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PROPOSED PLAN FOR THE ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT OF COMMON SCHOOLS IN VIRGINIA PREPARED AND PRESENTED TO THE LEGISLATURE AT THE REQUEST OF A SCHOOL CONVENTION HELD IN LEXINGTON ON THE SEVENTH DAY OF OCTOBER, EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND FORTY-ONE, AND COMPOSED OF DELEGATES FROM THE COUNTIES OF BATH, ROCKBRIDGE, AND AUGUSTA.

—By HENRY RUFFNER, *President of Washington College.*

**SECTION 11. OF COMMON SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND OTHER
AUXILIARY MEANS OF POPULAR INSTRUCTION.**

In the rural districts, especially those remote from towns, and inhabited by illiterate people, libraries will be essential auxiliaries to the school; indeed, in all districts where children have not generally access to social libraries, the school ought somehow to be furnished with them. Multitudes of families, and not a few of them rich enough in other things, have no books in their homes, at least none adapted to interest and improve their children. What then is the result when their children are taught to read? What else but that these children having an instrument of knowledge without materials for its exercise, not only fail to use it profitably, but undervalue and throw it away as useless? In fact, many neglect and forget altogether the little smattering of knowledge acquired at school. Had suitable books been put into their hands as soon as they were able to read them, great numbers would of themselves have overcome the imperfections of their schooling and have grown into intelligent men and women.

We do not expect by any means to make a whole people learned, or even intelligent. But who can doubt that an adequate supply of suitable books would greatly enhance the valuable results of the school system?

As soon therefore as the district schools have been organized, efforts should be made to establish school libraries. A strong book-case should constitute an article of furniture in most of the school houses, and in this, under the supervision of the trustees and the immediate care of the master, should be collected all the suitable books that can be procured by donation, subscription, tax, or other proper means.

The board of education should furnish printed catalogues of books suitable for these libraries; they might also make arrangements with booksellers to supply them on the best terms, and have them sent where wanted with the common school books. Thus the schools could be furnished with useful libraries at a very small expense, and in a few years the reading youth of each district might have access to a library of 2, 4, or 6 hundred volumes, most small, but all profitable to their minds, at an expense not exceeding 50 or 60 cents per volume.

These should be lent out for short periods and under strict regulations, to the advanced pupils of the school, and to others on their paying a small library fee, sufficient to repair the damages resulting from the use of the books.

This proposal made by State leaders 97 years ago shows their foresight in recognizing the value of school libraries. According to C. W. Dickinson, Jr., Director of School Libraries and Textbooks, this line of development in public school library service is now being followed.