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Educational Implications of De Facto Segregation

William B. Levenson

EVEN WITH THE BEST intentions and an abundance of good will the desegregation of schools in areas of segregated housing is a complex problem. There are many who believe that integrated schools on a wide scale cannot exist without first creating integrated communities. They hold that all school integration efforts in ghetto neighborhoods are artificial and cannot work. A frequent reply is that ghetto housing is itself artificially confined and that all avenues to liberate a new generation should be explored.

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A related argument is that integrated housing will not take place until the cultural level of the Negro populace is raised so that it may become

economically productive and financially able to purchase better housing, thus breaking out of the ghetto. In this process, education is the key; and quality education cannot prevail in separate and inevitably unequal schools.

Which comes first in the familiar "chicken-egg" cycle can be debated endlessly. However, the fact remains that no large American city having a sizeable Negro population has as yet been successful in significantly integrating its slum area schools. The purpose of this article is to describe the emerging approaches that have been considered and, in some cases, partially implemented.

I. RECOGNITION OF THE PROBLEM

The year 1964 will long be recalled as the period when urban school yards echoed to sounds other than the laughter of children. Demonstrations, boycotts, building stoppages, and vandalism occurred in several Northern cities. In the wake of such outbursts, many communities created citizens' groups to assist the beleaguered boards of education. In some instances these groups, usually termed a Human Relations Committee, were only window-dressing devices

and the recommendations are still "under consideration." In several cities genuine attempts to seek workable solutions have been undertaken.

Even before the so-called "civic disturbances," some areas were aware of the problem. The first formal statement of policy on school integration by a state educational authority was the declaration adopted by the New York Board of Regents in January 1960. It called upon "all our citizens and their agencies of government and their civic organizations to take concrete steps to provide the social climate which will make it possible for us to increase the effectiveness of education."¹ In August 1961, the State Education Department distributed a booklet on *Goals and Plans for Education in New York State* pointing out that plans were being formulated to promote school integration.²

Two other relatively early policy statements are also significant. The California State Board of Education, in June 1962, cited residential segregation as an important cause of segregated schools, but added that "in all areas under our control or subject to our influence the policy of elimination of existing segregation and curbing any tendency toward its growth must be given serious and thoughtful consideration by all involved at all levels."³

In Detroit, the Citizens Advisory Committee on Equal Educational Opportunities recommended in May 1962:

The Board of Education should affirm its responsibility, as a public educational agency, to promote the process of racial desegregation in every feasible way within the public schools of Detroit, and the Board of Education should reaffirm its belief in the historic goal of American public education which recognized the blending of our heterogeneous populations as a means of achieving equality of educational opportunity and as a necessity for national unity and progress.⁴

II. APPROACHES TO INTEGRATION

A. Preliminary Step

A necessary first step for a school system which seeks to evaluate its degree of school segregation is to compile reasonably accurate information about the ethnic composition of its school enrollment.

1. NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INTERGROUP RELATIONS, COMMISSION ON SCHOOL INTEGRATION, PUBLIC SCHOOL SEGREGATION AND INTEGRATION IN THE NORTH, J. INTERGROUP RELATIONS 48 (Nov. 1963) [hereinafter cited as N.A.I.R.O.].

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Id.* at 49.

4. *Ibid.*

At first glance this seems obvious, and yet, in light of past experience, such attempts at an ethnic census in the schools are not undertaken without difficulty. In fact, the very groups recently seeking such information were not long ago opposed to the use of any school records which designated race.

"Color blindness" versus "color consciousness" is the core of almost all disputes involving racial discrimination in the schools of the north and west. Until recently, the Negro community asked for policies based on color blindness — an absence of color consciousness in designating school boundaries, in employing and assigning teachers, etc. But when color blindness resulted in all-Negro schools and a preponderance of teacher assignments in accordance with the racial composition of the schools to which teachers were assigned, Negro leaders turned to color consciousness to rectify such situations.⁵

Most large Northern school systems are currently keeping such ethnic counts. It is usually done by teachers based on their observation of pupils and without questioning them.

