

OMAHA PROUD OF SCHOOLS

New System is Taught from Kindergarten to High School.

BUILDINGS ARE PERFECT MODELS

Many Side Issues Are Within Reach of Pupils Beside Mere Book Learning - Training in the Grades.

No principle of government is older or better known than that the schools are the background of the nation's virtues...

The children are the charge of the government in every sense of the word and the proper caring for their physical, moral and mental welfare is the final test of its efficiency.

The schools of Omaha, the skill with which they are administered, the care with which all the features of educational work are planned and executed...

The public education of Omaha school children is administered in thirty-five schools, including the high school. Housed in fine buildings, most of them comparatively new, 30,000 school children are trained by the best teachers that can be obtained...

The high school leads in attendance with 1,627 as a daily average and an enrollment of 2,981. Kellom has the largest of the grammar schools, has an enrollment of 1,650 and a daily average of over 300.

The high school itself is an institution which must serve as the final, secondary education for hundreds of children and indeed is an educational goal which a great many never reach. It is organized and run on a scale of thoroughness and completeness that would have been impossible in the small college of a few years ago.

Students Well Grounded. The courses of study, based on eclectic principles are calculated to give every student a thorough grounding in one or two fundamentals and to allow those who have special leanings to get some taste of their favorite subjects so that they may be encouraged and inspired to go further.

Every pupil who graduates has gone through four years of continuous study of the English language and literature. He has been acquainted with the greatest of English classics and with the ancient traditions and mythical lore that are the foundations of literature.

The thoroughness and efficiency of the rhetorical training are what have made the graduates of the Omaha high school so readily accepted in higher institutions of learning, and the college theme teacher very seldom can complain of the Omaha graduate as he does of the graduate of so many preparatory schools—that he cannot write an English sentence.

All modern languages that are commonly used—French, German and Spanish, are taught for four years, and in that time the careful student can get a working knowledge, Greek and Latin are taught, and the one who cares to ground himself in classics can get three years of the first and four of the latter.

Mathematics Required. Mathematical training to a certain degree is required and opportunity is given to carry it much further if desired. Science is represented in the curriculum of botany and zoology, physiology, geology, physics, chemistry and geophysics. Every pupil must know some ancient history and the first principles of American history and civics.

In keeping with the modern ideas of what education includes as necessary in a young student's training, the high school has taken the lead in establishing a system of manual training, and the system has spread to the ward schools. Manual training itself has been taught in the high school for twenty years in a two-year course. So far the work has been all in wood, but the Board of Education is contemplating an extension for the course. It will then take up the full four years, and the junior and senior years will be spent in forge and machine shop practice.

The work of the Omaha manual training pupils has always been of a remarkably high grade, and at exhibitions around the country, the turning lathe work that is done by second year boys has won a number of prizes.

As an adjunct to manual training, a domestic science department was established in the high school two years ago. One hundred and twenty girls a term can be accommodated, and the classes are always full. Among the girls it has proved the most popular of all elective courses, and extensions must soon be made. The original investment was not large, and the extension can be made with small additions to the equipment already purchased.

From the high school the manual training movement has spread until there are complete equipments under the charge of a competent teacher in the following ward schools, Monmouth, Howard Kennedy, Lathrop, Lake, Casa Pacific, Vinton, Forest (in construction), Comenius, Mason, Windsor, Beals, Columbia, Farnam, Walnut Hill and Clifton Hill. Even the youngest of the children can find a chance in these schools to get some training in the use of his fingers and in the mastery of tools.

Progressive Spirit Shown. The school system of Omaha, thanks to able and prospective officials and to the progressive spirit of the boards of education that have administered the finances set aside for the purpose in the last decade, has always been up-to-date in all educational activities. Mere fads and notions have been avoided but everything that has led to more liberal opportunities to more through sympathy between teachers and the taught, has been sedulously sought for and applied.

