

SINCE DESEGREGATION

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FOR a moment place yourself aboard a helicopter flying through a gigantic popcorn machine six miles long and six miles wide. The machine is a mass of action, full of kernels popped, half-popped and unpopped flying in all directions. Close your eyes and these pieces of popcorn become variables of human behavior vectoring out from the hot flame of desegregation. This dynamic mass of human interaction is the Sausalito School District since desegregation.

Open your eyes and look around. Those new kernels being fed into the hopper are the seeds of potential change aided by state and federal grants; colleges and universities; local public and private agencies. Other kernels, more volatile because of longer exposure to the heat, are community interest groups, parents, teachers, students and concerned individuals.

The School Board and the Community

At the center of action, some of the larger, more powerful kernels—the Sausalito City Council, the Marin City Community Action Committee, the Sau-

salito Citizens Council, the Chamber of Commerce—are holding a steady course, having continued from the beginning without wavering to support desegregation. The district's alert, interested, articulate School Board also gives positive, united support to desegregation and to high quality education.

Most Sausalitans at all levels of the community are proud of the fact that they have desegregated their schools. It would be naive to believe, however, that the community is totally in support of desegregation and subsequent integration. Groups and individuals who do not favor school desegregation exist; other groups and individuals who supported desegregation at its inception are now having second thoughts. For them, reconciling an intellectual commitment to desegregation and the accomplished fact's emotional reality is difficult at best.

The most active kernels popping in the Sausalito hopper are the parents. In both Marin City and Sausalito, the district is fortunate to have intelligent, committed, active parents who want desegregated education with high quality instruction for their children.

Parents

In the decision making year 1964-65, parental attention was focused on how to mechanically desegregate the schools. During the transition year 1965-66, parents examined how desegregation was affecting the learning and social behavior of their children. In 1965-66, several "compensatory programs" were initiated: the San Francisco State College Sausalito Teacher Education Project (STEP) went into operation supported by McAteer Act funds from the State of California; ESEA Title I funds were translated into a number of special programs and a study center program supported by O.E.O. funds was organized by interested citizens.

With this proliferation of special programs in the district, a new list of words was added to the community's vocabulary. Words such as "compensatory," "culturally disadvantaged," "ethnic minorities," "programs for the poor" and "deprived" caused parents to voice concern that the "gifted children" were being ignored because of the emphasis on compensatory education. It was, and still is, difficult for parents and other members of the community to understand that in a desegregated school district it is almost impossible to spend money for the benefit of only one group of children. With the specific exception of O.E.O. funds, special monies from the state and federal governments have been allocated to projects which improve education for all children.

During the summer of 1965 the School Board with the aid of an excellent citizens' committee and the advice and guidance of a professional desegrega-

tion team moved very rapidly to desegregate the schools. Thus, the teaching staff reported to work in September 1965, to find desegregation an accomplished fact with cluster grouping having replaced homogeneous grouping in the classroom. From every nook and corner anxious parents were observing classroom and playground activities and after a few months teachers said they felt as though they were working in a fishbowl.

Teachers

Questionnaires¹ given to all members of the teaching staff in the fall of 1965 and again in June 1966, sought to investigate staff feelings and perceptions concerning nine areas related to interpersonal relations. It is not possible to comment here on all the questionnaire data. A few comments are in order.

The staff reports more favorable interpersonal relations between children at the lower levels than at the upper grades. Teachers perceive better relations between themselves and white students than those which they have with Negro students. The differences were not large.

Of the top four student behavior problems identified by teachers, two dealt specifically with interpersonal relations. These malbehaviors were (a) aggressive behavior toward peers and (b) clannishness. Teacher satisfaction with the handling of malbehaviors was greatest at the lower grades, as might be expected. Dissatisfaction in this area was much more in evidence at the upper grades.

¹ ESEA Report on Proposal 21-180-01-0069 of Aug. 19, 1966. Complete questionnaire, interview and sociometric data referred to in this article are available in the ESEA report.

Almost 50 percent of teachers responding indicated a concern about being careful of saying things which might be critical of the desegregation process. Approximately one-third felt teachers were unable to influence administrative decisions. However, in all schools but one, the staff reacted favorably to the district's efforts to develop open lines of communication and mutual trust and respect among its personnel.

Questionnaire data indicated teachers saw their three major in-service education needs to be: (a) techniques of teaching students with differing levels of ability, (b) curriculum ideas for improving interpersonal relations among students, and (c) methods and approaches for coping with discipline problems.

In the current school year (1966-67) the establishment of Guidance Learning Centers in the two large schools, special in-service programs, and teacher involvement in decisions concerning their welfare have contributed to the improvement of interpersonal relations and the instructional program. Formal data collection has not been completed for the present school year, but informal observations and small interview samples indicate a dramatic improvement in teacher-pupil relations, teacher-parent relations and pupil-pupil relations.

