

WALTON COUNTY

Argyle, Fla., Jan. 1st, 1897.

Hon. W. N. Sheats, Superintendent Education:

Dear Sir--It gratifies me to be able to report progress, on the whole, in educational matters in this county.

Uniform Examinations.--The law providing for uniform teachers' examinations has greatly improved the character of the teaching in our public schools. The gain in this direction is immense. Living near the State line, I have opportunity, by comparison, to learn something of the excellence of our system. In more than one instance, within my knowledge, applicants failing to obtain the lowest grade of certificate in this county have straightway crossed the line and got certificates of high grade. Much credit, for the increased efficiency of our teachers, is due to our faithful, courageous and conscientious Grading Committees, upon whom rests in large measure the responsibility for elevating the standard of education of our public schools.

School Buildings.--There has been some improvements in the matter of school buildings, particularly as to arrangements for lighting and heating. Candor impels the statement, however, that the needs in this direction are still very great. Many of our buildings are such as to endanger the lives of the pupils by draughts, and their sight by deficiency of light. Our school funds are insufficient to bear the expense of school architecture, and many of our patrons seem not to appreciate its importance.

Low Average Attendance.--This report will be very misleading if I failed to note certain unfavorable features. Along with the improved character of the teaching already emphasized, it is lamentable that the average attendance in many schools is very low. In some cases sickness and the poverty of patrons necessitating the services of their children at home, may explain this meager attendance. But, it is to be feared, that want of deep interest on the part of parents in the education of their children, and a failure to exert parental authority to overcome the reluctance of children will account for most of it.

Teachers' Association.--I note, as both indicative and promotive of progress, the organization of a "Teachers' Association" with headquarters at DeFuniak Springs, that is watchful to discover defects in our system and thoughtful to suggest remedies.

The teaching in our schools is less than formerly a mere cramming of the mind with facts, and there is more elucidation of underlying principles.

Failure of School Board to Exercise Its Authority.--The insistence of parents on the privilege of selecting teachers, and the extreme reluctance of the School Board to contravene their will, has resulted in some grievous "misfits." Inasmuch as the State assumes the burden of expense for the schools the law vests in the School Board, representing the State, the right to name the teachers. In making assignments it is well indeed for the Board to give consideration to the wishes of patrons. But there are other considerations besides acceptability, and a firm, but judicious, use of the legal power of the Board in the premises would, I think, improve the prospect.

The improved character of the teaching is the strong point, the average attendance, in many of the schools, at least, is a weak one. I have had it in mind, by means of the local press, or by meetings of patrons, or both, to endeavor to improve the attendance.

Respectfully,

R. Q. BAKER,
County Superintendent Walton County