B. The Emerging Approaches

(1) *School District Revision.*—Once the racial composition of the school district is known, several different steps can be taken to alleviate an imbalance. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has indicated that "the best time to do anything about segregation is in conjunction with building programs. Some desegregation could be achieved if its desirability were considered as a factor in planning the building of new schools and the enlarging of existing schools."⁶ This approach can be useful in small communities or along fringe districts in a big city. For example, New York City's ghettos are somewhat dispersed in seven large, circle-shaped, non-contiguous areas. In such a setting, integrated school sites can be found on the fringes which are within reasonable distance of the pupils to be served. In Chicago, the Negroes are crowded largely into one elongated belt. In Cleveland, 98 percent of the Negro population resides in one relatively solid and expanding area of the east side. Locating a new school site which will be where the children live and yet hopefully serving both races is extremely difficult.

In the Cleveland-Lakeview School site controversy, which resulted in the death of a young minister, the alternative to continuous transportation of pupils out of the district or a new school in the

5. BLAUSTEIN, U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS 10 (1963).

6. U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS, PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE NORTH AND WEST 137 (1962).

neighborhood was to place the school on the boundary line of the adjoining suburb of East Cleveland. But even here the adjoining elementary school enrollment is increasingly Negro, so that even if the district were conceivably annexed the new school would soon be racially imbalanced.

In spite of such difficulties, several states have enacted legislation requiring boards of education to avoid deliberate racial segregation in site selection. In Illinois, for example, the General Assembly amended the school code in 1963 to provide that: "In erecting, purchasing or otherwise acquiring buildings for school purposes, the board shall not do so in such a manner as to promote segregation and separation of children in public schools because of color, race or nationality."⁷

Any large-scale use of the site selection approach is not evident. Even aside from possible lack of commitment, the inherent difficulties such as noted above constitute a real obstacle.

(2) *Modification of Attendance Districts.*—A second approach to school desegregation has been the redefinition of school attendance districts or zones. In Chicago, it was recommended by an advisory panel that "in locating all new schools and in redrawing school attendance boundaries or school district boundaries that the factor of fostering racial integration be included as an important consideration."⁸

Five criteria are usually applied when districts are drawn: distance, safety, transportation, space use, and continuity of instruction. The additional consideration of ethnic composition is being applied increasingly, particularly in the larger cities. But here, even more than in smaller communities, the application is more difficult for the site reasons noted earlier. Fringe areas of racially different districts are not often available. Occasionally, as in Stamford, Connecticut, a long drawn out controversy is finally settled by changing the attendance zone so that a predominantly Negro residential area is split for two schools. However, such arrangements are seldom demographically feasible.

(3) *Open Enrollment Plans.*—One of the more commonly used approaches is the plan of "open enrollment" or "free transfer." Many school systems allow pupils with special permit to attend other schools, particularly at the high school level. To encourage

7. ILL. ANN. STAT. ch. 122, § 34-22 (Smith-Hurd 1963).

8. Advisory Panel on Integration of the Public Schools, Report to the Board of Education of Chicago, March 31, 1964, p. 29.

integration, some systems also broaden the policy to permit pupils in the elementary grades to attend schools of their choice as long as there was room available after children in the district were enrolled.

Most observers agree that the open enrollment plan has limited value for desegregation. White pupils rarely choose to attend predominantly Negro schools. "Another limitation is that parents are required to pay for the transportation of their children to schools outside the district of attendance, a formidable obstacle for minority-group families with low incomes. Still another limitation lies in the necessary requirement that space be available in the school to which the pupil wants to transfer, unless there is such space, the 'option' to transfer is meaningless."⁹ Even in New York City where the costs of transportation by school bus or common carrier for pupils living more than one mile from the receiving school are borne by the Board of Education, the State Education Commissioner's Advisory Committee on Human Relations and Community Tensions has stated:

A total of roughly 16,000 students were affected or less than 1% of all students in the public system as a whole, or about 3% of the Negro and Puerto Rican student population.

Open enrollment has had no significant effect on the extent of segregation. It cannot have, as it depends wholly upon voluntary choice among Negro and Puerto Rican parents. In September, 1963, for example, when the program was revised and enlarged, about 110,000 elementary pupils were offered the opportunity to transfer. Of this number, about 2,000 applied, and some 1,800 were in fact transferred — an impact of less than 2% of those given the option.¹⁰

(4) *Busing*.—A fourth approach that has been used is the transportation of pupils. In some instances this was done specifically for integration; but in most, as in Cleveland, it was regarded as a temporary device to provide full day sessions for pupils while new schools were being erected. Since the most recently overcrowded areas are usually in the Negro districts, a by-product of the procedure has been a degree of desegregation.