Interdistrict Cooperation

An interdistrict student transfer agreement with the neighboring Mill Valley School District which allows 100 seventh and eighth grade Mill Valley students to attend the district's upper grade school was signed in 1964-65. By participating in the interdistrict pro-

gram Mill Valley parents sought to provide their children with a racially integrated school experience. In turn, the 100 white Mill Valley students insured Sausalito a well-balanced ethnic ratio in all upper grade classrooms.

Because of the new program an interdistrict committee composed of teachers, administrators, parents and professional consultants from both districts was established to resolve the interdistrict problems and to develop programs dealing with integration for parents and others from the community.

A major recommendation of the interdistrict committee dealt with the total integration of Mill Valley students into the Sausalito program. During the first year of the agreement, each district's classes were kept intact with Mill Valley students in self-contained classrooms being taught by Mill Valley teachers. The only mixing with Sausalito students came in such classes as physical education, art, music or on the playground. Tensions developed and soon problems were reported that were traceable directly to the "classroom rental" character of the Mill Valley experience. This year Mill Valley students were integrated into the Sausalito classes and Mill Valley teachers were incorporated into the Sausalito staff and a totally new and positive atmosphere in the school was reported.

The benefits derived from the close working relationship between Sausalito and Mill Valley through the mechanism of the interdistrict committee soon pointed up the need to involve the local high school district in the hopper of desegregation activity. Ninety percent of the children attending Tamalpais High School come from Sausalito

and Mill Valley. The inclusion of the high school district into the framework of the interdistrict committee has established a new tridistrict relationship which is providing the foundation for future unification of the three districts, a necessary step to meet adequately the complex economic, social and educational problems of the larger southern Marin community.

Children

In transitional 1965-66, teachers, parents and professional observers reported conflicts between the children of different ethnic groups. In a very real physical sense, desegregation brought together two groups of strange kernels. Although a large majority of white children came from homes in which the parents were intellectually disposed to-

ward desegregation, quite often a fear for the child's safety in the newly desegregated school situation was implicitly transmitted.

In Negro homes a strong feeling of power had developed from an active and successful participation in the desegregation process. "Overly aggressive" Negro children were reported using physical means to gain recognition and small groups of Negro children were observed in discriminatory behavior toward white children, particularly on the playground. Questionnaires returned by teachers and parents pointed out a somewhat self-fulfilling prophecy of the parents, in that fear often had developed where it had not previously existed.

During the winter of 1965 and in June 1966, students picked at random from

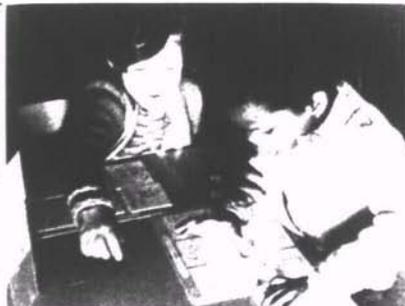
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each grade level were interviewed. These interview-reinterview² data indicated a general lowering of student fears related to schools, teachers, other students and intergroup relations between Negroes and whites. Students in the sample tended to feel slightly less satisfied about their schools, teachers, status of interpersonal relations among all students and intergroup relations between Negroes and whites.

There was one exception, however. Negro respondents tended to perceive their teachers in a slightly more satisfying light at the end of the school year than did whites. The decline in student satisfaction scores may be partly accounted for by the general tendency of students due to fatigue, boredom and the inviting prospect of a summer vacation, to react more negatively toward the school setting at the year's end.

Data dealing with intergroup friendship choices illustrated cleavages among the students. By June 1966, some 54 percent of the white students and 67 percent of the Negro students in the sample failed to report opposite racial group friends.

Information from questionnaires and student samples is not available for the current year. However staff observations show that white parents' anxiety for their children's safety has practically disappeared and Negro parents' concern over acceptance of their chil-

² No statistical tests for significance of mean differences were calculated.

dren in the school situation has been reduced. Conflict between children has been no more or less than that which usually occurs when large groups of individuals are brought together.

Sausalito since desegregation has become a better place for all children to live and to attend school. A recent incident illustrates this most dramatically. In January, a local Negro high school youth was shot in the leg by a policeman while fleeing the scene of a crime. A year ago this incident would have created a tense situation for several days, especially in the upper grade school. This year, as a matter of policy for all racial incidents, the shooting was discussed in all morning upper grade classes. The remainder of the day proceeded in its usual tension-free climate.

Since desegregation, parents, teachers, students and the general community have exchanged anxieties and fears for rational concerns about a high quality of education for all children.

The kernels of human interaction which were activated by desegregation are now being directed to the task of providing an outstanding school plant to complement the high quality of the educational program presently being developed in the district. The Board of Trustees recently approved the Educational Park concept as that which best suits the needs and goals of the Sausalito district. In this building it is hoped that desegregation will become an incident of the past and integration a reality of today. ☛



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