One of the more recent reforms widespread over the country in the interest of better conditions for school children is the recognition of the value of play in the teaching of the moral and intellectual lessons that must be learned. An institution that has grown up as a result of this movement is the kindergarten. In the very first years of the child's life when he is just beginning to discover himself and

the world about him, he is taught in easy stages the principles upon which all his later education must depend.

Many opponents of the kindergarten system have declared that confinement is not good for children of five years, but the expert can show how children can be taught that work and play are not so very different, that there is a joy in doing things for their own sake and can at the same time be so well satisfied and kept so well and so healthfully amused that the confinement is never noticed and has no bad effects.

The program of a year's work in the Omaha kindergarten department of the public schools, as it is published by the superintendent, reads like the program of a series of entertainments for children. Everything is demonstrated by play. It is a guiding principle that freedom will be given to the greatest degree possible without a competitive exhibit and the proud gardeners show the results of their labors for prizes and praise.

All the possibilities of their own back yards at home are made known to the children in this way. A mode of playing that brings not only present pleasure but fitting results in comfort or gain is not hard to teach and does innumerable good.

The seed merchants of the city are glad to furnish to the children through the schools as distributors, all the flower seeds that they will take at cost. Every child is given a chance to send in his or her own order early in the season and when the seeds come, instruction is given in how to care for each sort of plant.

And it is not only the children themselves who reap the rewards of this pleasant activity. The results are seen in better kept yards, in fresh and beautiful flowers beds where before were weed patches and bare spots.

High School Athletics. Higher still than the grades the play spirit manifests itself in the high school under faculty supervision. High school athletics are a necessary part of the preparatory schools' activities and many youths receive training through them that they would otherwise miss altogether.

In the Omaha High school the girls have a fine gymnasium of their own with an instructor and they have their competitive contests in basket ball and other spirited games.

Another high school activity that seems a little too staid and earnest to be classed with the play activities, but in fact an outgrowth of the same desire for individual accomplishment outside of the class room, is the work of the many societies. These clubs organized and managed under the direction of teachers take up debating and oratory, music, languages such as Latin and German, literature and composition.

The bank, glee club and orchestra are large organizations with enthusiastic members who spend their time gladly for the good of the cause. The work of the Latin society in awakening an interest in the classics and in classic times and places has attracted the attention of the faculties of higher schools. A pupil may belong to several of these at the same time and his interests developed along many lines at once.

All over Omaha the boys have been organized to take interest in athletics. Because that sports are not only good, but necessary, the board of education has committed itself to a policy of providing all the schools with large play grounds. All the new sites that are being purchased have wide spaces for romping and the old school yards which have become hemmed in by the encroaching of commercial advances or crowding dwelling houses are being extended wherever it is possible.

In these yards play of every sort is fostered and the teachers try to help without seeming to interfere. When games are getting stale and old, new ones are supplied and the principles of everything are explained.

The athletics of the older boys, which amount to specialized field sports as well as to the regulation base ball and "pump-pump-pullaway" are concentrated in the big interscholastic meet that is held every spring in the Auditorium. Here the high-spirited and enthusiastic is aroused and all the healthy wholesome effects of sharp athletic competition are developed. Boys are allowed to go into judicious training for their appearance and a friendly spirit of emulation is encouraged.

Obviously it is not only the boys who appear to represent their schools in the final events that get all the root from this system. Young boys are all athletes, potentially at least, and feel themselves so, and no natural superiority assures the members of the team that their places are safe. Every boy does his best to crowd in and gets in the way the benefit of his trying.

Girls in Athletics. What has been done so successfully for the boys is to be done for the girls. Plans are now under way in the minds of those who have the direction of such things as a part of their duties to get for the girls just a chance to do what the boys do, after their own fashion.

The child's imagination must be trained as well as his body or memory and the other faculties that he possesses. The modern way of doing this, the way that Omaha teachers are doing it is by skillful story telling. As an art, story telling is now recognized as one of the best assets that a teacher can have. The ability to tell an incident well, to illustrate a point aptly or to explain some historic scene in such a way as to make it vivid and real is the ability that enables an instructor to hold attention.