In both cases, the busing of pupils has led to deep resentment by the receiving neighborhoods. The essence of their concern, rightly or wrongly, is that a "drag" is placed upon the white chil-

9. N.A.I.R.O., *op. cit. supra* note 1, at 60.

10. State Education Commissioner's Advisory Committee on Human Relations and Community Tensions, *Desegregating the Public Schools of New York City*, Report Prepared for the Board of Education of the City of New York, May 12, 1964, p. 4.

dren by the presence of a subculture.¹¹ Granting that prejudice conditions this attitude there is, nevertheless, serious question among educators regarding the merits of this plan. The recent statement of a San Francisco committee on this question is an example: "Evidence is lacking that any supposed inherent advantages gained by sending children to distant schools outweigh the known disadvantages; therefore the Committee does not favor busing for the sole purpose of relieving imbalance."¹²

(5) *Princeton Plan*.—Several school systems have adopted the Princeton Plan, named for the New Jersey city which employs it. The essential feature of this plan is that the attendance areas of two or more racially differing schools are combined and all pupils residing in the area are assigned by grade to one of the schools. Thus, one school may serve grades one through three and the other grades four through six. The difficulty of application in large cities is again the problem of finding schools in proximity which are ethnically different. In New York, for example, "the pairing proposal thus would reduce minority school segregation in the city by 1%, if introduced all at once."¹³

(6) *Feeder Plans*.—A sixth approach which has been tried on a limited scale is the change of feeder patterns into the secondary grades. Nearly all school systems, except the very small, establish junior and senior high school districts by which pupils of the lower grades (after promotion) attend the higher grades. Some cities, such as Rochester and New York City, have modified several of their feeder patterns to promote desegregation by reducing the concentration of one race into certain secondary schools. At the present rate, and ignoring population changes in the interim, the junior high schools of New York could be desegregated by the year 2010.¹⁴

Related to this plan is a proposed change in the typical 6-3-3 school organization. Some of the motivation for this proposal comes from doubts that have been expressed concerning the values of the urban junior high school. The other consideration derives from a desire, as in New York, to extend the process of desegrega-

11. Miller, *Analysis of the "White Backlash,"* N.Y. Times, Aug. 23, 1964, p. 8 (Magazine).

12. San Francisco Unified School District, Office of Superintendent, Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Board of Education to Study Ethnic Factors in the San Francisco Public Schools, April 1963, p. 14.

13. State Education Commissioner's Advisory Committee, *op. cit. supra* note 10, at 8.

14. *Id.* at 7.

tion to the lower grades.¹⁵ In this plan, the school pattern in the ghetto sections would be 4-4-4 and pupils starting in the fifth rather than the seventh grade would attend the "middle school" from a greater area, thus possibly mixing the ethnic composition of the school.

In all these approaches it is evident that two obstacles exist: (1) the increasing proportion of non-whites in the total school enrollment which in Cleveland as in several other cities now exceeds 50 percent; and (2) the size of the monolithic residential concentrations within the cities.

(7) *Educational Parks*.—As noted, there have been several techniques used to extend or modify the school zone. A more recent development has been the suggestion that several schools be combined into clusters called "educational parks" or "education complexes." By transporting pupils from a variety of neighborhoods to a central point, it is expected that integrated schools would result. "This we think can be accomplished by locating groups of middle schools on large sites designed to accommodate perhaps 15,000 children with administrative units organized so that each child will be a member of a school enrolling 500 to 1,000 pupils. The most practical location for such schools would be in areas where a suitable number of minority group children can be drawn from existing ghetto neighborhoods into parks which will also enroll children from White neighborhoods."¹⁶

Proponents of such plans suggest that urban renewal sites be used for such purposes and that older school buildings be gradually vacated and sold for warehouses and other commercial uses.¹⁷ Orange, New Jersey, for example, is currently proceeding with an educational park. In Ohio, the Orange Board of Education in Cuyahoga County operates an educational park using 136 acres. Judging by the homogeneity of the ethnic composition of the district, it is doubtful that, since the plans were first made more than a decade ago, the purpose was school integration.

III. THE CORE OF THE PROBLEM

Most of the approaches noted have as their aim a change in the traditional concept of the neighborhood school. To some Americans that concept is as dear as the parade on the Fourth of July. It

15. *Id.* at 16.

16. *Id.* at 20.

