

DESEGREGATION: THE UNFINISHED AGENDA

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The elimination of segregation in American schools is a task not yet completed, more than 25 years after the historic *Brown* decision (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954). Even in districts where school enrollments have been adjusted to eliminate the most obvious evidence of the separation of the races, subtle forms of continuing segregation have been used to maintain a dual system of education, resulting in two standards of outcomes: one for majority students and one for minorities.

The unfinished agenda for desegregation is to achieve outcomes that are not identifiable along racial lines. Real educational equity means that all students are provided educational experiences that ensure the achievement of certain uniform goals and objectives. Students should be able to leave our public schools with a solid base of knowledge and skills, enabling them to pursue whatever

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Photo: Michael Sexton

To finish the process of desegregation, we must set district boundary lines to eliminate residential segregation, get rid of resegregation within schools, and adopt ancillary relief programs.

careers they may aspire to.

Education is the cornerstone for the achievement of equity in American society. Although a quality education does not guarantee success, it is still a prerequisite for achievement in most careers, and it is necessary for coping successfully with modern life. This is particularly important for minority individuals, who face discrimination in many areas. The well-educated minority citizen is better able to challenge discrimination in employment, housing, and health care. Similarly, the majority citizen

who has had a quality education in a nonsegregated setting is less likely to hold prejudiced attitudes and is more likely to behave in a nonprejudicial manner.

Discrimination in American Life

Part of the problem in pursuing equity in educational outcomes is the fact that discrimination continues in nearly every facet of American life. While the *Brown* decision provided the legal obligation for change in many important areas, actual change has been inadequate.

For example, unemployment continues to affect Blacks and other minorities with disproportionate severity. In July of 1980, the overall jobless rate was 7.8 percent, but the rate for Blacks was 15.2 percent. The jobless rate for black teenagers was 40.3 percent (Malabre, 1980). As long as poor Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans continue to experience high rates of unemployment, and as long as their children continue to be segregated in inferior schools and receive an inferior education, true equity will not be possible, either in education or in employment.

Discrimination in housing is also closely related to discrimination in education. The concept of neighborhood schools is often argued by those who oppose busing to achieve desegregation. Yet neighborhood schools will remain segregated so long as discriminatory housing actions continue to support housing segregation. Moreover, school districts have frequently acted in ways that not only reflect segregated housing patterns but actually serve to reinforce these patterns. In area after area, school district boundaries have been arbitrarily drawn and redrawn to contain Blacks and other minorities in segregated schools (Green, 1974). Particularly in urban areas, school district boundaries have been used to reinforce residential segregation patterns to keep minorities in central cities. Even Blacks who have moved to the suburbs still find themselves segregated (Darden, 1977).

To require school desegregation to be contingent on residential desegregation will ensure that at least another generation of youngsters will remain in segregated school systems.

Discrimination in health care is also related to discrimination in education. America has two systems of health care delivery, one serving the white, more affluent segment of the population, and one serving the poor and minority segment (*Health Differentials*, 1977). Minority children receiving inadequate health care are additionally handicapped in their educational careers. We must change the present dual health care system to a unitary system providing quality care for all persons.

Changing the pattern of segregation in the educational system would be much easier if other societal institutions were not also segregated.

Nevertheless, we cannot afford to wait for changes in other institutions before beginning to change the educational system. Not only are these institutions interconnected, but education has traditionally been the primary means for obtaining equity in American society. According to Bell (1973, p. 431), "... the right to an integrated education is the foundation upon which all legal claims to full citizenship for blacks have been built."

The Pursuit of Educational Equity

Elimination of racially segregated schools was the focus of the *Brown* decision and succeeding court decisions involving school desegregation. Yet, nationally, about two out of every three Black and Hispanic students still attend schools that are over 50 percent minority; in central cities this figure is even higher (Center for National Policy Review, 1977).

A major factor in this continuing segregation has been the lack of metropolitan desegregation plans. In Detroit, for example, a long history of residential segregation has restricted black mobility to the central city. School district boundary lines reinforce this pattern (*Bradley v. Milliken*, 1971). Yet when Judge Stephen J. Roth ordered a metropolitan plan that would have effectively desegregated Detroit schools by crossing the school district lines, the Supreme Court overturned the decision.

