

BECAUSE IT IS RIGHT -- EDUCATIONALLY

A Summary of the Report of the Advisory Committee on Racial Imbalance and Education
Massachusetts State Board of Education
April 1965

In March 1964 the State Board of Education and Dr. Owen Kiernan, Commissioner of Education, asked a twenty-one member advisory committee to make a thorough, independent study of racial imbalance in the public schools of the Commonwealth -- to determine if racial imbalance exists; if it exists, to determine if racial imbalance is educationally harmful; and, if found harmful, to recommend ways of eliminating it. . .

The March 1964 school census revealed that there was a predominantly nonwhite population in fifty-five schools (forty-five in Boston, eight in Springfield, one each in Medford and Cambridge) and some trend toward racial imbalance in one Worcester school. This census showed clearly that most Negro children in Massachusetts attend predominantly Negro schools while the overwhelming majority of white children attend schools that are either all white or have fewer than five nonwhite children enrolled.

We are thoroughly convinced that students attending predominantly Negro schools are denied equal educational opportunity. Racial imbalance is harmful also to white children.

We believe that integrated education means better education when it is planned carefully and implemented decisively. When it is supported by a program of educational enrichment that upgrades the learning experiences of all children, it is even more effective. We believe that the achievement of integrated education is feasible. Educationally sound and practical methods of achieving school integration are available.

We are convinced that the combined efforts of far-sighted political, educational, and civic leaders can rapidly eliminate racial imbalance from the schools of Massachusetts.

CONCLUSIONS

Our conclusions are clear. Racial imbalance represents a serious conflict with the American creed of equal opportunity. It is detrimental to sound education in the following ways:

-----It does serious educational damage to Negro children by impairing their confidence, distorting their self-image, and lowering their motivation.

-----It does moral damage by encouraging prejudice within children regardless of their color.

-----It presents an inaccurate picture of life to both white and Negro children and prepares them inadequately for a multiracial community, nation, and world.

-----It too often produces inferior educational facilities in the predominantly Negro schools.

-----It squanders valuable human resources by impairing the opportunities of many Negro children to prepare for the professional and vocational requirements of our technological society.

IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT WE BEGIN TO END THIS HARMFUL SYSTEM OF SEPARATION. THE MEANS ARE AT HAND. EACH DAY OF DELAY IS A DAY OF DAMAGE TO THE CHILDREN OF OUR COMMONWEALTH.

The Damage to Negro Children

Educators and social scientists have produced a large body of evidence documenting the conclusion that racial separation has powerful and injurious impact on the self-image, confidence, motivation, and the school achievement of Negro children. It is not difficult to understand why racial separation is harmful . . . outside of school the child and his family too often have heard the message "keep out - stay back - you are not wanted." He and his family have too often been made to feel different and inferior. The racially imbalanced school reinforces that feeling . . . A child cannot comprehend the subtle difference between illegal segregation in the South and racial imbalance in the North. In the words of Chief Justice Warren (1954) reporting the unanimous opinion of the U.S. Supreme Court summarizes in a few phrases the impact of racial separation on the Negro child: The separation of some children "from others of similar age and qualification because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.

Other Effects of SEparation on Negro and White Children

We have found that racial imbalance is educationally harmful to all children, white and nonwhite, because separation from others leads to ignorance of others, and ignorance breeds fear and prejudice.

Studies have shown that fear and prejudice cripple the creativity and productivity of white children as well as Negroes. In our Commonwealth, white children rarely have an opportunity to meet Negro children as individuals. Their thinking often becomes stereotyped. Negro children growing up in ignorance of white persons as individuals, also tend to develop a distorted and fearful picture of all whites. The deep feelings of separation engendered by a background of slavery and segregation produce a chain reaction of suspicion and hate, limiting the intellectual and emotional development of these children.

The Urgency of the Problem

Today in Massachusetts 20,000 nonwhite children are attending predominantly non-white schools. The education of many children is compromised and their future jeopardized. The lives of children are too precious to tolerate delay. That racial imbalance was not contrived with malice does not free us of the obligation to end it. That racial imbalance in schools derives from segregated housing does not diminish the damage done to the education of children. While we cannot solve all the problems of a segregated society by action in the schools, we believe it is possible to solve the problem of segregated education by action in the schools. Through the schools we can begin to break the vicious circle of poor education, poor jobs, poor housing, and to end the conditions which have deprived Negroes of equality of opportunity.

Wouldn't Compensatory Education be More Helpful than Racial Integration in the Schools?

Compensatory education is vitally necessary if we are to enlarge the lives and capacities of all disadvantaged children, white and Negro. Racial imbalance and poverty are both harmful to the education of children. Compensatory education programs can help to overcome the effects of poverty on schooling, but not the effects of racial imbalance. The effects of racial imbalance are so damaging that they cannot be counterbalanced by compensatory education programs alone. Compensatory programs cannot by themselves help Negro children to overcome society's affliction of racial prejudice and discrimination. For them, compensatory education and racial balance are vital to quality education.

Open enrollment alone cannot achieve school integration. We believe it is the responsibilities of school authorities to take positive action to achieve the racial balance necessary for equality of educational opportunity.

Summary of Answers to Most Common Questions Concerning Racial Balance in the Schools:

We have carefully examined the seven most common and major objections to racial balancing in the schools. We hope that our answers will receive thoughtful consideration from all citizens in the Commonwealth.

-----Negro children, given effective education in racially balanced schools, have the capacity to perform as well as white children.

-----The ethnically imbalanced schools which immigrant groups have known are not comparable to the racially imbalanced schools of Negroes because the history of Negroes is fundamentally different from that of other groups.

-----Negro children are at a disadvantage in school not only because many of them are poor, but also because their schools are imbalanced.

-----Compensatory education, however helpful it may be, is not the answer to racial imbalance. It should be part of a program for higher quality racially balanced education.

-----Well conceived and administered open enrollment plans can help to reduce racial imbalance, but cannot be considered as the answer to racial imbalance. At best, they put the burden on many parents who are unprepared to make choices and relieve school authorities of a responsibility which is properly theirs.

-----Racial integration will improve the education of and welfare of white and Negro children when accompanied by creative leadership, by clear explanation to parents and teachers, and by special programs designed for quality education.

-----Racial balancing will enhance the best values of the neighborhood school. It will extend the neighborhood and community to reduce prejudice, foster creativity, and promote democracy.

John F. Kennedy defended the principle of equal opportunity on moral grounds: "Because it is right." We support our recommendations and suggestions . . . because they are right, morally and educationally.

We firmly believe that the destructive and profoundly divisive problem of racial segregation is a serious threat to our democracy. We firmly believe that the school authorities throughout the Commonwealth have the responsibility for preventing and eliminating racial imbalance in the schools. . . Each of us, including the members of this committee, can do more than we are now doing to help heal this most serious wound in American society.

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