A PUBLIC SPIRIT
George H. Atkinson’s Written Legacy

Transcribed and with a foreword by Donald J. Sevetson
Our treasure lies in the beehive of our knowledge. We are perpetually on the way thither, being by nature [...] honey gatherers of the mind.

Friedrich Nietzsche

The “Bee Tree”, an iconic ivy-covered tree that stood on the Pacific University campus for many years, was already old and hollow when pioneer Tabitha Brown arrived in Oregon in 1846. Mrs. Brown started a home for orphans that would grow into Pacific University. According to the Forest Grove News-Times, the tree was “said to have housed a swarm of bees who furnished the little old lady with honey which she sold to buy provisions for her orphan children.”
George Atkinson’s lifelong commitment was for education for all. The ways in which he expressed that belief were many and varied.

He was the first person to bring textbooks in quantity for use in the schools of Oregon. While sailing on the Samoset from Boston to Honolulu he taught sailors to read. During his first year in Oregon he led in forming Tualatin Academy in Forest Grove, later to become Pacific University. He served as the secretary of that institution’s Board of Trustees for the rest of his life. In 1849 he prepared, and lobbied for, the legislation submitted to the first Territorial Legislature that led to the establishment of a system of common schools. He worked hard to recruit school teachers from the East, and to establish institutions for teacher preparation in both Oregon and Washington.

Atkinson’s most intensive involvement in education was during his nine years as pastor of the Congregational Church in Portland. Six of those years (1864-8 and 1870-2) were also spent as the elected Superintendent of Schools for Multnomah County, Oregon. This was a salaried position, but not considered full time.

Thirty-one districts had been drawn for the county, though only about half had enough residents to justify establishing a school. Each of the districts having a school had a three member school board. Although the Superintendent made many visits to schools, a regular visitation schedule was not realistic.

He chose to report on his work as superintendent in the columns of the Oregonian, the editor and publisher of which was Harvey W. Scott, Pacific University’s first graduate, and a member of Atkinson’s
church in Portland. The reports made him able to inform and educate readers across the county about the work, needs, goals, and vision of a large, complex, rapidly growing educational enterprise. A significant benefit for Atkinson was the growth of his reputation for intelligence, integrity, and dedication.

Nineteen reports have been found. Taken as a whole, they give a comprehensive, fascinating portrait of an energetic administrator involved with all dimensions of the school enterprise, supporting, challenging, chastising and praising the various districts under his care.
Reports of the Multnomah County Superintendent of Schools
July 1864 through June 1868
July 1870 through June 1872

Source:
The Oregonian Archives
Multnomah County Library
COMMON SCHOOLS IN MULTNOMAH COUNTY

The undersigned has visited most of the districts and found ten public schools in operation in as many districts, and two private subscription schools in other districts. Four schools in four districts—three public and one private—have recently closed. Of six or eight other districts he has yet no account.

Seven of the ten districts have comfortable, and some of them very neat, school-houses, which are a credit both to the district and the county. Three have rude, temporary structures. A disposition is manifested by some, at least, to make the children’s school-house convenient and attractive; yet improvement can still be made in this department, even in the foremost districts. Some school-houses need shade trees, of which others have a full supply; some need curtains to keep the hot afternoon sun from the heads of feverish and weary lads; some need to be ceiled before winter; all need outline charts or maps. One had no black-board until supplied by the teacher. In several, the seats and desks require remodeling. But with all these suggestions, we notice pleasing evidence of interest and attention to the subject on the part of the people. Often the school-house surpasses the farmer’s house. It is a wise rule to let the former keep pace with the latter. There is no finer ornament for a settlement than a neat, painted school-house among the trees, enclosed in an ample yard, with its number in legible figures over the door.

The ten schools visited number only from six to twenty-six pupils each, while the average is from five to twenty-two. Districts suffer because families move from their claims to town for the sake of schools, and because the wealthier class, in some cases, send their children away to what are called high schools. This practice takes from $100 to $1,000 or $1,500 annually away, which might be expended at home with more profit to all parties. For instance: a girl or boy has no need to go to an academy until he has completed the Mental and Practical Arithmetic, the four Geographies, the Common Grammar, the Common School History, and until he has become a good reader and a good penman. The walls of an
academy give him no advantage in these studies, unless it be in outline maps and charts. Usually he learns faster in the district school, under a good teacher, with his fewer pupils.

He comes to his daily task fresher and in better health, from the genial duties of home, than he can from any boarding house or stranger family. His vigor of body and mind are better preserved and his morals are under better care at home. If he attends the academy, it amounts only to a district school for him, because he must pursue the same studies. He often annoys and impedes those teachers by his poor reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, geography and grammar lessons, for he is expected to know these things before entering the academy. Soon his expenses burden parents and his term is shortened, so that he returns home more deficient in the primary and fundamental studies than he would have been by diligent application in the district school. If such pupils take higher studies, as philosophy, chemistry, algebra, botany, geology, geometry, rhetoric, logic, or music, drawing, painting, French, Latin and Greek, they will only acquire a smattering, and will stumble continually, because these higher studies are interwoven with and dependent upon the common studies.

Academies cannot remedy these evils. They must take such pupils as come. The only remedy is with parents and district schools. If these latter are kept on the shortest legal allowance of three months in a year, under an ordinary teacher, the high schools will be kept low, and lasting injury will be done to the mental habits, if not to the physical and moral health of the youth, who are sent away to half learn what they can wholly and more easily learn in the district school.

This injury can be and it is done at four or five times the cost of the opposite benefit.

On the other hand, parents, who are wealthy enough to send their children away, can use the same money to hire good teachers and keep them longer in their own districts, and what is better, have their children at home. If neighborhood bickerings arise, a little forbearance and generosity will usually unite the discordant
elements. Let every district resolve to make its school a first class school. Let every voter attend the school meeting with the sole purpose and vote and pay tax enough to put the house in good order and to hire the teacher for six or nine months.

The incidental benefits would be to make such districts popular, to attract more families, to transform scattered settlements into thriving and compact neighborhoods, to introduce the blacksmith, wagon-maker and other artisans and laborers, to raise the price of land, to open and improve more farms, and to increase taxpayers and lighten taxes. It is a sign of disease in the system when the blood determines to one part, whether the head or the limbs. It is a mark of ill-health in the body-politic, when the families—its life blood—“all rush to town.” A good district school is one of the best correctives of such abnormal tendencies.

G.H. ATKINSON,
Super’t. of Public Schools, Multnomah Co.

Aug. 25, 1864

In a recent communication I called attention to the commendable interest which several of our districts had shown in their organization, in their support of good schools, three, six, and, in some cases, nine months in a year; and in the suitable location and convenient structure of a majority of the school houses.

It is due to the district committees to say that they have evidently sought to employ competent and faithful teachers, and to make the schools worthy of the patronage of all the families in their districts. With the limited funds, which some committees have at command, they cannot of course do all that is desirable for the highest efficiency of their schools.

In some cases, there are divisions of sentiment in the district, which seriously cripple the action of both the trustees and the teachers of schools. In others there is a most desirable co-operation and harmony, and such districts reap the greatest advantages. In every
case the regularly chosen committee, with the school law before them, ought to exercise their authority and do their whole duty for the good of the school, without fear or partiality, and they will at least be appreciated.

It is hoped that time, experience, and observation and great teachers, will produce favorable changes and improvements in districts, now troubled with divided counsels. There is need of united, firm, and patient action on part of all, who love the cause of popular education; and, more than all, a purpose unchanged, that they will have a free school in their own districts; that they will organize and report regularly, and draw their share of the public money, and that they will visit and watch over their own school, become acquainted with its excellencies and its defects, and seek to become its intelligent guardians.

Fellow citizens of Multnomah County, you can know very little about your schools or your teachers unless you visit them. You must not depend upon your school committees alone. You must visit your own schools. The teachers will be glad to see you at any time. The children will be glad to see you. The eyes of your little ones will sparkle if they see you, father or mother, or uncle or aunt, older brother or sister coming into their school.

They will study better and behave better for your visit. The sight of your face, for five or ten minutes even, will do more good in the school than you imagine. The older children will take courage and even pride to do their best, especially if they may expect to see you. I have often noticed that the promising scholars are those whose parents attend most to these schools, and who often visit them. The committee will not be envious of your attention to these matters. Possibly they may never meet you in the school or know that you were in.

Yours in behalf of popular education,
G.H. ATKINSON, Supt. Com. Schools
MULTNOMAH COUNTY FREE SCHOOL—THE PRIMARY DEPARTMENT

In previous articles, some praise has been given to our citizens for the many good school houses in the country, and for their effort to get able and faithful teachers. We need now to look a little at the plan of the school itself, for there should be a plan in every school, as truly as a plan of the house.

Indeed the plan of the school ought to give form to the building in which it is kept.

The idea of the school should lead and not follow the fixtures for it. We do indeed have some attempt at this in the two or three low benches to suit the short legs of the little ones, but even these fail to fit. They have in many cases no backs to rest the weary child. Too often his feet cannot touch the floor and they hang in pain over the edge of the seat. If he lies down he is out of order and must get up. If he slips on to the floor for rest, he is worse off, for a switch will perhaps startle him. His seat too is often inclined out, so that he slides off. In a word, the building committee do not study well the wants of the little ones. At home they have nice little chairs, and stools, and lounges. They rest often by change of position. Their muscles are soft, requiring each rest. The result in school is to make them tired and uneasy. A child will sit as still as a grown person, but he cannot so long. Nature keeps him on the move, though it be but a short move.

In his early school days we must not resist this law, but guide it. Would you have the Primary Department quiet you must have low seats inclining in, like a child’s chair at home. You must have a desk for the little boy’s books as well as for the larger boys. He can rest on that also. Why should he hold his book up all the time, while others can lay theirs down? His small primer is as heavy for him as the larger books for the larger boy. But you often see the little boys and girls on the front seat, without a desk with a high perpendicular back. Lying down and turning every way to be comfortable, they fail
to be so, and they care for nothing as much as to go home.

The little ones are often too cold. They suffer sooner than older ones. They are nearer the floor and cold currents of air sweep over them continuously. They get chilled when the teacher thinks it warm enough. Stoves are set up high and they cannot get their feet up to warm them. At other times, I have seen little children kept in seats upon which the sun blazed in, keeping them in a fever. They actually wear thinner shoes or boots than older scholars and even thinner clothing, while too often they have less care to keep out of the rain and the mud. They sit all day with wet feet, or a wet jacket. School directors and school teachers must attend first and most wisely and constantly to the comfort of the primary pupils. In my next I will plead that they may have proper teachers and the right teaching.

G.H. ATKINSON,
Superintendent of Common Schools

January 7, 1865

THE PRIMARY DEPARTMENT

In my last article care for the physical condition of the small children in our schools was urged upon directors and teachers. We ought to care most for the young and tender plant. As age develops strength less care is needed.

