financial burden of supporting a public school system is a lighter one in San Francisco than elsewhere. Notwithstanding the large foreign-born population, illiteracy is here below the average for the whole country. Property resources are also shown to be very greatly above the average.

Take these four facts together—the number of children to be taught is much below the average for the whole country; illiteracy, to complicate the problem, is only about one-third the proportion for the whole country; population of producing age to pay the bills, is much above the average for the whole country; and property valuation immensely greater than the average for cities of its class in the whole country, and you have the foundation for the assertion that “few other communities in the world are so able to maintain their schools, and to supply them abundantly with all buildings, equipment and teachers that may be needed for their highest efficiency, at whatever cost may be necessary.”

(a) Student Body

Comparing San Francisco with nine other cities in the population class, 300,000 to 500,000, only two rank lower in the number of pupils in the public elementary schools per thousand of total population. (Table XIV.) The average for the ten cities is 15 per cent

greater than the number in San Francisco. Only one city ranks lower in the number of pupils in the public high schools per thousand of total population. (Table XV.) The average for the ten cities is 56.3 per cent greater than the number in San Francisco. Only two cities rank lower in the number of high school pupils per thousand of elementary school pupils, and the average for the ten cities is 37.9 per cent greater than the number in San Francisco. (Table XVI.) These figures are for the year 1915-16. They indicate that our schools do not obtain the attendance of as many children as they should. To what extent this is due to attendance at private and parochial schools, of which 106 are listed, and to what extent it is due to evasion of the compulsory attendance law, is, for want of a school census, required by law but neglected by custom, impossible to state. But they fail even more sadly to hold the children whom they do reach.

The study of the number of children in attendance, their ages and distribution through the grades, is called "the age-grade distribution." The figures were obtained directly from the principals and teachers, who were requested to compute "as of September 1, 1915." These figures show that, if indeed grading represents mental age, there is a dislocation between the schools and the children's needs, because there is (1) a wide spread in years of age in each grade. Grades 1A and 2A contain pupils ranging in age from under six to over nineteen years; grade 6B contains pupils ranging in age from nine to nineteen. (2) A wide distribution through the grades of pupils in individual age-groups (Table XXIII). Pupils thirteen to thirteen and one-half years of age are found in all grades from 1A to the second year of high schools. Pupils fifteen to fifteen and one-half years of age, in all grades from 1A to the third year of high school. (3) A large number of children who are above the normal age for the grades in which they are enrolled.

The loss of pupils from grade to grade in other ways than by promotion, and the loss of pupils to the system otherwise than by graduation, is called "*elimination*." Elimination in our schools begins very early, is rapid from the very beginning (Table XXIV), and is exceedingly great in the upper grades and after the age of thirteen years (Table XXV). The available figures for the composition of the population of San Francisco by age-periods do not afford an explanation of the rapid falling off in numbers of children in the public schools after thirteen years of age, nor of the rapid falling off in numbers of children after the eighth school year. (Table XXVI.) The inference is clear that the cause must be sought in the schools themselves. This failure of our schools to hold the pupils is empha-