

Riverside school board, NAACP discuss 'virtually segregated' schools

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Riverside school officials were relieved when the National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) approached them with a reasoning attitude and refrained from talk of a demonstration or sit-in.

The NAACP people were willing to recognize, according to the report made by school board member

Rae Sharp, that there are de facto academic shortcomings among Negroes as well as (even if because of) de facto segregation.

The NAACP talked of special counseling to make Negro students better aware of their own potentials and help them to break out of the cul-de-sac of segregation and cultural deprivation with its by-product of economic deprivation.

THE MOST remarkable thing proposed by the NAACP leaders and passed along to the board was that the abler pupils be taken out of Lowell, Irving and Casa Blanca schools and bussed to other schools where they would come into contact with students who perform better as students and so receive more challenge. That was a real switch.

The question President Arthur Littleworth of the board says he asked the delegation was, "Are you independent in his, or are you committed to action in accordance with the national policy of your organization?"

They couldn't have been hand-tied, because in San Bernardino and in most other areas the insistence of Negro groups has been for reorganization of school boundaries to mingle Negro pupils with white.

THE PROPOSAL was couched with what appeared to be a good frank recognition of infortunate facts that de-

veloped under unfortunate circumstances. But it nevertheless took the school administration aback. A little history will suggest why.

When Emerson school was built, a long time segregation policy was followed. The line between it and Irving and Lowell followed the then-existing neighborhood racial boundaries (which changed later, however).

When Alcott was built the "natural boundary" of Tequesquite Arroyo was used. That line seems to have been established by other forces working to keep the Negroes segregated, and it suddenly appeared that Lowell had been made into an all-Negro school.

THE SCHOOL board explanation was the same as the one currently being heard in San Bernardino — the idea of basing the elementary school on recognized neighborhood lines.

In the case of the arroyo, it was at least a geographic line although that line hadn't proved a barrier to Lowell school children for 50 years. In the case of the Emerson line, the only identifying aspect was color.

Subsequently the school board and administration apparently recognized that in setting boundaries they could and should move in the other direction. That was evident in the boundaries of Washington school, which took in some minority area that was formerly in Casa Blanca.

THE SCHOOL board and administration have demonstrated good faith in other ways. Good qualified teachers of Negro background, many of them educated elsewhere, are hired in Riverside on merit and are accepted in predominantly white areas because they teach well and effectively.

A compromise policy on Lowell was rather shamefacedly made. Fifth and sixth graders have the option of

transferring to other schools provided there is room and the parents pay transportation.

A few students make use of this policy. It might improve their lot, but what does it do for the Negroes who remain at Lowell?

SEVERAL school officials think it makes the remaining problem, for the vast majority of the pupils, much harder.

One teacher, not talking of racial problems but of teaching in general, said he always thought four or five better students sparked up a class and gave impetus to everyone.

They did more work, he said, and got the best grades. They didn't go unmotivated, although they helped the rest. But he wouldn't say so openly in this age of Conant and ability grouping.

IN RESPONSE to board member Sharp's report of the meeting with the NAACP group, in which good faith was evident all around, it was interesting to hear the suggestions made by Bruce Miller.

He talked of special grouping for achievement and a variety of other matters not directly related to the proposal.

On the subject of discrimination he recognized the problem in a way that hasn't been explicitly acknowledged by either board of administration heretofore.

HE MENTIONED the long-time nonsegregation of secondary schools but said that "Irving, Lowell and Casa Blanca are virtually segregated schools and there is a possibility that this might

well happen to other schools, Emerson and Longfellow particularly."

To correct it, he suggested a boundary policy that must be encouraging to Negro and other racial minorities — especially since it was actually practiced in the Washington boundary action.

He suggested expanding Emerson boundaries to the east and south and possibly dispersing some of the Lowell and Casa Blanca pupils to nearby schools.

Lincoln School has long lived by bussing students from the north side. When a new school is built to the north, Miller thought it might be used to bring better integration at Longfellow.

THIS WOULD certainly interest the San Bernardino Negro group that is making demands and being told that schools should be based on the "neighborhood," an entity that can be defined in various ways.

But is it a proposal moving toward general integration, or is it a move to solve the problem for a few Negro pupils and leave the others more isolated and more disadvantaged than ever before? That question remains unanswered.

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