What is true of the body, is true of the mind. The little child’s mind is in a tender state. It is as strong as a man’s for his age, but, like his body, wants growth, and thus the proper care and culture in order to grow. The minds of some bright little boys and girls are stinted by wrong habits of teaching, as I have seen their bodies stinted by wrong habits of work in the shop and factory, and even, though not often, on the farm.

There is a natural way for every child to learn at school, as at home. What he learns at home and in the shop is by imitating and by
trying to do certain work. The trial educates and trains him, while it encourages him to make new trials. How many self-educated farmers, carpenters, blacksmiths, gunsmiths, printers, merchants, lawyers, doctors and ministers we have in America and especially in our new State, and they generally do their work well. It is a marvel to some to find a man who cannot read or write doing a large and intricate and successful business. But we have had such cases in Oregon. We say that the man has no education; but this is a mistake. He has learned some things well, and he has learned how to use the knowledge of men. He sees quickly, studies deeply, reasons correctly and acts promptly respecting matters in which he is interested; two things have been true of such a man: he has felt an interest in knowing some things, and secondly, he has succeeded.

These two things are elements in every child. The first day of school you can see interest in every child, however small. His curiosity is all awake. The boy has much to tell pa and ma when he gets home at night. This curious interest of the child is the golden thread which the teacher may take, and which he must take in his hand to guide the child’s mind from one subject to another, and from one truth to another. The first days in the primary department might be spent in pointing out the objects in the school-room.

The teacher might ask the little boy or girl what the stove is for? What the house is for? What the black-board? What the slates? What the chart? What the primer? What a letter is? What a figure is for? At every step questions and answers should keep alive the child’s interest and he should feel that he succeeds. Soon he will learn the sounds of letters, or a verse of scripture or of poetry. He will see that he can fold his hands as others do, and know the letters and words and figures. His mind will begin to grow, or rather it will not stop growing. It will develop easily and naturally in new directions. If the teacher keeps a faithful hold of the child’s interest by such means, he or she will be able to lead on the pupil, step by step, to new truths with increasing success.

It is at this point that children are stinted. Their curiosity is not kept alive, or they do not succeed in getting the idea which they need to get. The task then becomes hard, even if it be in the alphabet, or in words of two or three letters. True it is, that our modern school
books contrive to arouse children by pictures and stories, and they help the teacher; but the teacher, after all, is more than the book. He must point out the way, give a cheering word, and make every child feel that he is doing something.

One little boy can make a good figure or letter, or draw the outline of a horse or cat, or the lines of a man. Another can read distinctly. Another spells well. A fourth is good for his quietness. A fifth sings well, and a sixth is a smart speaker. Each differs in mind from his companion as much as in looks. Two cannot be made exactly alike mentally. It is of no use for the teacher to expect the same things of every child. Uniformity in learning the letters, or to read or spell, or to give the sounds of the letters, or in studying Geography or Arithmetic, does not appear in the smallest collections of children, much less does it in large primary departments. The teacher must look for variety of talent and aptness in the little ones. They are scions of different families, and they are to be our future laborers, artisans, traders and professional men.

Cowper’s parents tried to make a lawyer of him, but he could be nothing but a poet. Some girls cannot help being good musicians. The music is in them, and they sing even when they are very small. Others can never sing or play with ease and success though you give them the best instructors. Yet the singing child may stumble over the simplest rules of arithmetic, while the unmusical child will find arithmetic and grammar a pastime. The teacher failing to find the same powers in both, must not call the one a dunce, and the other a bright scholar. The teacher must not have a chart marked for reading, spelling, writing, geography and arithmetic and grade all the pupils as they meet the bill, putting zero against the names of two, five or eight, who have no faculty for anything in the bill, but who have a faculty for something not in the bill.

I have seen smart boys and girls put down as nobodies because they could not do just what the teacher required as well as others, or even at all. Such children soon feel hurt and discouraged, and they give up all effort. Parents feel sad, and sometimes ashamed of their little ones. The fact is, these dunces are smarter to do some things than the brighter scholars are. They are little heroes to do what they
have an aptness for, and it is the teachers’ as well as the parents’
duty to find and bring out every child’s peculiar faculty, so that he
may himself see it, and feel encouraged. Then he will go on to learn
what will help him to know what he wants to know.

The fact is, that some of the best minds are stinted in primary
instruction and they never outgrow it. More care is needed to start
the young plant well than to make it grow well afterwards.

G.H. ATKINSON
Superintendent

January 19, 1865

PRIMARY DEPARTMENT

The work to be done in this department, we admit, is not easy.
It is a task to find the nature of each mind and heart, and then
deal rightly with each one. It requires wisdom, skill and patience. It
demands some experience, with a habit of close observation. No such
task is put upon any person in the community, as upon a teacher,
and no teacher has so responsible a place as the one who conducts
the primary department. If he takes a wrong step he breaks a tender
spirit, as the nurseryman who treads down his choicest fruit trees.

The maturest and most skillful teachers ought to be put into the
primary school room, and then all the fixtures should be made
to suit the little one’s demand. Much freedom should be allowed
to train them. The lesson should be simple and so varied, that
weariness and sameness shall be avoided. Much effort should be
made to bring out every child in something; in reading, spelling,
writing, the sounds of the letters, counting, singing, making figures,
drawing, sewing, even, and knitting; anything that the child can do.
One thing will help another. Soon the teacher can awaken dormant
powers and bring every one forward to a fair standing.
We know that the advancement of scholars is checked for want
of thorough study in the primary department. Pupils take higher
studies, who have not mastered the lower ones, and hence they are always superficial and imperfect. This is due to defects in the start. The child has not had the care, which his mind demands, and he suffers. No sure remedy exists in the upper departments. It must be found in the primary school. But it cannot be found here, if this is left to be a chance development. If it does not seem important to teachers and directors how the little ones get along, then the annual loss of mental development will fall upon a large per cent of pupils. But if we take good care of the primary department, the others will succeed with comparatively little difficulty.

This leads to the final remarks, that the best rooms—as to size and location and comfort—the best play-grounds, and the best teachers should be provided for the primary departments of our schools.

It is not right to crowd a room with little children, and expect any teacher to care of them and train every one successfully. There must be room enough for all the classes and for all the changes and movements which the primary Department requires. There must be classes enough to meet the advancement of the pupils, and time enough allowed to learn the condition of every child’s mind and to afford every one help.

Hence the labor of the primary departments ought to be well divided between two or three teachers.

The tendency is to impose too much upon those who conduct this department. In large schools like the public school in this city, the tendency is to lay too heavy burdens upon those who teach the little ones. This occurs just now incidentally on account of the rapid increase in the number of pupils, and measures are believed to be in progress to increase the number of school-houses in the city. But in all our schools there are liable to be the greatest defects in the instruction of small children, and too low an estimation of their wants in the selection of teachers.

G.H. ATKINSON,
Supt. Common Schools.
COMMON SCHOOLS OF MULTNOMAH COUNTY—
PERMANENT TEACHERS

Persons familiar with the operation of schools have noticed that a change of teachers produces a change in the course of studies. Very often the new teacher puts the pupil back to the beginning of every book which he is studying. The Grammar classes begin the Grammar again; the Geography, Arithmetic, Reading and Spelling classes do the same. If teachers are changed every six months, this putting back occurs as often. If the school is kept only three months, the new teacher begins where the old one did, and advances but little farther. Some children are annoyed and discouraged by this process; others like it, because it gives them a very easy time. Parents know not why their children make so little progress from term to term; yet teachers, knowing little or nothing of their new pupils, can do no better. For instance, if a teacher should call up a boy or girl of twelve years, and on inquiry, found that he had ciphered to fractions, and conclude to let the child begin at fractions, but after trial find that the child did not know how to divide or multiply readily, he would naturally suppose him deficient in addition or subtraction, and numeration and rotation. His only remedy of course would be to have the boy or the girl begin the book. If a child proposes to parse a simple sentence, and yet fails to give the parts of speech correctly, the new teacher concludes at once that he needs to be drilled in the elements of grammar, and so puts him back. The teacher cannot know in what, or to what extent a child is deficient. His plan of review must therefore be general, but his term closes before he has done much more than review what his predecessor has done, and what his successor will do.

Hence teachers, hired for a single term or two terms, are comparatively of but little use to a school. In this time they become fairly acquainted with the minds and standing, or advancement, of their pupils, and thus well prepared to carry them forward, to direct their view of needed points, or rules or sections, and to assist them in what they are deficient.
To illustrate the subject, let the school at East Portland be continued a year under the efficient instruction of Mr. Garlick, the present teacher, and all the pupils will be well advanced in their several studies, and they will be thorough. But if the people let Mr. Garlick go, and hire a new teacher—say after three months vacation—their children, a year from this time, will not be much in advance of their present standing, or of that which they will attain during the present quarter. The same remarks are true of the school in District no. 2—that which includes Brooklyn. If the Directors can possibly secure the continued service of the present excellent teacher, Mr. McLaren, it will be of great advantage to their children.

One reason why our city grade school and our subscription schools and academies are superior, is in the fact that the teachers seldom change, or are changed. The teachers know their pupils. The first and second terms give them the opportunity to find the mental culture of every child, and after that they can direct the studies, or afford the help which every child needs. Unless the teacher has this knowledge he cannot adapt himself to the pupil.

Parents may and they do complain that the teachers do very little good, while they themselves are at fault, because they will not give them time to produce desirable results. If you hire a man to till your farm, and tell him that he must do it in three months, and bring you the proceeds, he will very naturally object to the requirement and say that crops cannot be raised in three months. But how much more unreasonable it would be for you to reply: Sir, I have only money enough to hire you for three months. If you have a mind to work for that time on my terms it is well; otherwise I will find a man who will. There’s the land, sir. It is part unbroken prairie, part hazel brush and part thick woods. It is unfenced, sir, but that’s my farm, and if you have a mind to take it and bring me the crop in three months, you can have the job.

Equally absurd is it to require a teacher to put a wild school into good, productive order, and gather the mental harvest in three months.

But it is objected that we cannot afford a nine or ten months school per annum. Yet you expend one, two and even five thousand dollars
upon your wild land, and hardly make a show of a farm at that. Besides if a district like East Portland will tax itself to keep a school ten months in every year, and to add another room for the increasing number of pupils, the population will increase, the lots and farms will rise in value far above their cost. A graded school, conducted by permanent teachers, is the best investment which any district can make for itself.

Another advantage in having permanent teachers is, that teaching thus becomes a profession, honorable as it is useful. If candidates for this service understand that they will be wanted permanently in a school, they will prepare themselves for it, and we shall have a less and less number who want to teach a few months to get a little money in order to go into some other business.

It is to be hoped that the district directors in our county will, so far as possible, employ their old teachers, and hire them for a longer time. It is also to be hoped that the people will vote to tax themselves in every district, as one of the best means to promote the improvement of their children, and also to advance their own pecuniary interests.

