

STATEMENT OF THOMAS S. EISENSTADT, MEMBER OF THE BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
RE: THE REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON RACIAL IMBALANCE AND EDUCATION

At a meeting of the School Committee in February, 1964, I strongly recommended a systematic study of racial imbalance, and urged the community to remain calm and patient until it was completed. Several days later the State Board of Education announced its readiness to commence such a study. We now have its report.

I had hoped that the frenzy, the furor, and the fluster which have engrossed the entire issue would at long last have been dispelled by the forces of reason, and that the School Committee could receive this report in the very spirit in which it was offered. It emanates forth not from a conspiracy of un-American agitators, but rather from an alliance of men imbued with good will, high purpose, and unimpeachable integrity. It is not threatening, not intimidating, and not belligerent. On the contrary, it constitutes a scholarly attempt to instruct and to guide, and a noble effort to light the way for those who would curse the darkness.

Whatever its source, racial imbalance is very real in Boston. All of the School Committee agrees to this. That racial imbalance retards the health sociological, psychological, and educational development of the children within its clutches has now been proven. Therefore, today it is our responsibility to eliminate it as best we can, to whatever extent possible. We should be careful, however, to employ only those corrective devices which are practicable, realistic, fair and just, educationally sound, and not fiscally prohibitive. Furthermore, it must be continually understood that the schools cannot be expected to completely solve the problem of imbalance. To be cured, the illness must be attacked with even greater vigor at its other sources, namely, at the levels of employment and housing.

While some of the report's recommendations are sound and worthy of immediate implementation, others should be summarily rejected. Referring specifically to the report's major proposals:

1. I reiterate my firm opposition to the device of daily bussing school children to accomplish this or any other end! As I have so often said in the past, bussing is disruptive, inexpedient and impractical. Such a scheme would create more problems than it could solve. I am as equally adverse to the wide-scale, indiscriminate, and compulsory exchange of pupils between schools in this city!

2. I endorse the recommended closing of antiquated school buildings wherever possible, and the relocation of the affected pupils in nearby under-utilized schools, or in demountable schools erected on the sites of nearby schools. This endorsement is qualified, however, by the condition that the receiving school or site be at a reasonably close proximity to the abandoned school.

3. I support the suggestion that enrichment experiences such as glee clubs, field trips, and assembly programs should be made multi-racial, wherever expedient.

4. The suggestion that some of the older schools in the city be closed and new larger elementary schools be constructed to draw from a greater attendance area is worthy of serious consideration.

5. I concur that new schools should be constructed as close as possible to the boundaries between white and non-white areas, but only where the population pattern is determined not to be so unstable as to render such boundaries illusory.

6. I agree with the recommended liberalization of the present "Open Enrollment" Program, whereby the parents of any child may enroll their child in any school outside his district provided there is a seat available. This is an especially attractive vehicle for lessening imbalance in that it is completely voluntary, and allows the impetus and the initiative to lie with the individual parent. Parents should be encouraged to use the open enrollment program by the School Committee's offering the inducement of free M.B.T.A. car-checks in certain instances, and/or other transportational facilities. Further, lists of all open seats should be widely published in local newspapers, for example, as often as it is feasible for this to be done. In addition, the School Committee's Department of Public Information should prepare at once, for wide circulation in all areas throughout the city reading material that explains the system of open en-

rollment, and its advantages, and that sets forth precisely the conditions upon which its use by a student will be subsidized.

7. I agree with the recommended alterations of the so-called "Feeder Patterns" to junior high schools, and/or with the fluid districting techniques to achieve balance on this level of education. There is much merit, as well, to the proposed enrichment of curriculum and adoption of special compensatory programs in junior high schools, and, finally

8. I agree that positive steps should be taken to update and revise the curriculum at Girls' High School.

Furthermore, I have these recommendations of my own to offer:

1. That the School Committee establish as needed and wherever there is adequate space, in-migrant or assimilation centers for those children who have migrated to Boston from sections of the United States where they have received either no, or, at best, deficient educational and social preparation. Because of verbal and other handicaps the chronological ages of such children cannot be used as the determinant for grade-level placement. These centers should be located in several schools so as to be as readily accessible as possible to the needy child. I advance this proposal because much harm could result both to the in-migrant and to the Boston child if the former were to be automatically absorbed into an existent enriched program without adequate preparation beforehand, and

2. That this report of the Advisory Committee not be permitted to gather dust, but rather each of its recommendations should be thoroughly explored by the Superintendent and the Board of Associate Superintendents; and, that they, with the assistance of the Business Manager of the School Committee, should approximate the cost of each and all recommendations of said report, and offer the results of their study to the School Committee as soon as possible.

In order to alert those in our community who have shown themselves to be irresponsible in the past, let me say here and now that my basic position has not changed! I still refute the reckless charges that our teachers are inferior, and shall continue to defend their competence and dedication whenever they are impugned. I still regard with disfavor the marching, the picketing, and the sit-ins at our Headquarters, and shall continue my vigorous opposition to school boycotts! These activities tend only to fan the flames of passion, charge the atmosphere, and retard any chance for real progress.

In conclusion, even the least of discerning eyes can perceive that a great tidal wave of history is rapidly carrying with it significant change, and re-orientation of attitude, and soul-searching introspection among our people. Let it be our dedicated task to make this revolution, this change peaceful and constructive for all.

Viewing the evolution of developments in this area of social justice through the eyes of a young man, I can see the day over the horizon when I and my children--you and yours--will be living in a different, more whole, less fragmented society. I want to prepare myself, as you must, for that day.

There are some among us who would erect an impenetrable wall to stem this tide, and there are those who would encourage its flow. However, whether we like it or not, this non-violent revolution will not be stopped. The greater the resistance, the more persistent will be the counter-resistance. The devastation and tragedy need not be expounded. If for no other reason, enlightened self-interest requires us to prepare,--to make the way peacable for the cause of justice to prevail.

The mood of the times demands that we maintain level heads, and unruffled dispositions. To be reasonable, as we must; to be understanding, as we must; to be moderate, as we must, is not - as some contend - to be lacking in courage, or to be - as they say - "Giving In".

Despite my emphatic opposition to the bussing of children, I know that my general acceptance of the Advisory Committee's report will be for me politically damaging. Nevertheless, I am prepared to take that risk and do what I believe in my heart to be right!!

THOMAS S. EISENSTADT, MEMBER  
Boston School Committee