The problem of districtwide segregation reinforced by boundary lines exists not only in Detroit, but also in Benton Harbor, Chicago, Dallas, Newark, Los Angeles, and other American cities. Where districts have been involved in metropolitan desegregation plans, such as in Wilmington, Delaware (*Evans v. Buchanan*, 1974), and Indianapolis (*Buckley v. The Board of Commissioners of the City of Indianapolis*, 1975), the elimination of racially identifiable schools has been accomplished.¹

Even in desegregated schools, ability grouping and tracking have been used to resegregate students within school buildings. A study of desegregation outcomes in Kalamazoo, Michigan, showed that although the district had achieved a degree of desegregation in schools, within the

classroom there was little, if any, desegregation because of the use of tracking. Most of the classes for "gifted" students, as well as the college preparatory classes, were composed of white students, while black and other minority students were channeled into special education, compensatory education, remedial, or vocational courses (Green and Cohen, 1979).

Minority students are overrepresented in compensatory education and remedial programs in desegregated schools. Because many teachers assume that students placed in such classes are not capable of learning, they use different teaching methods, which further reinforce the students' low self-esteem and ensure that they will not be able to move out of the remedial programs. Many students placed in such programs remain in them for the rest of their school years and often find themselves unable to meet graduation requirements. In states that require competency-based tests for high school graduation, a disproportionate number of those failing the tests have been minority students.

Discriminatory disciplinary practices have also served to resegregate students within desegregated school systems. While minority students comprise approximately 25 percent of the nation's school population, they make up 40 percent of all suspended and expelled students (National Advisory Committee on Black Higher Education and Black Universities and Colleges, 1979). In Cleveland, for example, a report released by the desegregation monitoring commission showed that black junior high students were suspended at a rate of 53 percent, while Whites and others were suspended at a rate of 24 percent. Similarly, for high school students, the suspension rate for Blacks was 36 percent, while the rate for others was 20 percent (Office on School Monitoring and Community Relations Report, Cleveland Public Schools, 1980). Black students are not only suspended more frequently, their suspensions are also for longer periods of time. Thus, these students lose time in school, drop out of school, or fail to meet graduation requirements; they enter the job market with few work skills, destined to join the overflowing ranks of the unemployed.

Strategies for the Unfinished Agenda

In order to achieve educational equity, racially identifiable schools must be desegregated; resegregation through tracking or discriminatory disciplinary measures must be prevented; and uniform goals and objectives must be set for all students.

Research by Brookover and others (1979, 1975) has shown that when teachers believe in the ability of their students to learn, the students do, in fact, learn. Teachers must not be allowed to maintain one set of standards for "high ability" white students and a separate and lower set of standards for minority students. When students understand that they are expected to perform well in school, when teachers reinforce this belief and teach accordingly, it is possible to achieve equitable outcomes for all students.

In addition to setting uniform goals and objectives, we must develop strategies to make sure that all students are helped to meet these goals and objectives. Hundreds of years of segregation have made it impossible for Blacks and other minorities to "catch up" through the simple reassignment of students.

Ancillary Relief/Educational Components

Ancillary relief, which has been developed in a number of court-ordered desegregation cases, including Boston (*Morgan v. Kerrigan*, 1975), Detroit (*Milliken v. Bradley*, 1974), and Indianapolis (*Buckley v. The Board of School Commissioners of the City of Indianapolis*, 1975), involves educational components in addition to the reassignment of students. These components are specifically designed to ensure that desegregation will not only provide equal opportunity for students in the future, but will also allow minority students to overcome previous discriminatory educational treatment and achieve equitable outcomes.

The primary goal of ancillary relief programs is the provision of quality instruction in the critical areas of reading, mathematics, and language arts. A number of strategies may be used to achieve this goal:

- training teachers for heterogeneous classrooms;
- eliminating tracking and grouping;

- inservice training for teachers and other school personnel;
- revision of curriculum;
- review and revision, when necessary, of textbooks; and
- development of broad-based community support.