G.H. ATKINSON
Supt. Of Schools

March 17, 1865

SCHOOL STATISTICS (Oregonian)

Rev. Mr. Atkinson has left with us the facts for the following compilation of statistics in reference to the schools of Multnomah County. They relate to an important branch of our progress, and will be read with interest. The schools of our county have, under the management of the present incumbent of the Superintendent’s office, fared well, and appear to be prospering finely.
There are twenty-seven School Districts in the county, of which fourteen have school houses, the total value of which, estimated with grounds, is placed at $20,000. The average number of quarters of school in each District is found to be one and a half, or a little more than four months. The average number of scholars attending has been twenty-five in each District. Eighteen female and sixteen male teachers have been employed in Public Schools in the past year, at a monthly salary of $40 for the latter, and $28.74 for the former. The number of High Schools or Academies in the county are seven, with an average attendance of one hundred scholars. The pay of teachers, in each, is averaged at $75 per month. The whole number of voters in the county, according to the District reports is given at 1,009, which is, properly, including only those estimated as residents, taking part in the School Meetings of the various Districts, we presume. The returns show 1,982 persons over four and under twenty years of age, 981 of whom are males, and 1,001 females. The taxes levied and collected for the past year amount to $1,373.04. Teachers have received from the School Fund $2,018.76. Teachers have received from other sources of taxes and subscription, $3,093.76. Incidental expenses have been $1,115.04.

Sanders’ series of readers and spellers are used in 20 districts, Parker & Watson’s in 7; Monteith’s and McNally’s Geographies in 20; Davies’ series of Arithmetics in 10; Thompson’s in 16; Clark’s Grammars in 11; Bullion’s Pieno’s and others in 10; Willard’s U.S. History in 7; Spencer’s Copy-Book in 7; Colburn’s Mental Arithmetic in 3; Thompson & Davis' in 3. A few other varieties of text-books are scattered among the schools, multiplying classes, confusing pupils, and hindering teachers. The Superintendent urges a thorough statistical return of the text books used in the whole State, so that any future attempts to establish a uniform series upon the different subjects of study may be wisely made, and if possible, so as to save expenses to the families, who desire and receive the benefits of our Public Schools, while, also, the best books are chosen.
Most of our schools outside of Portland are in operation during the late spring and early summer months. Those are the most convenient seasons to spare older children, and the best for smaller ones to go to and from schools. I find eleven schools in progress, eight or ten others have either closed their terms or have been stopped by the high water. The city schools with their ten teachers amount to more than all the others in the county. They may be fairly set down as ten schools numbering seventy pupils each equal to twenty-five or thirty outside schools. Enrolled in the twenty schools outside the city there are, according to a pretty careful census, about 536 pupils, and within the city, 722 pupils—giving about five twelfths to the former seven twelfths to the latter. Of 2,333 children between the ages of 4 and 20 years in the county, only about 1,232, or one half are enrolled in the school registers. Of this deficiency, 850 are in Portland. The Academies and private schools have nearly 350 of these, leaving 500 unprovided. Two hundred and fifty in the outside districts fail to attend school, or about one-third of the whole number. The proportion of boys and girls is very nearly equal.

The School Houses remain much as usual. Some are well built, with good ventilation, light and heat, and comfortable seats. We can still commend those in Districts 1, 2, 3, 4, 15, 17 and 21. Districts number 14 and 26 are now erecting good houses. Some districts may have erected good houses within a year or two, which I have not visited; but the houses in 8 and 10 need better seats and desks. No. 18 ought to build a good house. They have a central and fine location. No. 21 needs one or two additional rooms to meet the wants of their increasing population, and especially to grade their school. The site is very fine. The proprietor of East Portland has given a block, which furnishes ample room for a building with all the Departments of a good school. It would add as much to the desirableness and value of that village as the present school has done.
District no. 10 has done honor to itself and to the cause of education by the erection of a beautiful school house on Harrison and 5th sts. The site has, however, been found unequal to the wants. The plan is according to the earlier, instead of the later ones for graded schools. It would be very desirable to have in this city a school building like that for the Denman Grammar School on Bush Street, San Francisco. To illustrate its importance, take the school in our new building just named. In the Grammar Department, 115 pupils were enrolled. They assemble in one large room, under the care of Mr. Warren, who, indeed, kept them in admirable order; yet classes were frequently going out to another room, under the care of Miss Lewis, to recite. These classes were in the same book and grade as those who remained and recited to Mr. W. For instance, there were in the Third Reader two classes—one of 26 pupils who recited to Miss L., and one of 28 pupils who recited to Mr. Warren.

These classes might have been together had there been a room of the proper size. They were of about the same standing in Geography and Arithmetic. These fifty-four pupils might have been under the same teacher, until prepared to enter another and higher grade. It is so in the Denman School and in others in San Francisco and Chicago, and other eastern cities.

There were thirty-five in the Fourth Reader who read to Mr. Warren, and thirty-six in the same who read to Miss Tower. These were of about the same grade in other studies, or they could have been, and thus have occupied another room until fitted for a higher grade, under one teacher, had a suitable room been found. Thus two grades of the Grammar Department might be formed. All the disturbance of passing to and from the rooms, and all the loss of time would be saved. The pupils would finish a prescribed course, be examined, and if qualified, would pass to the next room, and so on, until all the grades had been completed. Taking Wells’ graded system, which is now the American standard, as our guide, we should soon have the four grades of the Grammar Department. The present large room of the new building might be divided by sliding doors at little expense, and thus give us two departments. Possibly the two small recitation rooms might be large enough for the third
A Public Spirit

and fourth grades as our population now is, yet they are too small and confined for such permanent use.

We may illustrate the same subject by the Primary School in the same building. Miss Stevens had 237 pupils enrolled who assembled in one room. The average attendance was 150, who were closely packed. It was impossible to keep them quiet by “Rests”, “Singing”, “Recesses”, or any appliances with their lessons. Miss Kelly took class after class to her recitation room, but this necessarily kept up some confusion. There were thirty-seven learning ABC, who with a few more advanced pupils might have been happily taught and exercised in a room by themselves under one teacher. These two ladies had seven classes in the primer, comprising about one hundred pupils. These would have filled two rooms, or one of the ABC classes, and one a little more advanced.

There were two classes in the First Reader, comprising twenty-five pupils. These, with some retained at home because of the crowd, might fill a third room and be the third grade.

The two classes in the second reader, comprising 27 pupils, might occupy a fourth room and comprise a fourth grade, each under a separate teacher. Thus in that school we might have eight grades—four primary and four grammar, in as many rooms, under as many teachers—giving about fifty to each. The studies and exercises would be prescribed for each room. The pupils would be retained in one room until be examination they were found to be prepared for the next, the time for the primaries being six months, and for the grammar scholars one year.

The Central school needs a similar grading also to be extended to the higher department.

It is obvious that we cannot apply this system to outside schools, which have only twenty-five to fifty pupils. It could, however, be commenced with marked success in East Portland. Our children would be thus properly distributed, more fitly and thoroughly instructed, and be made to see their own steps forward, and they
would be stimulated to make progress. The only power of real advancement in our schools is by such a system of grading, and the school building must be adapted to the system.

GEORGE H. ATKINSON,
County School Superintendent

August 10, 1866

CHANGE OF TEACHERS IN OUR FREE SCHOOLS

Change of teachers has a two-fold view, as relates to our schools. We are not to look at the subject in its relations to the private pecuniary interests of teachers or their friends, except as they have an individual interest in the common welfare. No class, sect, society or Church has a right of monopoly or dictation in our public schools, and no monopoly can be justly held in the list of teachers employed. Neither one, two, or three societies can justly combine interest in this matter and exclude a fourth, fifth or sixth class. In the choice of a committee, the public seek intelligent and faithful men to represent them. In like manner, the committee, in the choice of teachers and their continuance in the schools, are expected to have reference to their fitness for their work, not for their family relations nor social standing. It is true in the case of equal fitness, some preference ought to be given to the most needy, because of that need, and because such persons, by the stimulus of necessity, may be expected to improve most rapidly, and thus the school will, in the end, be the gainer.

Among the reasons for changing teachers we may mention their indolence or unfaithfulness in obvious duties, or immorality, or ignorance and unwillingness to improve themselves. For if a teacher is ignorant on some points, and yet if he has a desire to improve, and if he make the effort, he or she can become intelligent on any subject to be taught in our schools. Defective control of the school may be remedied by the support of the committee, who are required by law to assist and sustain a teacher's authority.
When one of the first four reasons exists and there is not a disposition to improve, the teacher should be removed from the school and so reported, at least to the Superintendent, so as not to be liable to be transferred to another school. Such a person is unfit to be a teacher anywhere. His or her place should be supplied by a new candidate for the profession, and he should not be allowed to displace some other one, but should be dropped from the list of professional teachers.

It is obviously proper to transfer teachers from one department, or school, to another, because of their superior fitness for the position; but this has many abating circumstances, which should render it infrequent rather than a habit and a purpose. The path of improvement of schools does not lie so much in the transferring or advancing teachers to new places, as in greater efforts to improve the schools or departments in their charge. The teacher of a primary school can become eminently fitted and skilled for that department, and thus do more for the cause of thorough instruction in that office, than by any change; although the same teacher may fit himself for another department. A faithful primary teacher deserves, and he or she will receive, as much consideration as a sub-principal or even principal. High position is not so much to be desired as faithfulness to one’s position, whatever it may be. We cannot advocate frequent changes from what are called lower to higher departments. The fact is, one department is as high as another in its importance, and bearing on the future. If an apprentice is poorly taught he will be a bad journeyman. If a boy or girl in the primary school be imperfectly taught, he will always be unfitted for the grammar school.

It is an injury to parents, secondly, to change the instructors of their children. They wish to know and have confidence in a teacher, which they cannot do if he comes only for three or six months. A change is a subject of great anxiety to them, even if they proposed it, or have become so habituated to it as to expect it. The more prudent and watchful of the educational welfare of their children parents are, the more anxiously they await the result of these changes. It puts them in a state of suspense, which is always painful. Persons who have no children, or whose children have passed their school days, may not feel much solicitude on this point. Some, from curiosity,
may delight in frequent changes. But, as they occur, the tendency increases, until it comes to be expected that every new term or year will bring a new teacher into the schoolroom. Thus, confidence in the value of a free school system is diminished, and the parent feels less and less encouragement and disposition to help the school, or to attend school meetings, or to raise and pay taxes for its support or improvement. While on the other hand, the faithful teacher, from term to term, gains upon the regard, esteem and confidence of the real patrons of the school, and they consider him or her an integral part of their society, and not a mere exotic. We admit that many patrons expect and propose changes, but it is because they have formed such habits, though much against their interest as heads of families and guardians of the training of youth.

It is an injury, thirdly, to teachers and their profession to change them frequently from place to place.

For their own efficiency and improvement they need to know every pupil and every parent and guardian. The teacher must know whence the pupils come, and what has been their home training, what are their parents’ wishes, hopes and habits, and what is the child’s knowledge; why so little, or so imperfect, and what his habits? I often hear children attempting to read in the Fourth Reader, who ought to be in the Second, and on inquiry, I find that they came with the Fourth Reader; that the former teacher had put them into it, or that their parents desired it, and thus the teacher allows them to stumble on during his or her term. When another comes it will be the same. A permanent teacher, if careful and conscientious, would correct this fault, and would do justice to himself in his own teaching.

