

**A REPORT OF THE SURVEY
OF THE NIAGARA FALLS
SCHOOL SYSTEM**

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A Report of the Survey of the Niagara Falls School System by State Department of Education

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STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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SCHOOL SYSTEM**



THE NIAGARA FALLS HIGH SCHOOL.

A model building of its type when erected in 1903. The new building program for the city includes a large addition for the technical and industrial activities, auditorium, gymnasium, and swimming pool.

New York (State) University
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INTRODUCTION

The study of the Niagara Falls school system was undertaken by the State Department of Education on the request of the Niagara Falls board of education, and with the cordial cooperation of the various civic organizations of the community.

In April 1919 a special report was presented to the board of education by their building and grounds committee calling attention to "the pressing need of additional housing facilities for the continually increasing school population." The report emphasized the fact that this need had been recognized for some time; that the president of the board had stated a year previously that "for 10 years up to that time the average increase in our population of school age had been approximately 400 pupils." The committee not only made an analysis of the attendance during the years immediately preceding, but endeavored to interpret the figures in terms of the school problem.

As an illustration of the careful thought given to the problem by the committee of the board of education we note their discussion of the school registration in relation to the situation in the higher grades: "Theoretically these (total elementary registration) could be divided into eight parts or 862 pupils in each of eight grades. But we have only a little over half that number in the seventh and only a small fraction over a third in the eighth grade, a dropping off of 32 per cent between the seventh and eighth grades. Of course there will be a gradual lessening of numbers in the more advanced grades but seemingly the proportion is too great."

The spirit shown by the board of education and their constructive approach to the whole problem not only in their own preliminary study but also in their cooperation with local and state authorities have been most commendable.

On account of their special interest in the building problem a tentative report was made by the State Department of Education to the local board of education early in the fall of 1919 covering the condition of the school plant, the probable direction in which expansion should be made, and comparative school costs in cities the size of Niagara Falls. This tentative report with some slight modifications forms chapters 11 and 12 of this more complete study. The larger part of the work covered by the survey was done during the school year 1919-20, with the exception that the measurement of the instruction and the giving of the standard tests was completed during the fall of 1920. There was unusual cooperation on the part of the superintendents, principals and teaching staff in every phase of the work.

By way of summary statement a few features of the report may be noted. Niagara Falls is a typically cosmopolitan city. Although it has a high percentage of foreign-born whites, this element is largely homogeneous and does not present the social problem found in many communities.

The board of education consists of nine members who are appointed by the mayor of the city. The financial control of the school budget rests largely with the board of education. The annual budget is prepared by the board of education and presented to the city commissioners for approval. Expenditures for school purposes are made under the direct control and supervision of the board of education. The business procedure and office routine in connection with financial matters is unusually well organized. The details are efficiently demonstrated. Apparently the board of education and the superintendent of schools appreciate that efficient business procedure is essential to sound school administration.

The teaching staff shows a high percentage of professionally trained teachers. The local school authorities require the completion of an approved two-year professional course for those entering the service in the elementary schools and graduation from an approved four-year college course for those entering service in the high school. The local school authorities have emphasized the importance of a professionally trained teaching staff through the marked increments that have recently been made in the salary schedules for both the elementary and secondary teachers.

The elementary course of instruction includes not only so-called common branches but also some special subjects such as music, drawing, industrial arts and physical training. The special subjects are under the direction of the special teachers. The work through-

out the grades varied somewhat from recognized standards on account of the reorganization in the course of study and in the supervisory program which had been only partially developed. The apparent outstanding need relates to the reorganization of the work in the higher grades which is already under way through the inauguration of the new intermediate school program.

There are six general courses of instruction in the high school, including college entrance, scientific, normal or teacher training, household arts, industrial and manual arts, and commercial. The courses in household arts and manual arts enrolled a relatively small proportion of the student body. The work in these activities has been handicapped, however, by the lack of needed space and equipment. In several departments the work would be strengthened by a more definite organization. The congestion due to the large high school enrolment and the limited space without adequate opportunities for special activities or for adequate work in physical education, undoubtedly accounts in large part for the loose organization found in the high school at the time this study was made.

The percentage of retardation in Niagara Falls schools is neither unusually high nor unusually low. A marked feature of the situation, however, is to be noted in that an unusually large percentage of boys and girls leave school as soon as they are beyond the provisions of the compulsory attendance law. This situation is appreciated by the local school authorities. This condition will best be met by the provisions that are already under way for the inauguration of the intermediate school program.

The study of the school plant indicates that the school population has rapidly outgrown the present school facilities. This is the outstanding feature of the problem. The rapid growth of the city and the corresponding increase in the school registration from year to year gives ample evidence as to the wisdom of the school authorities and civic organizations in making a thorough study of the present situation.

The elementary school buildings as a group are reasonably modern. The board of education has shown a wise policy in giving very considerable attention to the need of adequate playground space. Their vision is also evidenced in the large provision which is being made to meet this need in the new plans now under way.

Two of the buildings, however, — the Cleveland Street School and Fifth Street School — have probably outlived their period of greatest usefulness. These two buildings, while the oldest in the city, have been used to accommodate the large proportion of the children of the

seventh and eighth grades. This lack of adequate school facilities for the children of the early adolescent period was an outstanding weakness of the present local school organization. The probable annual increase in the school registration is from 400 to 480. If merely desk space were provided and if the present school buildings were sufficient, this means a new 24-room school building every two years. This would leave out of consideration, however, the present serious handicap under which the seventh and eighth grade pupils are working in the two oldest buildings of the city. It would also fail to consider the conditions in the high school where there is already need for additional space and more modern equipment to meet the demands for technical and industrial work.

As a result of the preliminary report and the recommendations regarding the intermediate school program, the board of education presented a plan providing for the building of two intermediate or junior high schools extending the present elementary school plant and providing also for a large addition to the present high school for technical and industrial work along the lines of the cosmopolitan or comprehensive high school unit.

The city of Niagara Falls, through the active interest of civic groups and public-spirited citizens, carried by a large majority five separate proposals representing a total bond issue of \$3,500,000 for the purpose of putting the new school program into effect. Seldom has a city of the State adopted such a constructive and far-reaching educational program. The community is to be commended for its appreciation of the present need and its vision of the great possibility of the future.

The State Department of Education is pleased to have had any small part in assisting the community in carrying forward the plans which have resulted in such progressive educational steps.

Geo. M. Wiley,

Assistant Commissioner for Elementary Education