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The First Duty of Teachers

S. SILCOX, B.A., D.PAED.
Principal, Normal School, Stratford

THE effectiveness of any system of education depends upon how
regularly it is used by the pupils in the schools.   The best sys-
tem cannot educate a child who stays at home fifty per cent. of
his time; in that we all agree.   But where does a system begin to fail?
The New York Commission discovered that a loss of ten days or less
in a hundred-day term did not seriously lower the standing of pupils,
but that over ten days' loss of time produced an effect proportionate to
the time lost, or in the words of the editor of the report: "64.30 per
cent. of all non-promotions among pupils absent eleven days and more
may be attributed to the effect of absence."   The effect of absence is,
then, that tens of thousands of children are left back to go over the same
work again, to congest the already overcrowded lower grades, to increase
the amount and degree of retardation, and to add to the cost of the
elementary school."   The report concludes: "In view of the effect of
absence on the child's progress through the school, *the first duty of teachers
and principals should be to keep children regular in attendance*."   Accord-
ing to this report the standard of excellence for attendance would not
be below 90 per cent. of the enrolment month by month.

In order to learn the real conditions of non-attendance and truancy
in rural schools, the writer sent out six questions to twelve inspectors
in all parts of the Province of Ontario.   The questionnaire, with answers
received, follows:

Question 1.   What is the approximate average attendance, month
by month, in rural schools in your inspectorate?   Lowest?   Highest?