He must know every pupil’s progress in order to classify them properly. It often happens that pupils will go in a class for several weeks, because they claim to be in it, before the teacher becomes fully aware of their real status, and in his ignorance of them, his teaching was unadapted and apparently unskillful. A machinist must know perfectly every screw, rod and pipe and their place in their engine, or he will fail to work it successfully. The teacher’s idea of or acquaintance with his school must be hardly less minute and
intimate in order to a complete organization and progress. If he changes often he loses interest in any one school or class of pupils, or he will not allow himself to become much interested in them. He cannot lay plans for their improvement, or improve himself for their sakes. The stimulus to do it is removed by his removal elsewhere. He cannot do himself that justice which his self-respect and his profession demand. Witness a class of teachers, rotating from district to district or from room to room with no certain house or resting place, but with a certainty that they will be pushed along in a few weeks to another place! How it tends to destroy confidence in themselves, and also in their profession, and compels them to leave it in disgust so soon as they can find another means of support. How it makes the teacher’s office a mere means to get a little money, and lowers it for the reception of persons very poorly qualified for its duties. The lawyer, the physician and the minister keep their position for a term of years. The principal of the academy and the professor in the college hold their situations often for life, or at their own choice, and thus their offices have a value which secures fitness and confidence.

Some teachers, knowing the tendency to change, strive to arrest the evil by extraordinary toil and sacrifice, which is not requited; and some endeavor to do it by exhibitions which take much time and money, but which please certain parents and put forward those very forward children who ought to be restrained. But all these means fail in the end, and react to the injury of the teacher. Frequent changes keep salaries low, and tend to make them lower. It is a bid for new candidates. It destroys confidence in free schools, so that the citizens will neither vote for nor pay taxes for them, as they do for that which they value.

In view of these facts we hold that the most careful selections should be made for the teachers, and then they should not only be assured of their places but urged to keep them, and fit themselves more and more for the profession. There should be one question put to them—Do you design to teach for a series of terms or years? And an affirmative answer ought to be an element in the engagement for the service.
I desire earnestly to call the attention of school committees and friends of public schools in our county to these suggestions.

G.H. ATKINSON
Superintendent Schools  Multnomah Co.

January 24, 1867

SCHOOL BOOKS

The failure of our last Legislature to appoint a State Board of Education still leaves the choice of school books entirely to the District Committees. Sec. 8, Art. 8, of the law, under the head of “School Districts”, declares that the committee shall “secure as nearly as possible a uniform series of school books for their districts.” This law makes the local committee of every district a board to examine and require a uniform series only in the schools under their care, and thus constitutes as many Boards as there are Districts in the State; say, in one county, 10; in another, 20, and in another, 50. These District Committees never meet and consult so as to secure uniform books throughout a county, and much less through the State. They have no bond of union in this matter, but they, for the most part, leave the subject to the market which furnishes books for the schools. Those offered for sale are purchased. Hence authors of school books, or enterprising publishers, or teachers, or some interested agent, can introduce and thrust upon the market, and thus upon the schools, any series of books which either one of these parties may prefer. The result is from two or three to a dozen series of text books upon every branch of study taught in our schools. American zeal in the cause of education has stimulated the preparation and multiplication of school books to an enormous extent. It is a safe and profitable business. The demand is steady and increasing, and in no more danger of declining than the demand for groceries. Authors not only increase in number, and also strive to perfect their books, and thus command the market; but they are forced by the competition to issue new editions of the same books, with only slight changes from former editions. The number of new readers, grammars, arithmetics and histories annually increases,
and we not only find the shelves of our book-stores loaded with varieties of books on the same subject, but we find in every family, piles of books, little worn, yet thrown aside, because the teacher or the Committee have required new ones to be used. Our book sellers being obliged to keep on hand a stock of all kinds used, accumulate large amounts of dead stock, which must be at least paid for by a large per cent on the books sold. The people ultimately must bear the loss, both in buying the new books at higher rates, and in throwing away the old ones. The publisher also puts a premium on the new books in order to pay for the old ones that have become dead stock on his shelves. This is one of the reasons why prices of school books have advanced so much of late. To illustrate the subject, I have been permitted by the three principal book sellers in this city to examine their catalogs and collate the varieties which they are compelled to keep, much to their own inconvenience and loss. Under the head of anatomy and physiology I find text books by four different authors on their shelves; on astronomy, text books by twelve authors, on book keeping, by four; on chemistry, by eight; on composition and rhetoric, by eight; on English dictionaries, by one; on drawing, by six; on elocution, by nineteen; on French, by five; on geography, by three; on geology and mineralogy, by four; on German, by seven; on grammar, by eleven; on Greek, by seven; on history, by nine; on Latin, by six; on mathematics, by eight; on natural philosophy, by thirteen; on penmanship, by four; on readers and spellers, by six; on teachers’ registers, by three. Yet these are not half the number of authors on the different subjects, which books are kept elsewhere, and which are liable to be introduced here. Still, for the use of the schools in Oregon, these could be reduced to a single author or two on each topic, and thus save thousands of dollars to the parents, and much confusion of classes in our schools, and the greater loss of time of teachers and pupils.

I find that the sale of school books in the three houses above mentioned, is $30,000 per annum. There is at least the sale of $20,000 per annum within the State. Probably 15 to 20 per cent of this sum is wasted on needless varieties of books.

The difference between the text books by different authors is not so great that the school would suffer much by adopting any one series
and rejecting the others. Every author strives to make the best book, and they all make good ones.

It is important in a school to have as few classes as possible. Let the time be given to a few subjects, and let them be pursued thoroughly. But I have found in a school of thirty-five pupils twelve classes in arithmetic, eighteen in reading, three or four in geography, and as many in grammar. I find that even one series of books provides far too many classes, in small schools. The second and third geography classes might, in many cases, be united together, and also the second and third reader classes, and the whole time spent upon the two, given to one class with more profit. But instead of this, two or three series of books make the classes still more numerous. Frequent changes from place to place increase these difficulties to both schools and families, which would all be obviated by using one set of books.

We have no complete remedy for these evils until the law shall be changed and a State Board appointed, who shall decide what books shall be used in our public schools, for a term of years. Meantime, the District Clerks and County Superintendents, who are by law required to ascertain the books used in their several districts and counties, and furnish the list to the Governor, who is Ex-officio State Superintendent, from whom it can be known what varieties are most used in the State, can also ascertain what are most generally preferred by the teachers and friends of schools. The State Teacher’s Institute, which convenes in Portland early in August, might assist in the future choice by making this a subject of examination, and perhaps of discussion. Our chief confusion will arise from the variety of readers, grammars, and arithmetics. In geographies we are almost a unit, but we are exposed to division on this subject.

Those State journals, desirous to promote the welfare of our schools in this matter, are requested to call attention to these suggestions.

G.H. ATKINSON,
Sup’t. Schools Multnomah Co. and chairman Teachers’ Association
Dec. 10, 1867

TEACHERS’ INSTITUTE

The Multnomah County Teachers Institute will meet as adjourned at the Central School Building, Portland, Dec. 28th, at 10 o’clock A.M. It is hoped that teachers and friends of education will be present and take part in the exercise. A good degree of interest has been manifested during the season in all our schools, some districts having shone enterprise in raising funds to prolong their terms. No. 5, Mt. Tabor District, setting a good example, agreed to keep their excellent teacher, Mr. Pershin, a year at a salary of $800. No. 2 recalled their excellent teacher, Mr. Kittridge, and they seem determined to secure his services for an indefinite time. This is wise. If employers and teachers have confidence in each other, it gives great success to the labors of the school room. No. 7, though the smallest in area, with few pupils and a log school house, has done nobly in keeping Mr. Pratt, at an increased salary, and he has done honor to his profession by his faithfulness and zeal. His set of object charts, bought by himself for the good of the school, not only adorn the walls, but furnish much valuable information that would hardly be otherwise acquired by the majority of the pupils. We trust that Mr. Pratt will bring them to the Institute and give some illustrations of their use and value.

No. 4 have not only done well to employ Mr. Riley for two terms, but to engage him for another summer. The school showed much improvement in discipline and thoroughness.

No. 8 found in Mr. Brown a faithful instructor, but having as yet few pupils and no school house, and only a single term, little could be done this year. It is to be hoped that the addition of another section to the district will result in the erection of a comfortable school house on the Base Line Road, and that the district will be an honorable continuation of East Portland and Mt. Tabor. The finally harmonious division of old No. 8, into three districts, proves best for all.
No. 20 had a successful school term under the care of Miss S. Barker. Their enterprise is preparing to erect a school house on the river road, central to the families, it is to be hoped will be carried out in season for the summer term.

No. 16, once a part of No. 8, will need to exert itself early to have a school house and to stand fairly in the long line of Columbia River Districts. A little energy on the part of its prosperous farmers will give it the position. The locality is inviting to more settlers.

No. 17 has maintained its reputation this season, by employing for more than two terms, so steady and earnest a worker as Mr. Paddock. No. 30 has done well to recall him to teach during their winter term. No. 3 has received Mr. Riler for the winter, having previously tried two teachers for a short time. Often a little mutual forbearance will give success to a school, while a little hastiness would break up.

No. 18 has received a large addition, extending now to the Columbia, and they seem disposed to prolong the school terms. It is a favorable sign to recall a former teacher, Miss Brown. It would be still more encouraging to have a new and commodious school house at or near the junction of the Telegraph and Columbia River Roads. It would add more to the value and desirableness of the farms than it would cost. Besides its necessity for the school, it would be a gratifying sight to the eye of the many strangers who pass, and local benefit and honor to the people themselves.

No. 9 has been enlarged and harmonized. We were sorry to hear that Mr. Gullet, whose penmanship resembled engraving, remained but one term. The school seemed to be in the way of permanent prosperity under his care. We hope Mr. Hunter will have success there.

No. 25 needs to secure and retain a good teacher. The frequent changes of teachers gives an unstable character to the school, which manifests itself in the irregular attendance of the pupils, and also in their habits of study and recitation. That district has provided a great school house. We hope they will employ a teacher for six or nine months. It will amply reward parents to do so, as it will be far better than to send their children from to board and attend school.
The school house in no. 19 is one of the most favorable spots on Sauvie’s Island. If the building is repaired, reseated, painted and enlarged, it will be an ornament to the neighborhood and a great advantage to the school. Money enough is drawn by this district to support a good school two terms annually. A little liberality on the part of the rich farmers there can support a third term, and thus furnish their children about as thorough instruction as they could get in our crowded city schools, and at the same time keep them under the influence and restraint of home. Will the good citizens there think of this matter?

No. 11 has lost so many pupils by the removal of families that school is sustained with great difficulty. The families on the slough across the mouth of the Willamette should be united to No. 11 or No. 25. Will they choose which? Their children should draw funds for the benefit of some district.

