

PRELIMINARY SUGGESTIONS AS TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE
NORMAL SCHOOL AT HARRISONBURG - 1908

I. AIM OF THE SCHOOL

The school should aim to prepare prospective teachers by supplementing their lower school education with additional subject-matter, especially in the common school branches, by giving them instruction in the methods of teaching these subjects, by permitting them to observe the work of trained teachers with classes of pupils and by requiring them to teach under skilled supervision in both graded and ungraded schools.

It should aim to offer such courses as will enable teachers already in service and holding a lower grade certificate to secure a first grade certificate or a professional certificate, with additional work.

The greatest need seems to be to prepare teachers for rural, frequently ungraded, schools, and no effort should be spared to accomplish this. The mistake should not be made of attempting too much work of an advanced nature and thus "shoot over the heads" of those for whom the school is primarily intended.

II. COURSES OF STUDY

1. The subjects of the course of study should be so arranged as to permit the students to pursue and complete them in proper order, and at the same time to fit them as soon as possible for the work of teaching. Students should be given full credit for what they know when they enter the school, and they should be classified where they can make the most rapid advancement consistent with thoroughness.

The course should include a group of "required" subjects and also a smaller group of "electives", and should be made as elastic as practicable in order to fit it to the individual needs and aims of the students.

2. Several courses of study should be arranged, with the end in view of meeting the needs of students of varying degrees of preparation:

(1) There should be a one year course based on the completion of three years work in a good high school, approved by the faculty. This course to consist of a review of all the branches of the common school, together with methods of teaching these branches, observation in the training school, elementary agriculture, or practical nature study, and household economy. The course should be arranged to prepare the student for a first grade certificate.

(2) An additional year, or two years, of professional work should be offered, based on the one year course mentioned above, and including the studies leading to the "professional certificate".

(3) For those deficient in the entrance requirement mentioned above, courses in subject-matter of the 3 year high school course should be offered. This preparatory course should be arranged so that a student may take one, two or three years work, or pursue only such subjects as she may be deficient in, determined in each individual case by the needs of the student.

3. Each year of work should, as far as may be practicable, be arranged so as to be complete in itself, so that those students who are compelled to leave after any year's work will feel that they have been repaid for what they have done.

4. If practicable with the teaching force and accommodations that can be provided, it is suggested that a special "spring term" may be arranged for teachers whose schools close early in the spring and who would like to take a teachers' training course but are unable to spend a whole year at the school. This course might be made to extend into the summer months. It would seem, from a business standpoint, to be poor economy to operate an educational institution for only about three-fourths of the year, when it might be run the year round.

III. TRAINING SCHOOL

A training school should be provided, preferably in connection with the local school system. The training school should consist of a graded school of not less than seven grades and also of one or more ungraded schools. These should be in charge of a competent principal and supervisors, and the students should be required to observe and to teach under supervision. Every student before graduation should be required to prove herself in this way prepared to assume the management of a school, the ungraded one-room school as well as the graded school.

IV. INDUSTRIAL COURSES

1. Every student in the school should be required to pursue courses in either practical nature study or elementary agriculture, in household economy, drawing, and some form of handwork to be determined by the needs of the student and the time at her disposal.

2. The work in agriculture should be both theoretical and practical, each class or group of students having charge of a plot of ground for a small garden or "experimental farm", and the work should aim at giving the student a knowledge of the elements of agricultural science and a knowledge of good agricultural practice, together with the ability to apply in a small way at least this knowledge. Along with this should be developed an appreciation for the life of the farm and its advantages over the crowded life of the cities.

3. The work in domestic economy should give the student a knowledge of the proper organization and administration of the activities of the home and the ability to apply the same in practice. It would naturally include instruction in the selection and preparation of food, practical cookery, serving, care of equipment, preparation of menus, selection of food for sick persons, etc.; a study of textiles and practical work in sewing, dress-making and millinery, etc.; a study of house sanitation, home nursing, laundering, and other household affairs.

4. The work in handicraft should emphasize the use of native materials and should give some practical knowledge and skill in the use of the simple tools of the home in making light repairs to furniture, etc., and in making simple apparatus and mechanical devices for use in the school-room.

