

**THE HARVARD-NEWTON
BULLETINS, NO.
III: BRIDGING THE GAP:
THE TRANSFER CLASS**

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The harvard-newton bulletins, No. III: Bridging the Gap: The Transfer Class by Frank Watson Wright

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BRIDGING THE GAP

THE TRANSFER CLASS

BY

FRANK WATSON WRIGHT

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, UNIONTOWN, PA.

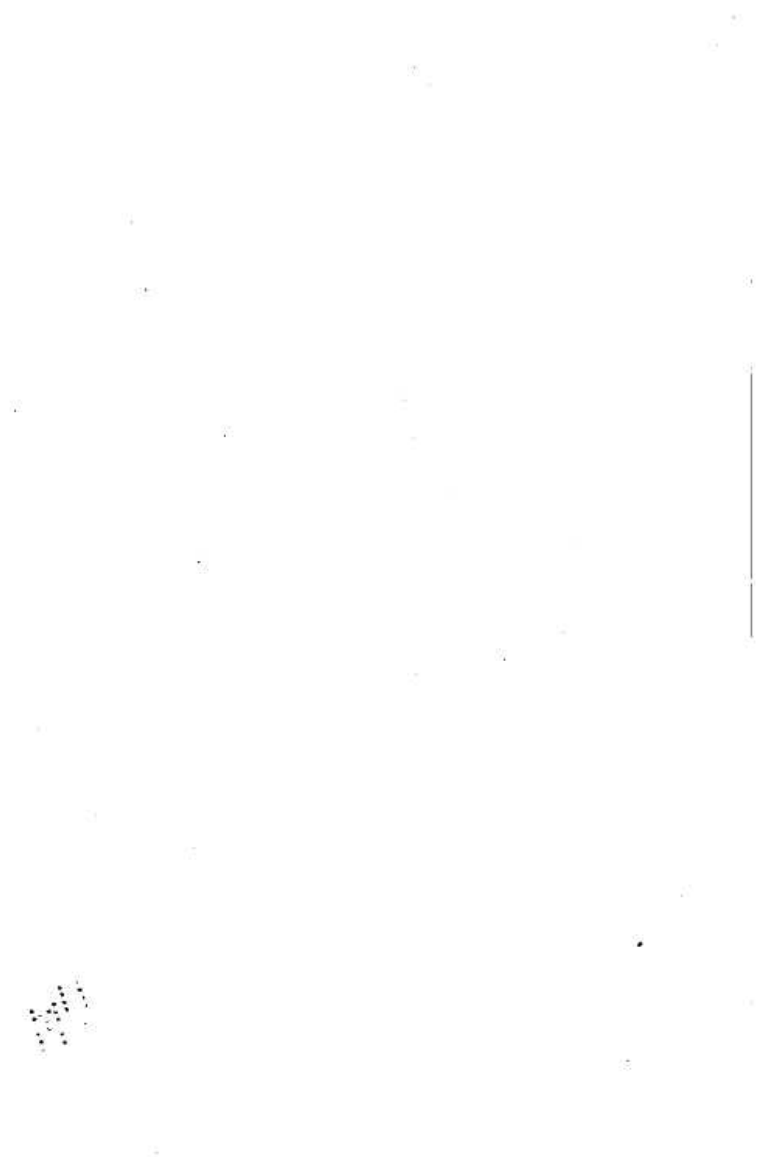


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PREFATORY NOTE

THIS statistical study of Transfer Classes in the Newton schools deals with three distinct groups of pupils, viz.: the class of 1912 of the Newton High School; Certificate (Transfer) Classes, with immediate entrance to the Newton High School, in the years 1906-07-08-09; and the Transfer Classes, requiring one or two years to complete the work for the grammar school diploma, in the Technical High School for 1910. It is upon the results of this statistical study, upon such opinions as were secured from those in charge of the plan, and upon the place that the plan takes in a school system which strives to serve the needs of all its pupils from five to eighteen years of age that the conclusions reached concerning the efficacy of Transfer Classes are based.

In preparing the section of the investigation dealing with the Transfer Classes in the Technical High School, interesting studies by Miss Mary A. Laselle and Mr. C. W. Waldron (teachers in charge of such classes) were freely drawn upon.

