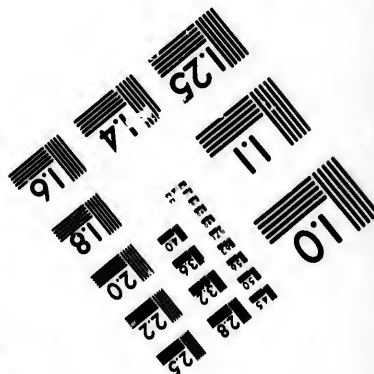
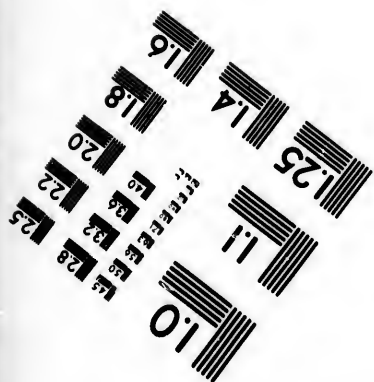
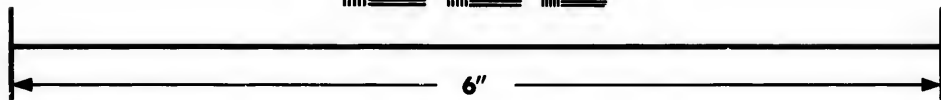
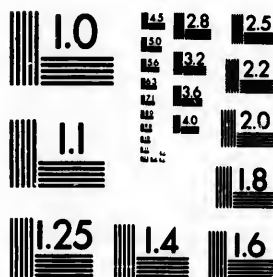


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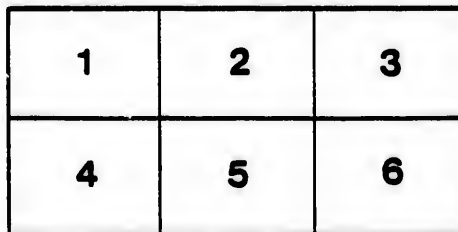
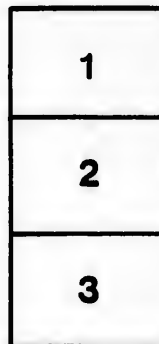
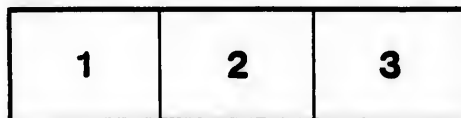
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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