No. 22 chose to employ a teacher two terms, allowing a long interval, instead of having one separate term per year. In both cases the vacations treble the terms, and afford little opportunity for children to progress. Yet 24 weeks of study are better than the same separated by twice as many weeks of vacation.

No. 14 has a good school house, in a good location. Removals from the district weaken the school, yet with united efforts to sustain a good teacher, parents would be saved the inconvenience and some extra expense of sending their children to the city schools.

No. 27 employs a teacher two terms for a small number of pupils. Soon the growth of the city in that direction, will perhaps unite more supporters as well as more families to maintain the school.

No. 10 had a more flourishing school than usual the past season, and wisely employed the same teacher, Miss Scott, during nearly two terms.

No. 6, it is to be hoped, will be united and prosperous under their present agreement with Mr. Wilmot. Divisions injure pupils as well as teachers.
No. 12 is just renewing an old organization, and erecting a school house in a convenient locality.

No. 21—“East Portland”, finds the value of their permanent school. It needs to be graded and another room furnished for the large and interesting class of advanced pupils, now under the care of Mr. Sellwood.

No. 31, with commendable earnestness, employ new teachers, as the former ones for any cause, retire. This evinces a purpose to maintain a good school, which will doubtless be more and more crowded with success.

“Portland”, employs eleven teachers in its Public Schools and from ten to fifteen in its private and corporate schools for about 1,800 pupils, or one teacher to 75 pupils if all attended. It evinces wisdom in continuing the services of a well known and successful corps of instructors. The crowded and overflowing rooms will, we hope, soon be relieved by the exodus of pupils to the new and commodious building in the North part of the city. The time should not be far distant in which a more thoroughly graded system shall be established. The chief work in this respect is needed in the lower department. Deficiency in elementary instruction increases with every advanced grade, while excellence in the primary department will shine more and more as the pupil goes onward and upward. The course of instruction in Miss Batchelder’s school illustrates the value of thoroughness in the primary teaching and training.

One section of the county (the South-west part) fails to revive its school organization. It is a local and a public loss. The present effort to form a new district on the macadamized road deserves the approval of all interested citizens. The law requires the assent of a majority in the district affected by the change. Three years ago it was suggested to the districts outside the city to maintain their schools for longer periods, and to employ teachers of more experience, instead of sending their children to the city schools and letting their own schools dwindle and die. Some districts have done so with evident profit to themselves and their children. What wise parent is willing to expose his children to the constant and powerful
A Public Spirit

temptations of the city, if he can avoid it? What good economist wishes to incur the increased set of costs of books, clothing, board, and other nameless expenses, if he can secure as good instruction for his sons and daughters near home at less cost? Besides, if Directors in the country will employ first class teachers at first-rate salaries, they will soon be more than repaid in the community that will gather around their schools, to enjoy the benefits.

This topic will be up for discussion at the Teachers’ Institute. The policy of congregating in homes from the country is injurious to both. It compels the city to provide for the instruction of children who do not belong to it, while it deprives the country of their help.

The value of a good teacher, one who makes this work his profession, is beginning to be felt not only by the teachers themselves, but by employers and by pupils. The demand is slowly creating the supply. To raise the standard of examination in this country according to the legal schedule of topics – the Institute will be requested to appoint two or three teachers to assist the Superintendent at quarterly sessions to examine teachers for the county. Those who pass such a board with a certificate will rank, no doubt, all others in public esteem and secure the best positions and the best rewards.

G.H. ATKINSON
Superintendent of Schools, Multnomah Co.
ELOCUTIONARY EXERCISES IN OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

It is common for teachers to devote two or three hours per week to exercises in declamation and composition. In some of the more permanent schools, companies of pupils are detained a few minutes on previous evenings, to rehearse or submit their compositions for review. Some aid is given by teachers and others in the selection of pieces to declaim, or of topics for composition. Generally, however, pupils make their own selections, the result of which is a variety, and often a strange mixture, revealing their own tastes and habits of thought. Some, however, stumble at the beginning, unable to make any selections. On declamation day we are treated with bits of speeches from great men, scraps of poetry, here and there a comic piece; not infrequently a trifling story, occasionally a touching narrative, or a poem full of pathos, like Barbara Fritchie, or eloquent passages from some of the old masters of the art.

As one observes these facts, and recalls his own school days, he will remember the abiding and powerful influence upon his own mind of the pieces learned by him, or spoken by other students. His own taste was excited and cultivated, his style of writing took its form, his habits of thought were directed, his curiosity was aroused, while the themes, the spirit, and the very names of the authors seemed to enter in and become a part of his own being then and ever after. When there was some stirring rehearsal of such speeches as Otis’, Henry’s, Curran’s, Burke’s, Wirt’s, Webster’s, Clay’s or Calhoun’s; or passages from Chalmers, Story, Phillips or Headly, he felt the pulsations of a new mental life; his ideals were adopted unconsciously and his aim was evermore in that direction. On the other hand, a poor, trifling piece, or a bit of comedy made an impression like itself. The pupil was estimated by his piece. The comic lives in memory only as a comic. The penny-a-line poetry lifts its author no higher. He who was satisfied to repeat a section from Mother Goose’s Melodies, stamped them upon his own mind, to be forever ringing there to the exclusion
of worthier subjects, besides making the same impress of himself upon others.

Similar facts are true regarding what pupils read, but how much more respecting what they commit to memory and often repeat, and thus make a part of their own mental treasures.

In a word, he who fills his mind with rubbish will find only rubbish there in the future, and it will attract its own kind.

Elocutionary exercises probably make a deeper impression and lead to more settled judgments and habits than any other class of school exercises. They ought to be the subject of corresponding care and attention. Teacher and parent should see that a worthy and ennobling piece is selected and well learned, not simply for the speaking day, but for its effect upon the mental habits of the pupil. Nothing low, vulgar, or trivial ought to be allowed. Even comic articles should have but small if any space. The mind abuses itself, if it is filled with grotesque ideas, or the antics of the buffoon. There is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous. A false clip will mar the most beautiful statue, and a blot will deface the finest painting. One of the most powerful of living preachers deforms his productions and degrades himself by his inveterate facility of uttering witticisms.

Teachers do much to guide the future thoughts and studies of their pupils, and in no way more distinctly than by these united public efforts. They have many facilities to give a wise and happy direction in this department. Books are abundant on the subject. Reading books abound with choice extracts from the productions of the ablest minds in the world. It is easy to lead our children and youth into communion with those whose writings are imperishable monuments of excellence.

G.H. Atkinson,
Superintendent Schools, Multnomah County
June 17, 1868

MAP OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF MULTNOMAH COUNTY

School clerks are often unable to tell what families live in their districts. They may, through mistake, report too many or too few people, and for the same reason they are liable to error in the assessment and collection of taxes. In order to prevent error and let the people know their own friends, the County Commissioners authorized the County Surveyor to make a new map, according to notes furnished from the records by the Superintendent of Schools. The map has been completed and colored in good style. One copy of it will be found hanging with other county maps in the office of the County Clerk, and one copy will be found in the office of the Superintendent of Schools.\(^1\) In order to secure the utmost accuracy, all the records for ten years past have been reviewed and compared, and a new record made of every district in the order of their numbers, with references in footnotes to the original and to explanatory records.

The maps, made by Mr. Pennoyer, during his official term in 1860, have been final authority to that date in doubtful cases. Conflicting or incomplete boundaries have been defined according to the best evidence of the petitioners, and the official act of the Superintendent at that time in office. In one or two cases the lines did not return to the starting point but ran on indefinitely and in courses that could give no limit to a district. These errors have been corrected.

SUPERINTENDENT OF THE SCHOOLS

Several school districts continue their terms six months, a few nine months, and one or two outside of Portland have continued the whole year, employing the best teachers. This is wise, if the expense can be paid by the income of the current year, or by tax or

\(^1\) Despite concerted effort by the editor, no copy of the map has been found.
subscription; but if the Directors must draw upon the next year’s appropriation to pay for the present salary of the teacher, it is not wise to prolong the term so much. Six months of school every year are more valuable to pupils than nine months one year, and only three months the next. Yet it is believed that parents are finding it cheaper, and in all respects better, to educate their children in the common subjects within their own district, and under their own eye, by employing good teachers, than to send a few off to the boarding schools; and it is better for the Academy that the pupils come more mature and better prepared. Our schools have suffered by the haste to put children forward before they have understood the elementary studies. The most thorough teaching in the primary department gives the best results in the higher ones. This fact appears in graded schools. The present arrangement in the North Portland, and to some extent in the Central School, by which only two classes occupy a room, so that while one is reciting the other is learning their lessons, thus alternating through the day, affords ample time for every lesson, enables the teacher to attend to the progress of every pupil, and gives promise of steady and thorough advancement. Such division cannot be made in small schools with all grades of scholars, but that can be the aim of directors and teachers as their pupils increase in number.

TEACHERS

Teaching is a profession. Like all other professions, it will be chosen by those who have a desire for it. When a person acquires the knowledge and exhibits the wisdom and skill needed to govern and teach a school, that person should be employed and well paid for the service. A man who wants a good wagon or a good plow, or a good house, is willing to pay for the skill and the labor of the mechanic; and he who wants a good lawyer or physician, is willing to pay for the use of their knowledge and skill. In like manner he ought to be willing to pay for the services of those who teach his children. The law of demand and supply ought to come into full play in this matter.

Let the teachers who receive number one certificates from Normal Institutes, or Boards of Examiners, or who bring other assurance
of their fitness for office, agree upon a tariff, or fix the minimum of their prices for the term, or per year, and they will secure better salaries. Let one well-tried teacher do it and he will be in greater demand. There are some who cannot be spared from the school room. Intelligent employers know this to be so. They soon become weary of poor teachers. On the other hand, let districts learn that it is as truly a wise economy to have first-class teachers as for a trader to have first-class goods. Let them make provision for such teachers, and in due time they will have them.

It has been the aim of the undersigned during his official term to stimulate every district in the county to improve its own school by employing good teachers for longer terms; by improving school houses when needful, by reducing the number and variety of books and thus of classes, and by giving a thorough drill in the common studies.

It has also been his aim to encourage and call attention to those teachers who seem to devote themselves to this work as a profession, and who love the work. It has not been done invidiously, but from a sense of duty to them and to the friends of education. If there have been any omissions or errors in this matter, or if any statement respecting any district has been at all inaccurate, it has been unintentional. In giving up the care of the public schools of the county to my successor elect, it is with the earnest hope that they have increased prosperity under his supervision.

G.H. ATKINSON
Sup’t. Pub. Schools Multnomah Co.
March 24, 1871

SCHOOL MEETINGS

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED AT THE APPROACHING ANNUAL MEETINGS

The law requires that “organized districts shall hold annual meetings on the first Monday of April and shall elect one Director every year, for each district, who shall qualify, and shall hold his office for three years; and also a District Clerk, who shall qualify, and give bond to the Directors for such sum as they may require, as an additional pledge for the faithful performance of his duties, and who shall hold office for one year, or until his successor is elected and qualified.” Directors can authorize clerks to call meetings, but it is not often done.