17. PACE Association, Report on Intergroup Relations in Greater Cleveland Schools, April 17, 1964, p. 4.

suggests enduring childhood friendships and parental involvement in local school plans and progress. It is, in fact, a haven. There are others, no less American, who believe the term "neighborhood" is an archaic device not consonant with today's reality. They point to rural school consolidation and the varying areas of secondary versus elementary school districts. Thus, they conclude that "neighborhood" is only a relative term. Because of the restrictive influences of the ghetto school they regard it more as a cage than a haven.

Even enthusiastic supporters of school integration state that it "should not be confused with the mere mixing of Negroes and Whites in the same classroom, or in the same school, or in the same neighborhood. To throw black and white youngsters into a classroom in the name of integration, without regard to what one may reasonably expect to happen, is to violate the Commandment which prohibits the worship of false gods; it is to sacrifice the children for the sake of an abstract principle."¹⁸ In addition, a report based on 3,000 interviews recently made by the American Association for the Advancement of Science indicated that "confusion, frustration and insecurity marked the mental state of the student transferred to a desegregated school."¹⁹ At the same time there have been many studies reported on the harmful effects of school segregation.²⁰

It is clear there is no one solution. It is likewise clear that the status quo is being challenged. "Thank God for the Civil Rights Movement," said Francis Keppel, United States Commissioner of Education in 1964. He was speaking as no flaming liberal intent on immediate integration of America's urban schools. Rather, his point was that the Civil Rights Movement had at long last made the public aware of what city educators had long known as the plight of our metropolitan school systems.

Though each of the approaches noted earlier has advocates as well as critics, there is general agreement that genuine integration, aside from improved housing, will not be possible until the schools in every neighborhood are up to the level of the best. The fallout from ignorance in terms of relief costs, unemployment, and delinquency is enormous and indirectly affects one wherever he lives. There is no neat way of confining the fallout any more than a neighboring epidemic can be shrugged off. Sooner or later this will also be a challenge for the suburbs.

18. SILBERMAN, *CRISIS IN BLACK AND WHITE* 304 (1964).

19. *Professor Says Child Is Pawn in Desegregation*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Dec. 28, 1964, p. 20, col. 1.

20. See WEINBERG, *LEARNING TOGETHER passim* (1964).

In most large cities, there has been an increasing disparity in funds available for school purposes. The wealthier suburbs in numerous instances spend twice as much per pupil as do the cities.²¹ The look to Washington for additional support is readily understandable. Thus, it is reasonable to ask: Given the needed aid, what can be done to significantly improve the urban schools? In summary form, these are ten of the more important needs:

1. *Reduction of Class Size.* Elementary school classes are almost twice as large as they should be.
2. *Employment of High Quality Teachers.* To achieve this in competition with the more attractive suburbs, city teachers must be paid at least \$1,000 more per year. At present, suburban salaries are comparable and in some instances even higher. To increase the supply, extensive urban teacher training must be undertaken cooperatively with colleges and universities.
3. *Wide-spread Establishment of Pre-school Centers.* The city schools are now expected to compensate for a vital period of neglect that occurs in early childhood. It is crucial that a favorable environment for learning be available early.
4. *Modernized and Expanded School Facilities.* There are hundreds of American city school buildings which are obsolete in function and expensive in maintenance.
5. *Greater Supply of Instructional Materials.* Aside from help in the learning process, such materials are a factor in attracting and holding staff.
6. *Crash Remedial Programs.* A wide variety of compensatory school practices have been tested and are available for after school periods and Saturdays: tutorial, guidance, supervised study, and the like.
7. *More Classes for Maladjusted Pupils.* Some pupils need individual attention through assistance of psychologists and counsellors.
8. *Increase in Special Staff Members.* The slum area school needs more help from social workers, visiting teachers, medical, dental, and psychological service.
9. *Extended School Year.* The rurally conceived school year is an anachronism.

21. CITIZENS LEAGUE OF GREATER CLEVELAND, GREATER CLEVELAND'S TAX PROBLEMS, TIME FOR DECISIONS 21 (1963).

10. *Expansion of Vocational Education.* Although this is the most expensive part of the curriculum, the need, particularly in the wake of automation, is evident.

An adequate implementation of these items on a national scale will be costly. In fact, it might require as much commitment and outlay as going to the moon. Is it worth as much to a hopefully-termed "Great Society"? Perhaps the words of Plato will suggest our national response: "What is honored in a country will be cultivated there."