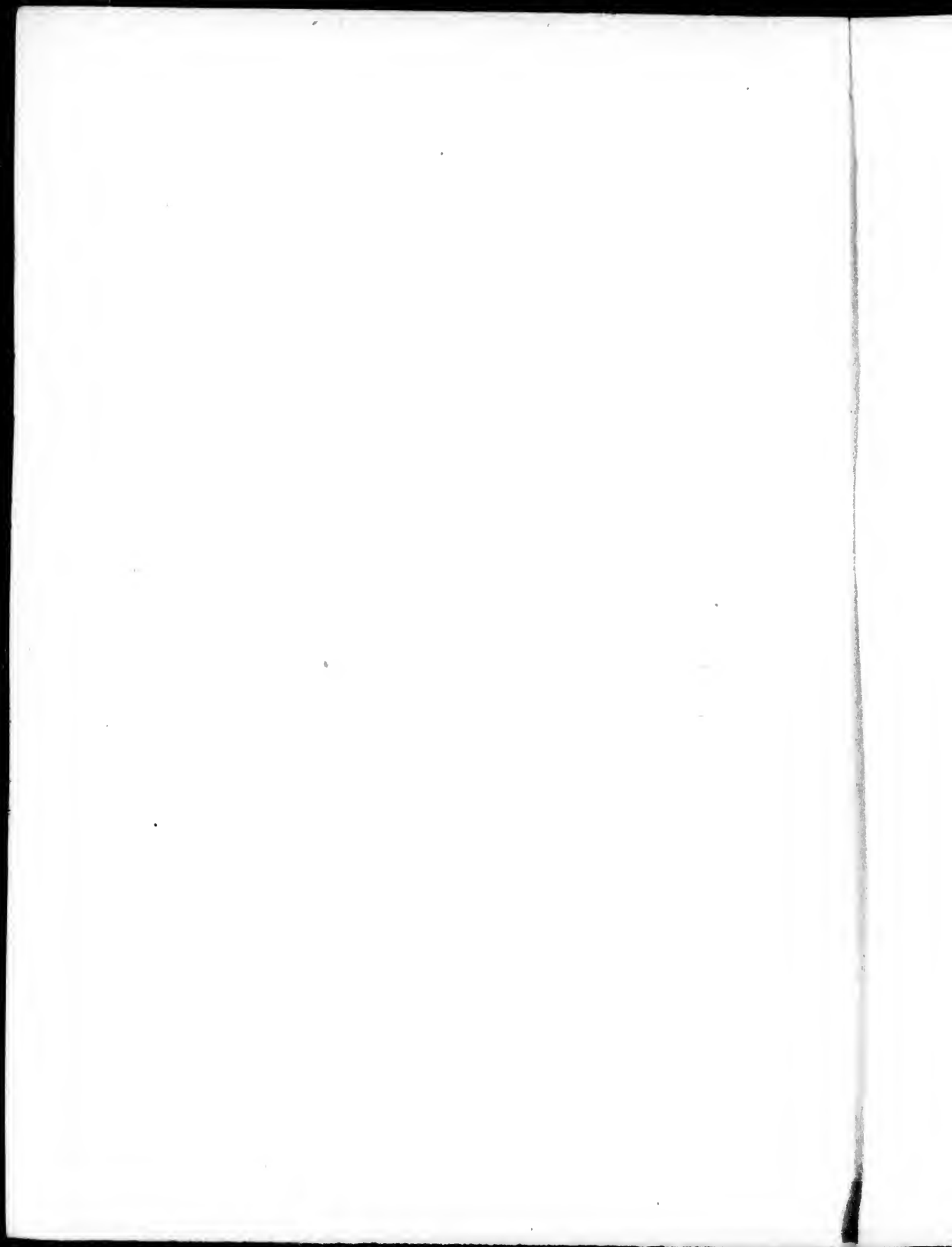
OF

R. U. McPherson, B.A., LL.B.

CHAIRMAN OF

The Toronto Public School Board.

FEBRUARY 4TH, 1897.



INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

Gentlemen :—

In view of the great responsibilities pertaining to the honourable position of Chairman of this Board, which, by your grace, I at present occupy, it may not be out of place to direct your attention briefly to some practical matters of more than passing importance.

In all our deliberations while fully recognizing that the majority of the teachers in our employment are an earnest band of men and women doing noble work in a profession in which the discouragements are many and the prizes few, we must not forget that the interests of the ratepayers and their children must be our first care.

TEACHERS' SALARIES.

The question of greatest moment to the people of Toronto at the present time is the financial one. In common with the country in general, we have fallen upon hard times with all that that implies—scarcity of work, lower wages, lessened incomes and reduced expenditures everywhere. Have we, as a School Board, fully realized this fact? Has our expenditure been reduced accordingly, or has it continued to increase as though the former prosperous conditions remained unchanged? Expenditure in one direction has been diminished. For the past year no new schools have been built. In other respects our expenditure has increased, and that out of proportion to the increased attendance. This is noticable in particular with salaries.

Taking the item of assistant teachers alone the increase for 1896 over 1895 amounted to over \$9000.

This, under present circumstances, is unwarranted on any grounds. It is peculiarly indefensible when based, as it is under our regulations, on length of service alone, irrespective altogether of the merits of the employee.

Ever since becoming a member of this Board I have, as you are aware, taken strong grounds against a system of paying salaries based on length of service, due frequently to inefficiency rather than to merit. While the difficulty of avoiding favoritism may be great, we should adopt the proper and rational system of payment according to the value of the work done, and forever discard a system just neither to the teachers nor to the ratepayers, whose interests we are elected to conserve.

The present plan, adopted and perpetuated confessedly for the sole reason that it is of easy and general application, is not worthy of this, the premier School Board of this Province.

Even if the Board in its wisdom should decide to adhere generally to the present plan of payment, there can be no reason for making an increase in all the salaries. No increase should be made in the salaries of teachers who have not given satisfaction during the past year. No reasonable plan would give an increase in such cases, the salaries of such teachers should be decreased if their services are retained. Nor can there be any justification for an increase to those whose work has been only fair, such salaries should at best remain stationary.

The information contained in the Reports of our Inspectors and Principals should be accepted by us as a sufficient basis for our action in this regard, and our usefulness as members of this Board will largely depend on our acting thereon without fear or favor.

