

Department of the Interior,

OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,

Washington, D. C., *April 3*, 1891

To Agents and School Superintendents:

As the school year draws towards its close, June 30, I desire to call your special attention to matters of importance looking to the prosperity of the schools for the year beginning July 1st, next.

First. I wish to congratulate you upon the great progress that has been made in educational work during the past year, in the enlargement and improvement of buildings, in the erection of new ones, in the better equipment and furnishing of schools, in the increased attendance, in the classification of the schools on the basis of the new course of study, and, in general, upon the fidelity and devotion of the teachers and the progress of the pupils.

There have been accidents, epidemics, and other unfortunate occurrences, but no more, perhaps, than would naturally be expected, under all the circumstances.

It is a matter of particular congratulation that Congress has made ample provision for the still further improvement of the Indian school system. Never before was so large and generous an appropriation made for this purpose, and no year in the history of Indian education has had in it so much of activity and hopefulness as ought to characterize the year upon which we are about to enter.

I desire that nothing shall be left undone, either in this office or in the agencies and schools, to render the coming year memorable in the history of Indian education.

Second. I desire that each school superintendent will prepare a full, detailed, carefully-arranged exhibit of the work of his school during the past year, and submit the same as soon after the close of the school year as practicable.

This report should give, unless the same was given last year, a succinct but comprehensive history of the school from its foundation. A reference to some of the reports of schools printed in the volume of this year's report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, which ought to be in the hands of every school superintendent, will indicate the scope and nature of the history called for.

If the history of the school has already been given, it need not be repeated, but the statement for the year should contain, in such form as to be intelligible to one unfamiliar with them, all the important occurrences of the year. A brief description should be given of the present plant, including amount and kind of ground under fence, and extent and character of its cultivation, character of the fences and other improvements, description of the school buildings; also statement as to repairs or additions or changes that have been made during the year. A full exhibit should be made of all the industries carried on at the school, stating what has been accomplished in each, with such suggestions for the future as the experience of the year may warrant.

The report should contain explicit information as to how far the school has been organized on the basis of the new course of study, and what obstacles have been in the way of its complete realization.

Special attention should be given to the matter of attendance, setting forth what efforts have been made to keep the school filled, what success has been achieved, and what hindrances have prevented a fuller attendance.

Third. If any improvements in the school plant are desirable, superintendents should set forth very fully in a *separate* communication the nature of the improvements desired, whether new buildings, enlargements, or repairs, etc., and the reasons for asking them, accompanied by as accurate an estimate as possible of their probable cost.

It is the purpose of the office to expend in the way of improving the schools all the money which is at its disposal for that purpose. But as the amount available is far below that which is desirable and will be called for, the estimates submitted for improvements should be modest, and those who make them must be prepared for disappointment. The Commissioner can expend only the money in hand, and will endeavor to make it go as far as possible, and to expend it on those fields which seem most promising.

Fourth. During the vacation the buildings should be thoroughly renovated, plastering repaired, white-washing and cleaning done, in order that everything may be made as attractive as practicable and may be in readiness some weeks at least before the time for the opening of the new school year. The superintendent who neglects to plan and to execute these vacation improvements will neglect an important duty.

Fifth. It is desirable and expected that all of those now in the school service who have given satisfaction in their work, have been faithful and successful, shall remain.

If there are any who expect to retire from the service by resignation it is hoped that they will indicate their purpose at an early day in order that steps may be taken to fill their places. If there are in the service persons who ought not to be there by reason of any infirmity or of incapacity or unwillingness to render good service, a full statement of each case should be made by those responsible, in order that such persons may be given early notice of their proposed retirement and in order that their places may be filled without delay. But it is hoped that the number of changes from all causes will be as few as possible.

Sixth. The matter of school attendance for the year to come should receive attention at the present time in order that orders may be given and arrangements made for promotions, transfers, and recruiting. To this end—

1. Superintendents of non-reservation training schools will submit at an early day a special report giving the average attendance for the year, the number of those now in attendance who in all probability will leave the school at the close of the year, and the number necessary to fill the school to its full capacity next year, and will state what plans they have for securing these new pupils, the places from which they expect to get them, and the prospects of success.