The chief school meeting of the year is the annual meeting on the first Monday in April. At that time the reports of the previous year are made, and plans proposed for the new year. It devolves of course upon the Board of Directors to present the facts respecting the schools and the property of the district, and make recommendations, if they have any, under the general law that “Directors shall perform such other duties, not provided for in this act, as the wants of their districts may from time to time demand.”

The people have a right to expect of school directors a vigilant attention to the interests of the public schools. Men should be elected who will give that attention. Clerks also should be chosen who will faithfully serve in that office. They keep the records, collect the taxes, make the annual reports to the County Superintendents, draw the funds and disburse them, as audited and ordered by the directors, act as attorneys for their several districts, and act as Secretaries of all meetings. The law aims evidently to make the system efficient. The annual meeting is the place to show whether it is so conducted, and to provide that it may be continued efficient.
Time should be taken, especially by the district officers, to prepare for this meeting on the first Monday in April. Time should be taken on that day for hearing and deliberating upon the reports presented and measures proposed. Our public schools vitally affect our social and civil conditions as a people. The Monday evening usually given to the school meeting in Portland is hardly enough for the full discussion and wise action upon the subjects proposed. Would it not be better to have an afternoon session and an adjourned meeting for the evening? A year ago it was proposed to buy and prepare a block for a new public school in the western part of the city. The subject was briefly discussed and decided in the negative, and it has proved to the loss of the city. Whether more consideration would have produced an opposite decision cannot be told, but it is certain that important questions require time and all the light that can be thrown upon them. The tax proposed was reduced in amount much to our injury, as money has been borrowed and interest paid to keep our present school in operation until other funds come in. The same thing will have to be repeated, especially if we mean to provide schools for the eight hundred children now in Portland, who have no provision for their instruction in either the existing public or private schools. And here it is proper to remark that the carefully matured plans of directors deserve to be well considered, and they ought not to be hastily set aside.

But it may be objected that our deficiency of funds this past year was due to excessive expenses during the previous year, that the annual report of the Treasurer showed unusual payments, even without vouchers. It has been reported on the street that the claims were not audited, and that money was drawn without legal orders, and thus several hundred dollars were misspent and the treasury depleted. Whether this was so or not demands an inquiry, and report by those who hold the documents. But if directors deem it necessary to spend a little more than common to furnish schools with maps, charts and apparatus, or to furnish themselves with information by books or by visits of one or more to other cities to learn the better methods of conducting their own schools, or to perfect the plan of a school building, or if they occasionally hire a carriage, instead of walking two or three miles to visit their own schools (being men of dignity and gravity), why should it be thought strange, or spoken
against, and not rather a sign of more enlarged views of school interests? Certainly such action is worthy to be reported fully at the annual meetings, that the people may imbibe the spirit and give it their sanction.

There are certainly grave questions to be decided respecting grade schools and suitable buildings for them. It is wise to profit by the experience of other cities that have the best public schools, rather than to build what we think will do, and soon find, as we have in Portland, our buildings defective, and practically a loss. Better for the Board to spend a little money for information than to act blindly. Better also for every district to raise a little more tax and provide a suitable building or buildings for the not distant future, than to come to that period with buildings wholly unsuited to the wants of the district. Had the East Portland District three years ago put up a larger frame for a two story building, as advised by some friends, and finished one room, they would now be prepared to extend their grades and meet the demands of their growing city at small expense. Instead of this, they have two small buildings on hand which can accommodate only about 90 of their 265 pupils. Let the Board be authorized now to erect a two story center building, with high ceilings, making wings of the present buildings, and the defects of provision for pupils will be partially removed. If Districts Nos. 2, 4 and 5 provide for grade schools, as it is hoped they will, the experience of other districts should teach them to make liberal provision for buildings.

Such questions, of course, bear upon that of annual district taxes for schools, to add to the funds distributed, and prolong the schools from one to two, and from two to three quarters each. Twelve districts voted taxes last year. The people seem more willing year by year, to do this. They find that good schools can be provided and continued at home cheaper than to send their children abroad. They know that the country is a better place for their children than the city, and that home is better for them than a boarding house, and far more economical.

It is easy to see that a good grade school continued six or nine months in every district that is large enough, gives worth, attractiveness and
dignity to that district, and adds far more to the value of property than its cost. Besides such thoughtful and enterprising plans, presented and adopted at the annual school meeting, will react upon directors and clerks and other officials to make them more efficient and faithful to their trusts, more careful in securing and disbursing school funds, and will impress a public sentiment of the value and dignity of our public school system, which it has received and retained in other States of the Union, and which will not allow its character or its friends to be sacrificed to the prejudices of its foes or the greed of the avaricious.

G.H. ATKINSON
Supt. Public Schools Multnomah County

March 29, 1871

TEACHERS

The school law requires that "teachers, before making applications to teach in any district organized, or perpetuated under this act, shall secure from the County Superintendent of Common Schools a certificate of qualification and character, and they shall produce the same to the Directors on making application. If any person shall violate this section they shall be liable to a fine of twenty-five dollars, to be recovered by law, for every such offense, payable to the county school fund." The school law further declares that "if any district shall employ a teacher who has not obtained a certificate as required by this act, and laid the same before the Directors for their inspection before commencing school, such district shall forfeit its proportion of the county school fund for the year." This requirement is again enforced upon Directors with a penalty for violation.

The law further requires that the County School Superintendent, under penalty for its neglect or violation, "shall strictly examine all persons who apply to him for certificates with the intention of teaching in his county in the following branches, viz.: Orthography, reading, writing, arithmetic, English grammar, geography, modern
history and mental algebra, and if they possess a good moral character and are loyal to the United States Government, he shall give them a certificate. And if the applicant pass an examination so satisfactory to the Superintendent as to justify him to set the figure one (1) opposite all the branches named in the foregoing certificate, the certificate shall be good during the term of office of the Superintendent issuing the same, but if the Superintendent rate the applicant number two (2) or three (3), the applicant shall obtain a certificate for every quarter’s school they teach under district organization, and such Superintendent may, when he deem it advisable, set apart a certain day or days in any quarter for teachers’ certificates, giving due notice thereof, and an applicant failing to be examined at such a time shall pay to the Superintendent a fee of two dollars and fifty cents for such certificate.”

The law further requires that the teachers shall maintain order in the school, so conduct as to command the respect of pupils, commence school at half past eight o’clock, A.M. and close at four o’clock P.M. of each day, giving one hour for recreation at noon, unless otherwise ordered by the directors, labor incessantly during school hours to advance the scholars in their studies, to create in their minds a desire for knowledge, principle, morality, politeness, cleanliness and the preservation of physical health, to keep a register of daily attendance, and hand a copy of the same to the District Clerk quarterly, and give a public examination on the last day of each quarter’s school, and invite the County Superintendent to be present.

It will be seen from this law that the people aim to have well qualified and faithful teachers, and to guard themselves against incompetent ones, or mere hirelings, who seek the office as a means of temporary support, without any love for teaching or desire to do good to the pupils, or honor to the profession. If fully applied, this law would sift out the latter class of teachers. It discriminates as carefully respecting the character and qualifications of candidates as any corporate Board of Trustees of an Academy or Superintendent of a select school would do, except that the grade of scholarship may not be quite so high. It aims to put all our children and youth under such mental and moral training as the most prudent and watchful parents would desire. Its design, if carried out, would thereby
reflect dignity upon the teachers’ profession, as well as become one
guarantee for the intelligence and virtue of the rising generation.

But to enforce such a law respecting teachers requires help from
the districts. If you ask teachers to be fitted and devoted to such
a work, you must hold out proper inducements. It is not enough
to declaim against them for lack of qualifications, if you will not
encourage them to be prepared and faithful. Accountants, merely
good penmen and arithmeticians, honest withal, command from
one hundred to one hundred and twenty five dollars per month, for
the year; and bank clerks receive from eighteen hundred to three
thousand dollars per annum. Sheriff’s clerks, and other county
officials, get salaries large enough to be sought, and their terms of
employment and pay are rendered sure for one or more years. They
have a motive to fit themselves for their mere business occupations.
But a teacher deals with the mind in its most tender and susceptible
periods. He must have many qualifications of mind and heart,
must be familiar with many studies, must be intelligent in respect
to current and general affairs, must have prudence, discernment,
good judgment and skill to understand how to deal with pupils, and
often with parents, also; he must win favor by success of some kind,
and all this he must do in a few weeks or months at most. Judged
by any rule applied to other persons, his office is a difficult one to
fill. His task is a hard one. All eyes are upon him. All lips speak his
praise or dispraise; all hands are ready to retain or eject him. His
tenure of office is controlled by the popular breath of the district.
At longest, his engagement is a short one, and he is made to feel
that his life is but a pilgrimage from district to district and from
village to village. If by any fortune, like marriage, he is anchored
awhile, he is soon made to feel the uplift of unseen tides, warning
him that his bark may soon drift, if it do not sail for other ports. If
he strive to make his calling a profession, he know that it cannot
have even the definiteness and certainty of the ‘itinerant’s’ life. If
he buys a lot and builds, the probability is that another will occupy
his dwelling. If he plants and cultivates, it is with the prospect that
others will eat the fruit. Others can fix themselves for a term of
years, or for life, but he only for a term of months. Others can form
plans, but his plans are subject to the caprice of a feverish, and not
always wise and just community.
The usual application, for a common school teacher, is for one who will perform all the duties, for a term of eleven or twelve weeks, “for seventy-five or a hundred dollars and board.” Seldom is an offer made, or a promise given, for a second or third term. You ask a teacher to qualify himself to do a greater work than an accountant’s, or clerk’s or sheriff’s, for one-third, or one-fifth, or one-tenth, or one-twentieth of their pay, and you agree to employ him only one-half, or one-third or one-fourth of the time. You complain of the lack of fitness, and skill, and experience of school teachers, but forget that those best prepared for the office escape from it as soon as they can get a more settled employment.

The law aims to raise the grade of teachers as well as of pupils, but the policy of the people in many districts is to lower them both. Those in cities and villages usually have better and more permanent situations than those in the country, but theirs is an uncertain hold of their places.

What is the remedy?

First, evidently to give material encouragement to the teacher’s work. Pay the gentleman or lady whom you employ to teach your children, according as you value the minds and hearts, the intelligence and virtue, of those children, and not simply as you pay those who dig, and plough, and chop, and reap, or who spin, and sew, and cook well. Let them know that you prize the work by your demands upon and pay to the workman. Tutors in palaces get honors and rewards according to the dignity of the princes whom they instruct. Every school teacher is an appointed tutor over those who may yet become princes and princesses in the empire of thought, and the realm of morals, and who may wield the scepter of world-wide beneficence and of permanent power.