5. Special attention should be given to the needs and possibilities of work of this nature in the one-room rural school, and to ways in which outside agencies can be utilized in connection with the school work.

V. LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

The school should admit both day and boarding students. For the boarding students satisfactory accommodations should be provided. These would naturally include dormitories, dining hall and kitchen arrangements and laundry. Instead of a large dormitory building the "cottage system" would probably be more satisfactory. Each cottage might consist of eight to twelve rooms and accommodate two girls in each room. A lady member of the faculty or a mature and advanced student should live in each cottage and as "house mother" should have general supervision over the students composing the group. To each cottage should be attached a small garden. A kitchen and dining-room, also, a laundry, may be provided in at least a few of the cottages, or the students may eat in a common dining hall and have a laundry provided for the whole school.

The cottage plan of living possesses many advantages. It is the most practical method of teaching household economy. It would be most advantageous in a social and moral way, inasmuch as it would bring a comparatively small group of students into personal contact with a member of the faculty, who would be her sponsor in all things affecting her welfare at the school.

VI. FACULTY

The strength of a school is in its faculty. Sufficiently large salaries should be offered to secure instructors competent in every sense. The members of the faculty should be carefully chosen, not only with reference to their ability to give instruction in academic subjects but also with reference to their personality and character, and the impress they are apt to make upon the students in their care.

Especial attention should be paid to the selection of instructors who recognize the needs of the class of students that they will have to teach. The most profound scholar is not always the best instructor for teachers who are to manage one-room rural schools; but the scholarship of the instructors should be good.

VII. BUILDINGS

1. The school grounds should be thoughtfully laid out and the buildings placed with care to allow for future growth of the school.

2. It will perhaps be best to build one large building for the general work of the school and follow later, as the needs demand and as funds are available, with a "Science Hall", and "Industrial Arts Building", and perhaps others.

3. I favor the "Cottage System" of dormitories, including arrangements for meals in each cottage, however, if the latter is considered inadvisable, a common dining hall might be provided either in the main building referred to above, or in a temporary structure.

4. In the main building provision should be made for the following rooms:

1. Chapel, or auditorium, to seat not less than 400 persons.
2. Gymnasium.
3. Library and Reading-room.
4. General offices.

5. Reception and Hall for students' societies.
6. Two or more science laboratories.
7. Six or more class-rooms.
8. One sewing-room.
9. One cooking-room, with small dining-room attached, for instruction purposes only.
10. One manual training, or handicraft room.
11. One drawing-room.

5. I would suggest that at least five cottages be built, if possible, during the first year, to accommodate 100 students and five teachers.

6. If satisfactory arrangements cannot be made with the local school authorities to use one or more of the existing schools for this purpose, a building should be provided for the training school, which should consist of at least eight rooms.

7. The buildings should be in every way substantial and modern, but should be simple and appropriate in design. The same type of architecture should be maintained throughout.

VIII. EXPENSES OF STUDENTS

The necessary expenses of students should be reduced to as low an amount as practicable. Fees should be nominal, and boarding charges should be kept as low as is consistent with wholesome food and comfortable rooming arrangements.

The "cottage system" is recommended inasmuch as it will enable groups of students to live together, serving in turn in various capacities and thus reducing materially the cost of living.

In time it is hoped that scholarships may be established, or loan funds, to assist deserving students to continue their work to graduation. It may be possible to find employment to occupy a small portion of a student's time in cases of necessity. Every effort should be made to keep worthy students in the school as long as possible, and the aim should be to have no student leave the school for lack of funds to continue.

I suppose that the usual pledge to teach at least two years in the public schools will be required of state students, and that no tuition will be charged these students, and also their living expenses be reduced to a minimum.

IX. SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS WELFARE OF STUDENTS

I believe that the social and religious welfare of the students should be guarded with the greatest care at all times. Every effort should be made to make their surroundings attractive and pleasant, so that they may lead a wholesome, happy life, full of the beauty of nature which surrounds them. While carefully avoiding all sectarian bias, the spiritual side should be seriously looked after. Besides the usual chapel exercises each morning, the students should be encouraged to form classes for Bible study, etc., and to affiliate with the churches of the community.

The faculty should live in the midst of the students, and exercise careful supervision over their social life.