In this connection, it should be remembered that it is the purpose of the office, so far as possible, to fill the non-reservation schools, taking, if necessary in order to do so, pupils from the reservation boarding schools and filling their places with children from the camps and homes.

2. Superintendents of reservation boarding schools are instructed to submit at an early day a statement of the attendance by classes at their schools, and to indicate the number of pupils from each class that they think can be spared from the school for promotion to some training school, also indicating their preference of the school to which such pupils should be sent.

It should be remembered that the success of the entire school system depends upon the co-operation of all those engaged in the school service, and that the filling of the training schools is very important, and while it may for the time interfere somewhat with the reservation schools, it will in the end promote their growth and success. Zeal on the part of the superintendents of reservation schools in building up their own institutions and in seeking to give to them a higher character is expected and is commendable; and yet in the present condition of things and until higher schools have been completely filled, zeal for the reservation schools must not be allowed to interfere with procuring pupils for the training schools.

Without undervaluing in any degree the importance of the reservation schools, the fact remains and should be distinctly remembered that at present there are advantages in the way of industrial training and otherwise afforded to pupils in the training schools that can not be given them in the reservation schools.

After the training schools have once been completely filled there can be a system of promotions from the higher classes that will in no wise interfere with the prosperity of the reservation schools, but will be to them a stimulus and a help. In some cases this is possible already.

Every pains should be taken upon the reservations to secure an increasing number of young children, so that the work of education will begin at an earlier period than heretofore.

The attention of superintendents and of agents is particularly invited to the important item in the Indian appropriation bill conferring upon the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, full authority to compel attendance of Indian children at schools provided for them. The full significance of this should be explained to the older pupils and to all the Indians, so that it may be well understood among them, and they should be told that this is for their benefit, and will be enforced for their good. It should be explained, however, that no force will be used unless necessary, and they should be advised to avail themselves of the great opportunities now offered to them by the Government of securing for their children, without expense to themselves, the inestimable boon of an English education, including board, clothing, and care while sick.

Seventh. The attention of school superintendents is especially invited to the question of expense. During the last session of Congress there was considerable discussion with regard to the per capita cost of Indian education, and an effort was made to reduce the annual expense per capita of pupils in the training schools. The cost of the system of Indian education for the year to come will exceed two and one-quarter million dollars, and it is evident that Congress will be unwilling to continue to make such large appropriations unless it can be shown conclusively that the money used for this purpose is expended economically.

All buildings and all the surroundings of the school should be simple, and no expenditures should be made for anything that might be regarded, even by a somewhat critical mind, as extravagant or unnecessary. Clothing should be plain, the diet simple, and the utmost care should be exercised to protect and preserve all public property to prevent waste.

So far as it can be done without interfering with the legitimate work of the school, which is that of training pupils for industrial pursuits, the work of pupils should be directed in such a way as to yield some income to the school. While it is not expected that the schools will be self-supporting, and while gain is not the chief purpose of pupils' labor, yet it is practicable, by thrift and by proper financial sagacity, to produce in the gardens and in the fields as well as in the shops such things as will materially lessen the cost to the Government of the maintenance of the institutions.

The Commissioner desires to call special attention to the urgency of keeping at every boarding school a sufficient number of good milch cows to supply the children with an abundance of milk and butter. This should be done as a matter of economy, of health, and also for its value as a training in dairy work and the care of cows.

Agents to whom this circular is sent will make themselves familiar with its contents, retain one copy for their office files, and deliver another to each of the school superintendents under their charge.

Each superintendent who receives this circular letter will not only familiarize himself with its contents and carry its suggestions into execution, but will communicate its contents to each school employé under his direction, in order that there may be a full understanding on the part of all engaged in Indian education as to the views and wishes of this office regarding Indian schools for the year to come.

Very respectfully,

T. J. MORGAN,
Commissioner.

Circular April 2/21

Instr. to prepare full report
at close of School Year