Who ever enters the humblest school room, and does not think of its possibilities? Who looks upon one of the world’s heroes like Adams, Webster and Peabody, and, on tracing their biography to its early direction in the village school, does not bestow grateful eulogium upon the faithful master or mistress who guided and impressed that young life?
Second, employ the same teachers, if possible, term after term, and year after year, and make them feel sure of their places, and thus encourage them to prepare themselves better for their work, and to be more faithful.

Third, provide the best buildings and grounds, and furnish the best helps for teaching, such as charts, books, blackboards, platforms and good seats.

Fourth, visit the school, become intelligent respecting its modes, its excellencies and defects, encourage its discipline and sustain its reputation, not only by good words, but by sending your children regularly.

Fifth, give teachers a day or two every quarter to attend County Institutes, and require them to do it, and to show their earnestness to improve in their art. Such methods will speedily be felt as a powerful stimulus among teachers, and will not only honor their work, but redound to the welfare of their pupils and thus to that of the district.

Saturday, April 1st is the first day appointed for the examination of teachers in this county. It will be conducted in writing. Schedules of questions will be furnished to each candidate, and slips of paper for the answers. It will be at the Central School building, as the desks and blackboards furnish more conveniences than my private office. The room will be open at 9 o’clock A.M., and the bell will be rung. An adjourned meeting of the County Teachers Institute will be held at the same place at 10 o’clock A.M. All teachers are especially invited to become members and workers in the Institute. The second examination day will be Saturday, July 1st, the third will be October 7th, the fourth, December 30th. The County Institute will probably adjourn from time to time, so as to include those days.

G.H. ATKINSON
School Superintendent, Multnomah Co.
April 5, 1871

SCHOOL GROUNDS

The present school law provides that School Directors “when authorized by a majority vote of the district, shall purchase, lease or build school houses, and buy or lease land for school purposes.”

The lands specified evidently mean sites for school houses—not fields or farms.

The practical question is, how much ground ought to be laid off for the school building, outbuildings, and play grounds? In large cities, in which land is very costly, almost all the ground is covered by the whole building, in which rooms are prepared for physical exercise, and apartments assigned for fuel and other needed uses. One objection to this is, that the air and light within any building cannot be so pure and good for children as that without. In new cities of moderate size, like Portland, it is comparatively easy and economical to secure an entire block for the grounds of a single school. This policy of our late Boards of Directors has proved wise. It has given children ample room for play, the best light and air without and within the building, and has kept the schools as free as possible from contact with the houses and grounds of neighboring families, which has also proved to be a mutual benefit. The evil of the opposite policy is seen and felt in the half block occupied by the Harrison street school. The value and comfort of that school and of the houses there, are alike diminished.

It is to be hoped that the city will authorize the directors to pursue the liberal policy of purchasing full blocks of lots for all of our future public schools. A block, with the streets on all sides, gives an open area of 115,200 square feet or 2.2640 acres. In this proportion the schools in the country, which are much smaller than in the city, need a full acre, and even two acres would not be amiss. The object
is to let children have room enough for their health and their sports without annoying neighbors or being annoyed.

School sites ought to be well chosen for views, for air currents and sunlight. A free circulation and a bright sun, will quickly carry off malarious vapors, prevent contagion, and render rooms comfortable on the most sultry day; while a fine prospect of river, forest and mountain will impress itself indelibly upon a child’s mind, render him more cheerful and happy, improve his taste, refine his manners, and aid in various ways in mental and moral culture. The high and beautiful site of the Bush street, or Denman School, of San Francisco, overlooking the city, the harbor, the magnificent bay, the hills and mountains beyond, adds very much to the value and attractiveness of that school. But while children need the sun, they also need shade trees. It requires ten years for our transplanted maple to afford much shade, and fifteen for the elm. As the older forests are cut away, or liable to be, we cannot be too early in surrounding our school grounds with trees that in time will afford graceful shade in a hot summer noon. Our present municipal law has provided for this in the city, but it is apt to be rejected in the country districts. No. 18 did well two years ago to enclose their school ground and set it with shade trees, upon completing their cheerful looking school house.

As much as possible, grass plots should be laid out and guarded within school grounds. This is a difficult matter, but the plays of children seem to have no rule but the utmost freedom, but it may be possible, in large grounds, to save some spots in the corners, and along the fences and walks, for grass.

Our wet winters make it needful to have some well-graveled plots, as well as good plank walks, to the entrances, and around the buildings. Small school yards are planked in some places, which give pupils opportunity for exercise in calisthenics, military drills, swings, ball and marble playing; and which contributes to their cleanliness, and that of the rooms.

School grounds are a part of the teacher’s domain as much as school rooms. Two teachers, in our large schools, a gentleman and a lady, should always oversee the pupils, during recess and intermission, on
the play grounds, or in any basement, or other room appropriated to recreation. The boys, under the care of a gentleman, should have their section; and the girls, under the care of a lady, should have theirs. In no other way can quarrels, or bad words, or vexatious and oppressive conduct of older, and stronger pupils, over the younger, weaker, and more timid ones, or immoral tendencies be checked or repressed, and the best manners and habits be cultivated. The most common evils of our schools, and the chief complaints, arise from the rude, wild, improper and some reckless conduct of a few pupils during recess and intermission. Good order in the playground will secure it in the recitation room. Whether high fences should separate the two sections, depends somewhat on the plan of the house, and the separation of sexes into rooms by themselves. But teachers, for their own sake, as well as that of the pupils, ought to be present with them in their recreations. With such oversight, they will secure higher character for their schools, and command for them greater respect and confidence.

G.H. ATKINSON,
Sup’t Schools Multnomah County

April 29, 1871

SCHOOL HOUSES

The object of a building should govern its construction. The clearer and more comprehensive the idea or aim, the more distinct will be the outline, and the more simple and harmonious all the parts. A dwelling for a family must differ from a store, or a church, and a school room should be unlike a hothouse, a furnace room, or an ice cellar. A prison even ought not to be underground, or destitute of good light and air, in order to gain the ends of punishment, discipline, or reform; but rather to be built so that light, air and comfort, as well as confinement and toil, may serve these ends, and thus impress the benevolence of justice, as well as its power. The brightness of a school room ought to be adapted to the wants of the human eye, not flaring, not deeply shaded, and its temperature ought not to be oppressive or chilly.
The Boston School Report for 1864 properly says: “If the light can be admitted only on one side of a school room, the pupils should be seated with their backs toward it. If the light is admitted on the opposite sides, the seating should be so arranged that the blank walls may be in front and rear.” Very often school houses are so placed as to receive the full midday rays of the sun. The tax upon the eye’s power to exclude such needless brilliancy, tends to weaken the strong, and to destroy the weak. The rooms for some of the primary departments of our city schools have this defect.

The temperature of a school room ought to conform evenly to that of the body in its normal condition. Upon this subject Mr. Wells remarks: “We are so constituted that a certain degree of heat is essential to health and comfort. The proper temperature of a school room, according to the testimony of a large number of the best physicians and educators, is about 68 degrees Fahrenheit. When the thermometer in a room rises above 70 degrees, measures should immediately be taken to reduce the temperature; and when it sinks below 65 degrees, measures should be taken to raise the temperature. If at any time the thermometer sinks below 60 degrees the pupils cannot be confined in their seats without an exposure of health.”

Good ventilation is also essential to a school room. Mr. Wells says: “The healthy action of both mind and body requires a constant supply of fresh air for the lungs. A pure atmosphere is composed of about 80% of nitrogen, and 20% of oxygen. The life-giving principle is oxygen. Air that has once passed through the lungs is deprived of a large portion of its oxygen, and charged with a poisonous gas. If it is retained in the lungs a few seconds, it will not even support ordinary combustion. Besides the impurities, sent out from the lungs, the insensible perspiration from all the pupils in a room contribute very considerably to increase the pernicious quality of the atmosphere. To those who value the health of their children, it needs no argument to prove that this devitalized, poisonous mix should be constantly removed from the school room and pure, life-giving air be introduced in its stead.”
Dr. Reid, “from an extreme variety of experiments, made on hundreds of different constitutions,” recommends at least ten cubic feet per minute as a suitable supply for each individual. No physiologist estimates the amount required by each individual at less than five feet per minute; and yet not one school in a hundred receives even this supply. The North American Review says: “That ventilators should be open near the floor of the apartment to be ventilated, in order to carry off the stratum of air in contact with the floor, which is always the coldest, and usually the foulest, in the room.”

Mr. Wells adds that, “in constructing school buildings, ventilating registers should generally be placed both at the top and bottom of rooms.” With this idea the report of the New York Board of Education agrees.

The size and shape of a school room should be governed by the number of pupils committed to the care of one teacher.

The average number admitted into one room in San Francisco is fifty.

The Superintendent and Architect of the Boston Schools in 1864 submitted the following outline and plan of a model primary school room:

“Fifty-six being the number to be accommodated, the arrangement of the desks for this number is the next things to be done. The best mode of disposing of them seems to be to make seven rows with eight in a row. Arranged in this way, they will occupy a space in the form of a rectangle, of which the longest side will be parallel with the teacher’s platform. Each desk is one foot and a half long. The center aisle should be two feet wide, and each of the others sixteen inches. A chair and desk together require a little more than two feet from front to back. Fifty-six desks and chairs, with the above dimensions and arrangements, would occupy a rectangle twenty-two feet by fifteen. In the rear and on the sides of the space appropriated to seating, there should be a space not less than three feet wide. The teacher’s platform should be at least five feet wide, and the area
between the scholar’s desks and the platform should be at least as wide. These measures will require a room twenty-eight feet square in the clear. The height should be twelve feet in the clear. This size gives one hundred and sixty-eight cubic feet of air to each child, which would be sufficient to last thirty-nine minutes without a fresh supply. This plan makes provision for black boards in the rear and in front of the pupils, and for light on both sides.”

The 26 class rooms of the 23d St. Grammar School, in the eighteenth ward of New York City, average about 19x22 feet, which will seat one thousand five hundred scholars, or fifty-seven each. The two assembly rooms, 44x70 feet, will seat nine hundred scholars. The second and third stories are fourteen feet in height and the fourth seventeen feet, which allows about 100 cubic feet of air to each pupil, or enough for ten minutes. See annual report of 1864, of the New York Board of Education.

A building with a central entrance and hall, evidently allows the best and most convenient divisions into school rooms, clothes rooms, stair-ways and areas. The plan of the double cross and wings, tho it increases the cost, yet like the Washington Square primary school in Boston, affords good egress to the yards, and better light and air to all the rooms.

The plan of the school house on 23d street in New York City is one of remarkable completeness and economy. The idea is that of a thoroughly graded school. It has all the advantages of large reception rooms, one of which can be turned into four classrooms by sliding doors, leaving a smaller reception room 30x45 feet, besides numerous adjacent class rooms. Its outline and divisions help to protect and confirm the school grades, while every architect knows that a few feet added to the size of a building increases its capacity far above the proportionable increase in cost.

