

GENERAL REVIEW.

Our Public Schools.*

The educational year does not coincide with either the calendar or the municipal year. The municipal year begins December 1st, while the educational twelvemonth commences July 1st. Hence the Directory's year, being identical with that of the calendar, includes the last half of one school year and the first half of the next. Our record for 1871, then, embraces the last half of the school year 1870-1, and the first half of the school year 1871-2.

MORE EFFICIENT SUPERINTENDENCE.

In January, 1871, the newly appointed incumbent of the lately created office of Deputy City Superintendent, John Swett, began his work. The Deputy really doubles, even more than doubles, the activity and consequent usefulness of school superintendence. Personal attention to the constantly increasing throng of petty details very far exceeds the power of any one man, even the most versatile and experienced. Eastern cities no larger than ours provide two, and, in some cases, even three deputies, to do the work here exacted from one. The Deputy's duty is to visit schools, observe methods, commend excellencies, note defects, suggest improvements, counsel younger teachers, advise with principals, and communicate results to the Board; in short, to promote unity, foster harmony, and increase efficiency. In some respects he is a traveling Normal School, which kindly goes round to the teachers instead of compelling the teachers to come to it. The eminent ability and extended experience of the first incumbent have caused his office and his duties to seem as natural and become as useful as if both had been long established. Both office and duties had long been needed, and have already paid many times their cost to the Department.

THE NEW COURSE OF STUDY.

Decidedly the next gain, in point of value, has been the dropping of the less essential studies from nearly all the grammar grades, and the material reduction of the amount required in several of the studies retained. The new course cumbers pupils with fewer tasks, but requires them to make up in thoroughness what they may lack in variety, so that, while the whole amount of formal study is considerably lessened, the thoroughness of the drill and the real quality of the education secured is correspondingly enhanced.

CONSOLIDATION OF PRIMARY GRADES.

A third improvement, of hardly less importance, was the consolidation of primary grades in such a way as to reduce their number and double the time allowed to each without increasing the time required for the completion of the full primary course. Formerly the primary system included six grades each occupying six months, while the grammar course consisted of four grades each requiring one year. The manifest difficulty was that the highest primary grade would be graduating pupils into the lowest grammar grade twice as often as the beginning grammar grade was ready to receive them. By

*We are indebted to the courtesy of Prof. E. Knowlton for this interesting Communication.—[COMPLER.

reducing the number of primary grades and extending the time of each through one year, the completion of each grade, the examinations therein, and the promotions therefrom, are made coincident with those of each grammar grade.

COMPETITIVE EXAMINATION OF TEACHERS.

The fourth improvement, and one tending directly and especially to enhance efficiency at its very source, was the establishment of quarterly Competitive Examinations of Teachers. All candidates for position as teachers in the Public Schools of San Francisco, regardless of age, sex, previous experience, number of testimonials or character of indorsements, are required to pass an oral examination conducted by specially elected practical teachers, in the presence of the other candidates and, frequently, before members of the Committee on Classification, with the Superintendent or Deputy, or both. The Board of Examination subsequently classifies the successful candidates into three grades or ranks, and submits a written tabulated report of such classification to the Board of Education, for its information in the nomination and election of teachers.

The averages of several such examinations thus far have clearly demonstrated three things:

- 1st. Surprising incompetence in candidates claiming, and supposed, to be thoroughly qualified.
- 2d. The imperative need of thorough examinations, faithfully conducted by competent and impartial examiners.
- 3d. The great aid rendered, by these examinations, to the Committee on Classification, in its nomination of teachers; and to the whole Board in their subsequent election.

Unfortunately, however, truth compels us to state that some of these subsequent elections have clearly shown that unquestioned natural capacity and the best certified experience, joined with the highest rank in scholarship, cannot always command the number of votes requisite to secure a position as teacher in the public schools of this city. Here, as elsewhere, the question more frequently asked is, *not what, but who* the candidate may be. Personal influence—the bane of California public life—reinforced by prepossession or prejudice, occasionally causes obvious personal partiality and gross injustice.

EVENING NORMAL SCHOOL FOR TEACHERS.

A City Normal School, just established, or revived, affords younger teachers, and, in fact, all teachers, opportunity to learn what older or other professional brethren or sisters can teach. This tends immediately to make them better teachers in their own classes, and, incidentally, to qualify them for passing the competitive examination necessary to obtain a higher grade certificate should they so desire. This school meets on Monday evening of each school-week, continues two hours, is conducted by competent teachers,—under the direction of the Deputy Superintendent as Principal,—is numerously attended, and promises much good.

INCREASED PAY OF GRAMMAR ASSISTANTS.

To raise one's salary generally stimulates one's efficiency, and to increase one's efficiency certainly