

Schools and Health

In the 1890s only 5 or 6 children of a family of 10 were likely to live to adulthood, and ill health was the chief factor in keeping school attendance low. In some months in 1896 one pupil in every 5 was absent, in some cases for the whole month; in one class, 3 boys died of measles.

Unfortunately, many parents would not co-operate in having their children vaccinated, so that year the Board, consulting the City Health Officer, tried to insist, and succeeded in having nearly 2,000 vaccinated. But year after year parents continued to refuse permission. Even epidemics failed to bring public backing for drastic action. In 1904, 229 child and adult victims of typhoid were carted off to the pest house near Brookside Cemetery at midnight, and still there was little demand for preventive measures by the Board. The trustees realized they would have to act. Dr. Mary Crawford was asked to conduct a medical survey and after examining some 4,500 children she reported that health was a vital factor in education. And in 1909 the Board set up the Public Schools' Medical Service and appointed Dr. Crawford and Dr. A. W. Allum as medical inspectors on a half-time basis, with two full-time nurses to assist them. It was a courageous and wise move and within months the effects were apparent.

From J. W. Chafe *An Apple for the Teacher*, 1967 pp. 74-75