It is safe to calculate the size of school rooms at the rate of twenty-eight feet square, and twelve or fourteen feet to the ceilings, for fifty-six pupils. In cities the plan seems to be adopted to have primary schools entirely separate from grammar schools. It is also an increasing custom to have the grammar schools for boys and girls separate from each other and on different blocks and streets.
Such separation removes one of the most common objections to the public schools and adds much to their efficiency and value.

It is evident that our city has the finest opportunity to profit by the experience of other cities in the purchase of school grounds and the erection of school buildings.

Mr. Failing justly remarked at the last school meeting that “the erection of the Central schoolhouse had proved to be the best investment which Portland had ever made;” and we may add that the city owes to Mr. Failing a debt of gratitude for his laborious efforts, freely made, to establish our public schools. Gratitude is due also to many other gentlemen, who have for years, quietly and freely, but effectually, done similar service.

_Duty now calls us to extend and perfect the system._ An investment for public schools, that has been found wise and remunerative for the last ten years, _by inviting hither and adding many families_ to our permanent population will, if increased, prove equally, and perhaps doubly, valuable during the next ten years.

What is true of Portland will be true of East Portland, if the citizens there will make wise provisions for graded public schools. And what is true of the cities, will be true of the village centers in the country, if the citizens pursue the same policy. A good free school draws and binds to itself the families that comprise the real strength, intellectual and moral, of every community.

G.H. ATKINSON
Sup’t. Schools Multnomah Co.

_Sept. 29, 1871_

**THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF THE CITY**

It may be important, especially to recent citizens, to know that our free schools offer increased advantages of education. The Directors have enlarged the Harrison Street building; reslated
the blackboards in several rooms; provided more comfortable seats, especially for the little children, and added one or two to the corps of teachers, besides filling the vacancies with well accredited instructors. A visit to all the rooms shows that teachers and pupils are refreshed by the long vacation and ready for vigorous work. It is a pleasing fact to note the steady, upward progress of the different classes. Pupils that, not long ago, were among the tenth grade primaries, are now in the fourth and even third grades of the grammar department.

It attests the value of our Public Schools, in keeping, as far as possible, the same teachers, who, while working together harmoniously, and knowing well their pupils, advance every class as far and as fast as they are prepared to go. This stimulates pupils and encourages parents.

Division of labor by the graded system helps both teacher and scholar. Yet our ten grades can be worked even more efficiently. No room should, in fact, have more than one grade. This is the plan in St. Louis, and in other large cities in which the Public Schools have so justly attained, and maintain, preeminence. The grade in each room is, for greater convenience and profit, formed into two divisions or classes, of about twenty pupils each. While one class is reciting a lesson the other is preparing a lesson. The first division will, of course, be the more advanced pupils of that grade. Thus the grades are practically doubled, and the steps of progress are made easier and surer. These two classes alternate between study and recitation every day without confusion, or loss of time. Their work is simple and plain to themselves as well as to their teachers. In fact a casual visitor can tell where every class is. The studies will be better pursued and illustrated, and also remembered. The room itself will help the mind to recall the subjects, as the workman’s shop, the printer’s case, and the merchant’s shelf helps one to find his tools, the other his types, and the other his goods. Our public schools have two grades to a room, and in one case parts of three grades. This is a great improvement upon the jumble of mingling all classes in one or two rooms, but our desideratum is a single grade of two divisions to each room.

But it is obvious that our school buildings are not well constructed for this object; some rooms are too large, while others are too
small for the purpose. The entrances are in the wrong places. The light, ventilation, seating and blackboard arrangements should be adapted to such a system of grading. In fact every school building should conform to the improved school idea, as our later built residences conform to the improved idea of the family home. Every architect makes and follows the plan of his employer, and it is very unfortunate if any man attempts to build without a distinct plan.

It is plain that graded schools require central halls in every story but the attic. Grade rooms are easily and economically arranged on both sides of such halls, the lower grades below, and thus rising to the upper story, which should be a single room for the assembling of the whole school, for general purpose, or for musical instruction, like the upper room in the Bush street school of San Francisco.

For the convenience of departments, sliding doors, as in some of the St. Louis school buildings, should be placed between some of the rooms. A few such simple outlines in the plans of our future school edifices would greatly facilitate the comfort and success of our schools.

The North school building needs just such a hall through the center, above and below—if its size will admit of the change. Our Central building is too small for the change. It should be moved into a corner of the block for primary departments and a center building worthy of admirable location, the city’s growth and the school interest, should be erected on that site. Our High School should be in this central location for the obvious convenience of pupils from all parts of our widely expanding city. At present it cannot well be removed from the North building, though that will soon be so crowded as to need all the room.

For the welfare of all lower classes, it is imperatively necessary that pupils prepared for the High school and so designated by their teachers, should enter it at once. Their delay confuses teachers and pupils in the Grammar departments. Distance is an objection made by the girls in the south part of the city, and this is to be regretted, but this evil is not so great as that of confusing the succeeding classes—for that confusion will increase more and more. Good
plank sidewalks on Sixth, Seventh and Eighth streets render it much easier to reach the North school from Caruthers’ Addition than it was to reach the Central school formerly from the same points.

Our High school teachers have been long tried and most successful educators, and although their time is still divided among too many grades and classes, yet they are doing vigorous work in their department.

In every review we ought to remember the little ones, who are forming their first idea of school. They need special and kindest care and culture. Like tender plants they can be easily crushed in spirit and power of growth, or they can be nurtured to a beautiful mental and moral development. It depends very much upon the spirit of the teachers which result shall be achieved. Their station and office is more important, if possible, than that of teachers in the intermediate or grammar grades. They need many helps, such as comfortable seats and rooms—which some have—good charts and outline maps, and the constant aid and sympathy of Directors and friends, that their pupils may be well fitted for and happy to go into higher grades.

As a whole, there is much to cheer and encourage in the respect of our public schools in the city and county. If the people will take broad views of the subject and furnish Directors with funds enough to erect or improve buildings and pay current and justly increasing expenses for more teachers and furniture, our public schools will more and more attract families and enrich and ennoble the whole community.

G.H. ATKINSON
School Supt. Multnomah County
March 23, 1872

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
OF MULTNOMAH COUNTY FOR 1871-2

Thirty-one districts have been laid off in this county, twenty-five of which have been organized. Twenty-three have reported schools the past year, and received their orders for school money. Two failed to report, and thus forfeited their right to funds. Four districts of other counties reported pupils in this county, and drew their pro rata of funds.

The following summary of the reports will give an outline of the condition of the districts:

Number of voters reported 2,407
Number of children between the age of 4 and 20 yrs. 3,730
Number of males “ 1,923
Number of females “ 1,807
Number of terms of school taught 124
Number of pupils enrolled 2,155
Average attendance 1,360
Number of teachers employed 65
Number of male teachers 33
Number of female teachers 32
Amount paid teachers during the year $20,889.49
Average paid teachers per term during the year $168.54
Amount paid teachers from county fund $14,402.08
Amount of incidental expenses $4,454.33
Amount of district taxes levied $22,301.73
Amount of district taxes collected $20,381.73
Amount of cost of new buildings, lots and repairs $15,137.11
Whole amount paid for school purposes $40,692.00
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Value of public school buildings $46,300.00
Value—approximate—of school lots $53,700.00
Value of public school property $100,000.00

District No. 1, Portland, reports 2,452 children of school age—a gain of 82; of whom 1,126 are enrolled in public schools, and 815 in private and corporate schools, leaving 511 who do not attend any school.

Great credit is due this city for the liberal provisions made by voluntary taxation to support and improve the public schools the past year.

District No. 2, Brooklyn, reports a gain of 20 pupils; No. 3, “Dufur,” reports a gain of 6, No. 4, “Powell’s Valley”, reports a loss of 3; No. 5, “Mt. Tabor,” reports a gain of 12. A majority of the districts report about the same number as last year. No. 21, East Portland, reports a gain of 49, and No. 31, “Holladay’s Addition,” reports a gain of 54.

In several districts confusion still exists from the great variety of school books. This evil can be corrected by a State Board of Education, authorized to prescribe text books.

In thirteen districts of the county, schools were continued two terms each. The schools of East Portland continued three terms each. Those of Portland had four terms each, equal to eighty terms for the twenty rooms or teachers.

The public schools of the city have for the most part improved in character, in order, in the methods of teaching and in the habits of the pupils about the school buildings. Improvements of this kind have appeared in some other schools, while some have made little or no advance. This is due in part, perhaps, to a lack of interest in the patrons, in employing and sustaining teachers, and in providing proper school rooms and furniture. It is hard for little children to sit all day upon high benches, with their feet dangling, unable to touch the floor. It is hard for teachers to illustrate subjects without blackboards or wall cards, outline Geographical maps or charts. It
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is hard also to instruct pupils, who come irregularly. Directors can do much to aid teachers and improve the scholar by the monthly visits and care which the law requires.

Our schools have less public money per pupil this year than last, owing to the fact that $2,227.41 of the two mill tax had not been collected on the first Monday of March, the legal day of distribution to the several districts. Orders have been issued for $12,012.39 coin and $769.82 currency; a sum in coin of $1,268.47 less than the amount distributed in 1871. These sums afford $3.68 coin per pupil for the current year, against $4.28 coin per pupil drawn in 1871.

It was expected that the interest of the irreducible fund would relieve our school treasury, but the portion assigned to this county has not yet been received, and the sum is declared to be small, about $1,157.36 coin, or 31 cents per pupil.

The law needs to be changed so that taxes collected and funds accumulating after the annual distribution in March may be distributed to the district on the first Monday in September, instead of lying in the treasury ten or eleven months.

It will be seen from this report that local taxes will be needed to keep the schools up to their present condition. It is hoped that funds will be raised and efforts made to improve them in quality and to extend their terms.

We are inviting immigration, and one of the most effective motives with the intelligent, industrious and skilled classes, whom we most desire to secure as settlers, is the prospect of good schools for their children. The policy of improving our schools and school system is the policy that will enrich ourselves. The best families go where their children can have the best advantages.

The American system of free, graded English schools, including Primary, Grammar and High School Departments, as conducted in many of our eastern and western cities like Boston, Worcester, Chicago, Milwaukee, Winona, Sterling, Moline, Rock Island, Omaha, Sacramento, San Francisco, Portland and hundreds of other places,
forms not only one of the brightest ornaments of American society, but one of the most conspicuous and attractive objects of intelligent immigrants from different States and other lands.

A higher consideration than this is the confessed power of such schools to enrich and discipline the mind, and, to some degree, to mold the character of our youth. It is surely the most effective means to render our heterogeneous population homogeneous in language, in proper freedom and habits of thought, and thus in fitness for their privileges and duties as citizens of the Republic. While we vote taxes and subscribe money freely in material investments, let us not forget that our richest possessions derive and retain their value more from the mental and moral character of the people than from their own abundance. Gold and silver, houses and lands, manufactures and merchandise, are almost worthless in an ignorant, debased and irresponsible community.

The lesson of history is that the better we make our schools, and the more completely they reach and train the masses, the safer and happier shall we be, and more assured will be our future prosperity.

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