

**THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
IN THE UNITED
STATES OF AMERICA**

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The Public Schools in the United States of America by Edward E. Sheib

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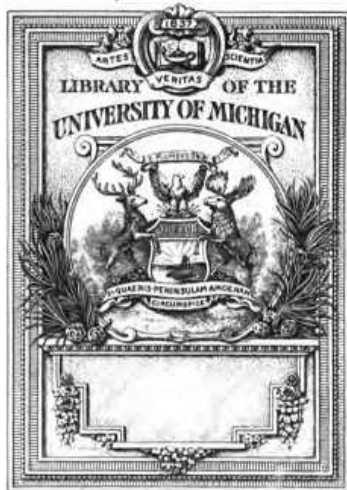
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In modern times the ideas of popular Education have sprung up as necessities. But these ideas, to a great extent, have been transplanted from the countries of Europe to the United States of America, hardly differently from the manner in which the Secondary School was introduced, the history of which extends back to the beginning of civilization in Europe. Yet the schools of Europe have gradually assumed a character, so peculiar to the different nations, that it is easy to know the German from the French or English institution. And still, though it is true that the nature of educational institutions is certainly determined to a great extent by nationality, social and political interests and the standard of civilization which has been reached by each particular nation, nevertheless the achievements of one nation in the department of education like the researches of science, cannot long remain unknown to others. And for that reason, despite their national peculiarities, we find that the schools of all European countries have much in common, and that the fundamental ideas pervading those of England, France, Germany and Switzerland are at the present day much the same. That the results which are achieved in the different countries are so dissimilar is owing to two things: Knowledge or ignorance of the best methods and the skill or deficiency of the instructors.

In the United States the schools are rapidly assuming greater similarity of appearance, as the heterogeneous elements of which the nation is compounded, become more and more assimilated. It is well known that some of the races, now intermingling in that country, are of a character favorable to rapid progress, as the English, the Germans and the French; whilst others greatly impede the



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this case the school-board is independent of the municipal government. The board of education of each city is presided over by a president, who is sometimes the superintendent of the schools of the corporation. It is necessary, in order to become a member of the board, only to be a citizen, of an honest upright character. (Missouri school-law.) The entire control of everything touching the public education is in the hands of the commission. Not only does it select the books to be used, the teachers to be appointed, the buildings, the officers for all positions, and the like, but it even determines the exact amount of work for each class for a given time, the methods to be used, the questions to be proposed at examinations, the number of answered or missed questions required for a mark of "merit" or "demerit." (Report of City of Philadelphia 1874; Boston and Baltimore 1872, 73 and 74.) To facilitate the work which it has to perform, the board divides itself into different committees: Committees on finances, buildings, examinations, appointments, etc. The commissioner representing a ward, is obliged to visit and report upon the condition of the schools in his district, to visit the parents of pupils and to call the attention of the Board to all deficiencies that may appear.

The "Superintendent of Public Schools" in large cities has one or more assistants. He receives a salary of from 3—5000 dollars and is often elected for a longer term of years. He should be familiar with all matters touching the public instruction, visit all the schools and report quarterly to the board and, in his detailed annual report, should supply an account of the standing in each establishment and the progress made during the year. The multiplicitous duties of this office, demand a man of administrative ability and possessed of superior knowledge in educational matters, the more so, as he has to depend nearly entirely upon his own resources, the commissioners rarely being schoolmen who are able to advise him. (Report of Superinten-

dent of St. Louis 1872; 44th Annual Report, Cincinnati 1874 etc.)—The school boards of the different school-districts report to the state school board, and the state school superintendent visits the various districts and renders an annual account to that board.

It is evident, that the municipal corporations enjoy great freedom in organizing their schools and not seldom are they vested with nearly unlimited power. There seems very little probability that the government will, at any time, gain such a considerable influence in educational matters, as would tempt it to use the school for political ends; particularly, do such apprehensions appear unfounded, when it is noticed, how in one state after another, laws are enacted, excluding any one holding a political or municipal office, from serving as a member of the school-board. When it is well known, that vice and ignorance go hand in hand and that prisons cost more than schools, (Report of Board of Education, Massachusetts 1872—73) then the legislature of a state is certainly authorized in taking precautionary measures to secure the safety of society and in making school-attendance, at a certain age, obligatory. But the state-government does not demand more. Viewed thus, it is a mere question of political economy, and the state as such, only takes measures for securing its own welfare. The manner how the demands are complied with, does not concern the state. That compulsory education has not as yet been enforced in all parts of the country, is not a mark of greater liberty, but on the contrary, it is a proof that the national and social institutions of a country are still of a very imperfect kind.

The expenditures for public instruction have increased from year to year. Last year (Report of Commissioner XXXII, Tab. I, Part 2, 1875) the entire income of public schools amounted to 88,648,950 dollars and the expenditures to 81,932,954 dollars; the cost of instruction per capita of average attendance in public schools in 1875 ran-