The present system of paying salaries was adopted in 1886 under entirely different conditions from those which obtain to-day. It is time that a change should be made, if not to payment by merit alone, at least to payment according to a system based on merit and length of service

combined, or to some plan in which the efficiency of the individual teacher is not entirely disregarded.

Since 1886 the salaries paid throughout the Province to teachers of all grades have largely diminished, partly because of increased competition, until at the present day excellent teachers holding first-class certificates and graduates of our Universities would be glad to receive the salaries we are paying to holders of second-class certificates who are not by any means our best teachers.

Provided the present plan is adhered to for this year, 81 teachers in our employment, irrespective altogether of their ability or merit as teachers, but entirely on account of the period they have been in our service, will be in receipt of \$636.00 per annum. The fact cannot well be too strongly emphasized that some of these are such indifferent teachers, that our officials refused to recommend their re-engagement.

That is the worst of all possible systems by which the highest salaries are paid to the poorest teachers. Yet under our system fifty per cent. of the assistant teachers whom our officials refused to recommend for re-engagement are receiving the maximum salary of \$636.00 per annum; a grave condition of affairs when we consider that all the teachers receiving this salary are only about twelve per cent. of our whole teaching staff.

No further commentary on the system can be required.

APPOINTMENT ON TRIAL.

No teacher should be appointed permanently who has not been recommended by the Inspectors and Principals nor should any be retained in our employment whom the Inspectors and Principals refuse to recommend for re-engagement.

As a necessary part of such a system no teacher would be appointed on the permanent staff until after serving as a probationer long enough to enable the Inspectors and Principals to determine the applicant's ability as a teacher and general suitability for the work we should receive from our teaching staff.

This system of trial is of prime importance. Every member of the Board is aware of the difficulty experienced in dislodging an incompetent teacher; theoretically it is easy, practically, almost impossible.

Too much caution cannot therefore be exercised in making permanent appointments. This plan has worked admirably in the past, enabling us to select from among the many applicants those whom we found adapted for our special work. To do away entirely with the system of probation, as is proposed, would be to wilfully discard our only means of ascertaining the suitability of the applicants for positions on our staff. We pay the best salaries in the Province, and we should have the best available teachers—the pick of the profession. To this end we must have some method of selection and nothing can be better than actual trial.

TEACHERS' READING COURSE.

It has long appeared to me to be a defect in our educational system that the average teacher's course should end on obtaining a second-class certificate. The objection is not so much to the qualification as to the fact that there is no further inducement to continued study on the part of the teachers. As a result the ordinary teacher goes no further but stands still. To meet the difficulty the Education Department has this year prescribed, for the first time, what is to be known as the Teachers' Reading Course, to extend over three years. Three books, selected by the Education Department with special reference to their educational value, are to be read each year commencing with the first of January. The books for this year are "Psychology Applied to Teaching," Baldwin; "Education from a National Standpoint," Fouillee; "How Canada is Governed," Bourinot. At the end of the three years' course on being satisfied that the work has been properly performed and the conditions complied with, the Education Department will grant a diploma certifying to the completion of the course. Another diploma can be obtained every three years by continuing the courses, thus keeping the teacher constantly up to date.

The wisdom of something in the direction of this departure is not open to question. It remains to be seen whether the plan just outlined

will accomplish the end in view. As the course is entirely voluntary the success of the movement will largely depend on the importance attached by the various School Boards to the superior qualifications of the teachers having this extra training.

This Board should have no hesitation in requiring our teachers to take up the work. Other things being equal a teacher who has this additional qualification and is continually progressing will be preferred for re-engagement and promotion before one who has for any cause failed to take advantage of her opportunities.

ANNUAL GAMES.

Athletic exercises in moderation are undeniably beneficial, but does the present expenditure on school games result in the physical improvement of our pupils generally? Only a small fraction of the school children are at all induced by the hope of winning a prize at the annual games to take an interest or part in athletic exercises. The expenditure under this head for the past five years has amounted to over \$1,600.00. Such an expenditure in times like these should be justifiable on the ground that it is of benefit to every pupil in our schools.