F. W. WRIGHT.

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BRIDGING THE GAP

TRANSFER CLASSES IN THE NEWTON SCHOOLS

I

PLACE AND PURPOSE OF TRANSFER CLASSES

The policy represented by the "Transfer Classes" in the public school system of Newton, Massachusetts is well stated in the following paragraphs from the report of Superintendent F. E. Spaulding for 1912:—

The Newton schools are trying to educate all boys and girls in the city from about four or five to about eighteen years of age; the schools are trying to educate every one of these children and youth with individual discrimination, that is, to develop the natural capacity of each so that he will be able and disposed to render the largest possible service to society—throughout his life beyond the school.

We are convinced of the supreme educative importance of the period from fourteen to eighteen, and we are planning and striving most earnestly to hold boys and girls in school through this period.

This is the dominant note in the administrative policy of the Newton schools. In it we find the reason for the Transfer Classes. One recognizes herein not only the policy of a single progressive school system, but a policy that is becoming more and more pronounced in progressive school administration the country over. This policy is the subordination of fixed curricula and arbitrary standards to the varying needs and abilities of the pupils in the schools.

To be sure, this policy is subject to the unfavorable criticism of those who still believe that a high percentage of failure to reach a fixed standard of ability, through a more or less prescribed and formal course of study, is at once an indication of strength in the school, and an evidence of weakness in those who fail. But such

persons seem to be unaware of the remarkable change that has come over both the curriculum and the method of administering it; they do not see that too many students fail, not so much on account of lack of ability, as from lack of adaptability to the formal requirements the schools have set up. And they do not seem to realize the significance of failure to pupils at the age when a Transfer Class would provide some means of carrying them forward to a newer, and, for them, more rational plan of work. Adolescent failure is both pointed in its immediate effects, and permanent in its ultimate influence upon the life of the pupil who acquires the habit of facing it.

In addition to the personal effects of failure in advancement to the high school, or after pupils have once gained the coveted honor of regular promotion, we have to reckon with the feeling on the part of the public that our secondary schools have not yet justified the great expense at which they are maintained. If we set up an arbitrary standard which is to act as a barrier to many, we shall have difficulty in defending the problem of elimination that presents itself, both at the portals and within the high school. People are coming to see that the high school is getting too few and losing too many of the pupils.

Many discussions, largely academic, have taken place on "bridging the gap"; many plans have been suggested, and some tried, for retaining the weak pupils in the high school; but in the Special Transfer Classes of the Newton High Schools we have not only a means of "bridging the gap" — or we might better say the chasm which separates the elementary and the secondary school for the over-age or retarded pupil — but we have, also, a special method of providing for his peculiar needs after he has been transferred to the high school.

II

We now turn to a brief sketch of the development of these classes in the Newton schools.

In 1906, in the various districts of the City of Newton, two kinds of diploma were given to the graduates of the grammar

schools; first, a diploma of graduation which did not admit to the high school; and, second, a diploma with special recommendation, which did admit to the high school without examination. Later, all grammar school diplomas admitted to the high school, together with the plan — and here begins the transfer idea in its most conservative form — of making all “slow pupils” the subject of special investigation by a committee — this committee to be composed of the Superintendent of Schools, the principal of the grammar school, the teacher of the pupil, and the principal of the high school. The committee set one question before itself in taking up each case: Assuming that this pupil is going to school next year, where will he profit most? If the pupil was over-age, the decision usually admitted him to the high school.

As a result of the foregoing practice the following rule of the School Committee made Transfer Classes a recognized part of the administration of the schools:

Certain pupils who have spent a year or more in the eighth grade, but whose standing is not fully up to the prescribed standard for section four (a general average of *C*, not below *D* in arithmetic, language, and grammar, and not below *E* in any subject) may be admitted to the high school without examination.

For the purpose of determining what pupils may be so admitted, a committee consisting of a grammar school principal (acting only when pupils from his school are under consideration), the principal of the high school, and the superintendent, shall consider individually, during the last quarter of the eighth year, all pupils whose ranking falls below the standard for regular promotion. This committee shall decide each case on its merits, the main consideration being the welfare of the pupil. This committee shall determine also the conditions under which each such pupil may be admitted to the high schools, including the courses therein which he may enter without examination, and the number of periods per week which he may carry.

All pupils admitted to the high schools under Section 8 may graduate from the grammar school with their class, and shall receive a formal certificate stating what they have done.

And in addition, for convenience, these pupils shall receive cards, signed by the grammar school principal, stating the conditions on which they are entitled to admission to the high school, in accordance with section 8. — *Rules of Newton School Committee, Sections 8 and 9.*

We must here note that the first transfers were made on certificate to the Newton High School — then the only secondary