Children cannot be made to learn things with any enjoyment in the process unless they are made to seem to be so interesting as to be well worth learning. To develop an interest in this part of a teacher's work the Story Tellers' league was founded. It has been more successful than was ever expected. Even mothers, anxious to gain new ways of making themselves useful to their families have joined it and matches of experience with those who are paid for relieving mothers of part of the daily task of making good citizens out of their meetings are a source of the greatest pleasure as well as information for those who attend them. The story telling is done according to a regular program. Members recite each other's stories and a critical spirit is the test to which each story teller must meet in turn. When the program is over those who have taken part

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charge of their work, the superintendent and other authorities, lecture them and direct their study.

The training school is in fact, an institution that undertakes to do the work of the normal school, but reverses the normal school methods. Instead of an over-abundance of theory and practically no real experience, the training school gives plenty of experience and brief instruction in theory. When the girls graduate they have been trained in general principles and in the special methods of the Omaha school system.

Everything that leads to a higher standard for teachers and teaching is encouraged in the Omaha schools. One instructor in English on the regular staff of the high school is now on leave of absence in Europe helping a famous Shakespearean scholar in work upon British Museum records, and he gives her credit for being of great service to him. Others are taking courses at foreign universities or traveling for general culture and information. All high school teachers are college graduates, and must be tried and experienced teachers before they are put upon the staff.

System of Pensions. To secure the teacher against any fear that the public is ungrateful or ungenerous, the school authorities have inaugurated a system of old age pensions. Every teacher's salary is reduced 1 per cent and the tax is put into the pension fund. This amount is increased one and one-half times by the board of education, and from the established fund any teacher who has taught thirty-five years, twenty of which have been in the Omaha schools, is entitled to retire and draw \$500.

No only the splendid high school building, but all the school buildings of Omaha are attractive, sanitary and modern structures. By the efforts of the pupils themselves many of them have beautifully decorated interiors. Every class that has ever graduated from the new high school has left some memorial of art. The halls are filled with fine casts of famous statuary and well selected pictures. The class of 1898 bequeathed a fund to have a bronze tablet erected, which will commemorate the historic associations of the old Capitol hill, upon which the building stands. Many of the ward schools are no less well

provided with interior decorations, and have large collections of worthy pictures. During the last year a large wing has been added to the high school carrying out the original scheme of the white stone building. It contains a large assembly room, a feature which has heretofore been lacking.

Attendance Statistics. Other additions were made to Beals and Central Park schools. The new Forest school will be finished before very long, and a new school at Miller park is projected.

The compiled attendance statistics for the year 1909, which have justified these extensions and improvements, are as follows:

ENROLLMENT
High school grades 5, 10, 11, 12, 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26,27,28,29,30,31,32,33,34,35,36,37,38,39,40,41,42,43,44,45,46,47,48,49,50,51,52,53,54,55,56,57,58,59,60,61,62,63,64,65,66,67,68,69,70,71,72,73,74,75,76,77,78,79,80,81,82,83,84,85,86,87,88,89,90,91,92,93,94,95,96,97,98,99,100

AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE
High school 1,457
Grammar and primary grades 11,909
Kindergarten 1,194
Night school (300) 178
Total 15,748

NUMBER OF PUPILS ENROLLED
White 13,903
Colored 501
Total 14,404

NUMBER OF TEACHERS EMPLOYED
High school 25
Grammar and primary grades 391
Kindergarten 56
Night schools (180) 7
Special teachers (supervisors) 7
Principals (entire time devoted to supervision) 18
Manual training teachers 12
Total 526

Omaha has a right to be proud of its schools as it can be of any other institution. There are beside the public schools that have been described strongly equipped parochial schools. And over and beyond all the smaller schools there are several institutions of higher learning, each of which has an interesting history of its own, and all of them, working with the public school system, are doing the biggest part of what must be done to make the next generation one of useful citizens.

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