

OPEN LETTER TO ANN ARBOR BOARD OF EDUCATION

The Board of Education is acting responsibly when they seek means of improving educational opportunities for all of Ann Arbor's students. It is believed that adoption of recommendations of the Jones School Report would be a step that would not benefit the children and therefore should be rejected by the School Board.

The Committee has apparently overlooked the real objective of furthering the educational development of the Jones School children and has become preoccupied with a concern for racial balance. The report states, "The emphasis is on the responsibility of the board in meeting the problems in the context of the great movement of our day to secure equal rights..." How can equal rights be achieved by depriving a group of children of their right to attend a neighborhood school, the same as any other child in Ann Arbor? Added emphasis should have been on the responsibility of the school system to provide special remedial teaching to meet the individual needs of students who are having learning problems.

Not only is the emphasis of the report wrong but there are basic errors in logic from which the major conclusions are drawn. The substance of the argument in the report is that reading test scores of negroes in Jones School are lower than reading test scores of negroes in predominantly white schools and therefore moving children from Jones School to other schools will raise their learning ability and thereby those test scores. The error in such logic is plain. Factors such as cultural level and family background of students were not correlated with test scores. If such factors are studied differences may be seen between families in the Jones School area and those who have moved out to predominantly white neighborhoods. Such factors should be assigned far more significance than the present negro enrollment in the school attended. The omission of information of the individual's background makes the conclusions of the report appear invalid.

The concern expressed by the report of whether there is a 40-60 negro to white ratio or a 20-80 split only obscures the basic issue of whether or not Jones School is providing the type of educational opportunity needed by its students. It is believed that the report recommendations provide only a diffusion of the problem to other schools, not a solution to the problem.

This attempt to cast all children into the same mold reminds me of a currently popular song about people being fitted into little boxes and turned out all the same. Perhaps a little less "ticky tacky" and a little more special attention to a special situation would be a more appropriate objective for our educators. As the Ann Arbor School system is a pioneer in the field of special education, it would seem that in an optimum use of Jones School to meet the need of the Jones School students we have available to us an interesting and fruitful challenge for our educators to master.

An interesting article written by Inge Lederer Gibel appeared in Harper's Magazine of November 1963 entitled, "How Not to Integrate Our Schools." The author, a mother, a white Austrian

Immigrant married to a negro and resident in Harlem, has many suggestions of how to enrich the school experience. I would like to quote some of her ideas:

"In our Northern cities...there is a large mass of Negro children whose cultural and economic background is so deprived, that merely placing them in 'integrated' schools will accomplish nothing."

"...I think I feel what any mother of black children would feel when I am subtly patronized by white liberals. Sometimes I am simply shocked and repelled by the irrelevance of their ideas despite the nobility of their motives."

"What...Negro parents wanted from the schools--and what, unfortunately, they were not getting-- was a longer day; more and better textbooks that would be more representative of the minority and urban groups in our culture; dedicated teachers (of any color); smaller classes; and special programs which really serve the low-income child and are not aimed just at the middleclass child..."

"The crucial factor, I think, is the teacher. Good salaries are important, of course, but salary and prestige can't buy dedication. A dedicated teacher can turn a rathole into a palace, she can turn slum children into empire children."

"There are still such teachers in some of our classrooms, and we must find ways to encourage them and add to their numbers. At the same time we must weed out the security seekers interested mainly in salary, vacations, free time, and pensions."

"All our teachers--including the best--should be required to attend a seminar dealing with Negro...history and culture, and to learn how to emphasize the positive elements in them to their students."

"The middle-class Negro child can learn all this at home, but the child of the slum is usually doomed to remain ignorant of his own history."

Mrs. Gibel has some further suggestions of how a school system can mobilize volunteers to aid in the battle of improving education:

"A child who comes to school from an overcrowded home without a good night's rest or breakfast is in no state to receive an education. These children need an all-day neighborhood school which would open its doors around eight o'clock. A breakfast of, say, an orange, a bun, and hot cocoa (if schools can serve lunch, why not breakfast?) would be distributed by an early shift of volunteers."

"And some of these same teachers and volunteers could carry on into the late afternoon (with extra pay for the teachers, naturally, and perhaps a small stipend for the volunteers), with remedial classes and ballet, art, cooking, sewing, and athletics."

she concludes her article by suggesting:

"bussing children around the city is no more than a feeble--
foredoomed--palliative...."

In conclusion let me say the evidence in the report is
inconclusive, the remedies offered appear risky and no informa-
tion is available as to the expected results. Unless we are to
put the civil rights movement ahead of the welfare of the children,
I cannot see any justification for approval of this report.

Respectfully yours,

Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Smit