If the games are to be continued, instead of giving prizes which become the property of the winners, would it not be better to have trophies to remain the property of the Board and be kept in the class or school of the victor for the time being and be competed for annually? These banners, flags and cups, or whatever prizes might be selected, by being always in the view of the pupils, would be a constant stimulus and spur. The value of the prize is in the winning, not in the possession, as the laurel-crowned Greeks well knew. The cost under this scheme would be much less than now, we would have only occasionally to renew and not to buy fresh prizes yearly. The money so saved could be utilized in fitting up appliances at the different schools for the physical exercise and development of all the pupils. In this way without increasing the expenditure now annually made we would, in a few years, have sufficiently equipped gymnasiums in every school.

There is another question, however, to be considered in this connection. The expenditure of school moneys for prizes in connection with the annual games appears to be illegal, and until the school law is amended it cannot be continued as in the past or diverted in the way here indicated.

Much could be done for the physical development of our pupils by encouraging outdoor sports. The play-grounds in connection with the various schools are much too small for this purpose, and a strong effort should be made to induce the City Council to set apart certain defined areas in the city parks for the use of the school children during certain hours. This would entail no expense to the Board. Provision would, of course, have to be made for the regulation of the sports and the protection of the players.

SOLICITOR.

The City Council has offered us the right to have the legal work of the Board attended to by the City Solicitor at the expense of the city. It will be for you to determine whether the offer should be accepted. In any event there is no doubt that part of the work hitherto done by our Solicitor, but not necessarily solicitors' work, should be attended to in the office of the Secretary-Treasurer and a considerable saving of expense effected.

GREATER POWERS TO COMMITTEES.

It would be an advance in our methods of doing business were the Committees given more extended powers than they now have. There is no valid reason why a considerable amount of the detail work of the Board might not profitably be delegated to the several Committees. All of our Committees are representative of every section of the city so that no local interest could suffer by the proposed change, and when we consider that some of these Committees are composed of thirteen members it is not easy to understand why work of this nature might not safely be entrusted to them. I may instance leave of absence, transfers of teachers,

filling of temporary vacancies and such minor matters. The authority of the Committees in this regard would, of course, have to be distinctly specified, and the matters in which action had been taken by them could be reported to the Board at its next meeting. After the thirteen men composing the Management Committee for the year have gone with the greatest care into the case of the proposed transfer of a teacher it is surely waste of time for the Board to go over the same ground again. All appointments and other matters of a general nature or involving the expenditure of money would, as at present, be considered and determined by the Board.

As the work is carried on at present the time of the Board is largely taken up in the frequently profitless discussion of matters of detail already wisely decided by the several Committees.

By the adoption of the plan here suggested these small matters would be promptly adjusted, the Board relieved therefrom and left free to devote its attention to matters of greater moment. The time thus saved could be much more usefully employed in initiating and carrying into effect reforms in the working of our educational machinery.

There are many questions awaiting solution. We want a better system for payment of salaries, and our present school accommodation could, I am persuaded, be utilized to better advantage by judicious transfers of pupils from the congested districts to the sections where we have sufficient space and to spare. The complaints of defects in the teaching of the fundamental and more important branches, such as reading and writing, could be fully investigated and the causes of failure ascertained and removed. We could also consider and determine the advisability of giving more time and attention than at present to the practical and necessary subjects and less to the ornamental—the luxuries of a common school education.

In the event of the amalgamation of the Boards some such plan as that now proposed would be almost a necessity in order to enable the joint body to overtake the work.

AMALGAMATION OF BOARDS.

Considerable public attention has been aroused in connection with the proposed union of this Board with the Collegiate Institute Board. That the union has not been consummated is not the fault of this Board.

After full consideration we decided almost unanimously, on more than one occasion, in favor of the amalgamation. The Collegiate Institute Board could not see eye to eye with us and the result is that we must, for another year at least, hold on our separate courses. Personally, I agree with the majority of this Board in favoring the union but it would be out of place at this time to support with reasons an opinion which we hold in common. I refer to the matter now only to point out that having considered the question of union and being fully persuaded that it is a thing to be desired in the interest of the public school education of this city, it is our duty to see that the union is brought about.

It is to be expected of this Board that as a matter of course it will administer the existing school law to the best possible advantage of the Public Schools of the city. This would be much to attain, but our ideal should be higher yet. It would not be too much to hope that this Board, with its extensive and varied experience and great opportunities, might make many practical and valuable suggestions for the advancement of the cause of education generally and insure their being adopted and applied for the improvement of our educational system.