An assumption underlying all ancillary relief programs is the establishment of uniform educational goals and high standards of achievement for all students. Extensive inservice training may be necessary so that teachers and staff can work together effectively in support of this assumption. A quality program of counseling for students who experience difficulty in meeting the instructional goals may also be needed.

The success of a desegregation program in providing equity in education depends on positive attitudes among teachers, students, administrators, and staff. The school counseling staff, with the assistance of human relations specialists, should be catalysts for establishing a positive school climate. Inservice training provided by persons knowledgeable and experienced in the implementation of successful desegregation programs can be a valuable resource. School board members must also take the lead in setting educational policy that ensures successful desegregation implementation and encourages positive relationships in the schools. Finally, community education projects must be initiated to increase parental and community support for schools. Again, the school board and school district administrators can play a critical role in ensuring community support and developing positive relationships between schools and parents.

The necessity for educational components in a program for ancillary relief has been recognized by courts in several areas, including Boston, Detroit, and Kalamazoo, Michigan; and school districts such as Indianapolis and Benton Harbor are beginning to take responsibility for including ancillary relief measures in their desegregation programs.

Long-range planning is of critical importance, especially now, when desegregation and race relations are matters of public concern, and when people are increasingly interested in how dollars are being spent. Objectives should be well articulated and understood, and procedures should

include a time frame for accomplishing the objectives. Equally important is the inclusion of a procedure for evaluating progress—both in eliminating racially-identifiable schools and in upgrading the quality of the instructional program. Shortsighted and hastily-conceived plans must be replaced by plans that are integrated, cohesive, and adapted to the particular needs of the individual community. The use of outside consultants may be required to develop plans which will enable a school to move effectively in completing the unfinished agenda.

Recommendations

1. School systems should acknowledge that the final goal is to end race and class segregation, not only in education, but in all areas of society.

2. The goal of quality education should be pursued through intense efforts in the areas of curriculum, particularly in basic skills; adequate counseling services; increased inservice training for staff, administrators, and students; and the elimination of tracking and testing maneuvers as a means to achieve resegregation.

3. Higher education must become more egalitarian and multicultural, particularly in teacher-training institutions. We must give more attention to preparation for teaching in desegregating school systems.

4. Metropolitan solutions should be explored for many urban school systems that have been divided between central city and suburban interests.

5. Housing desegregation should be part of the societal remedy acknowledged by educators and by the general community as necessary for the achievement of truly integrated education.

6. A high priority should be assigned to placing minorities in all categories of jobs related to education, including administrative and policy-making positions, as well as teaching and support staff.

The reassignment of students and staff so that schools are not racially identifiable is only the first step in the school desegregation process. The major challenge is to provide educational opportunities which will enable all students to meet uniform goals and objectives.

Ancillary relief must be provided

by way of educational components designed to ensure high quality educational programs, effectively delivered. Strong leadership and broad community support will result in a school system sensitive to the needs of all children and equipped with well-planned strategies for meeting those needs. In a democratic society, we must find the will and the way to complete the unfinished agenda of providing quality education in desegregated schools for all the children of the nation. ■

¹ The Indianapolis plan, however, involves only one-way busing of black students to suburban areas, rather than a more equitable approach which would allow for transportation of both black and white students across district lines.

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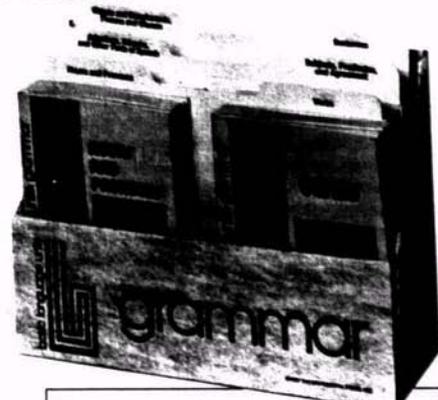
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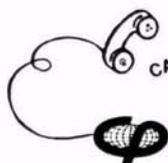
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