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SEGREGATION IN MILWAUKEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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The Milwaukee chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) presents its findings and opinions before the Milwaukee School Board's Special Committee in order to point out some of the serious problems existing primarily in the inner core schools. In the following discussion, the sociological and academic problems are discussed together, as we feel that the two fields are interconnected, and cannot be separated. Whether segregated facilities are purposeful, circumstantial, or accidental, they must be corrected immediately. The separation of students and schools because of race is an obvious injury both to the student's academic accomplishments, and to his psychological development. Although correcting the established segregation based on housing restrictions and zoning will take some serious, vigorous planning, and study, there are many inequalities in Milwaukee's educational facilities which can be corrected immediately.

Excuses generally given to keep separate educational facilities are the alleged lower level of Negro educational ability, or the poor family background of students. The difference of ability between children due to race has never been defended by any competent social scientist, and this view is worthy of no serious consideration. The other excuse of a poorer background is true in some cases. But to place all the parents of Negro children into one class is a stereotyped and prejudiced view. There are certainly school districts in Milwaukee outside of the inner core with similar parental economic and social backgrounds. An experienced core teacher commented that the school has the student longer than he is at home, and that with understanding and an interest in the subject being taught, it is possible to educate a large majority of students well, regardless of the family background. So there is no defensible basis for the racial separation of school children, and CORE will consider this its position in this report.

CORE feels that the almost 100% Negro attendance at many Milwaukee schools is extremely detrimental in itself. Regardless of the fact that the inner core is heavily Negro in population, to build a system of public education on separate schooling by race goes against the 1954 Supreme Court decision in Brown vs. Board of Education that in public education, separate but equal educational facilities are inherently unequal, and violates basic common sense views on educational equality. To find examples of racially integrated schools that have been very successful, one need go no further than the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee Campus Elementary school. If the Milwaukee School Board would quit looking for details and cases to prove that integration will cause hardships and trouble, and start taking the positive side and see what progressive cities and educators have accomplished in similar circumstances, we could begin to have a good system of integrated schools.

In the placement of teachers in inner core schools, there seems to be a feeling by the School Board that placing Negro teachers in the core schools "works out better that way". It is logical that more Negro teachers would tend to teach in the heavily Negro inner core schools, but why are so few Negro teachers placed in other Milwaukee schools? This would be an excellent way to break down the prejudices that now exist in many Milwaukee school children.

Another problem is the quality of teachers placed in core schools, and the amount of effort spent on special guidance, special classes, etc. One young language teacher interviewed was assigned to the core area as her first placement directly from college - evidently a rather normal procedure. She did not have any experience, and was assigned to a class that consisted of problem students many years older than their classmates - students normally put in special classes in other areas of the city. Her initial experience so angered her, that she quit the Milwaukee Public School System, and is now teaching in a suburb. Not only did the city lose a good teacher, but this case is not unusual in the assignment of inexperienced teachers to the core area in disproportionate numbers. The inner core should not be a training ground for new teachers - it should be the area in the city where some of the best and most experienced teachers are placed. If the School Board considers the standards here low, then why not correct this with better than average teaching staffs? The establishment of special classes for both slow and fast learners must be accelerated to keep up with the rest of Milwaukee's schools, plus the improvement of curriculum to meet the standards of the rest of the city. It is no excuse to offer an inferior curriculum, and then state that the students coming out of these schools have an inferior education due to their race or economic position.

The free transfer policy of the Milwaukee School System is a sound plan, but there seem to be some very obvious discrepancies in carrying out its stated goals. In many cases, parents CORE contacted (both white and Negro) stated that it was easy for a white pupil to get a transfer, while Negro children had a hard time, or were refused. Negro teachers' children, naturally, had no trouble, but many Negro parents had to come back, and fight hard to get a transfer for their child. The standard procedure is for both the new and old principals to approve the transfer application. The excuse for refusal to grant transfers is that the receiving school has its full quota of students. After interviewing parents of transfer students, CORE believes that some principals are using the full quota excuse to keep qualified Negro students from transferring to their schools. We believe that it should be the Board's stated policy to encourage the free transfer of students for the purpose of integration. In some typical cases, CORE found the following results: A Negro parent who wanted a transfer of her child to prevent time lost in bus

transfer was refused, and given no reason for the refusal. Another Negro parent who wanted her child transferred to a predominantly white school this fall, was told by the receiving school's principal to go back to "her district" (North Division High), and was given no excuse of school overcrowding. A white student in a predominantly Negro high school was transferred at the suggestion of the school's principal into a mainly white school. The student had not even thought of, or requested a transfer until the principal suggested it. Is this a normal policy for some Milwaukee schools? In this case, there is little doubt that it was a quiet, behind the scenes move to enforce segregation in the city's schools. Parents of a grade school pupil at LaFollette school were told their son had to transfer to Twenty-Fourth St. school due to remodeling of LaFollette. The LaFollette school has finished remodeling some time ago, according to the pupil, some teachers, and the last PTA meeting. The forced transfer is still in effect - a teacher has stated the transfer was for purposes of integration, but neither principal, or any school official has made any explanations. The Milwaukee School Board certainly has the responsibility to keep parents informed on why transfers are made, how long it will take, and when the children will be returned to their regular school.

What is especially important in this case is that the grade school student at LaFollette was on the honor role, and interested very much in his schooling. After being transferred to Twenty-Fourth St. school, his grades have dropped significantly - he is no longer on the honor role, and seems less interested in his schoolwork. The student's mother puts the blame on the present bus transport policy. She feels that the Twenty-Fourth St. school teachers are capable, and in this case since the student is sent by bus with some friends, he is not completely alone at the new school. The only logical explanation is that the time lost during lunch period in bussing students back and forth (taking over a half an hour of school time), plus the interruption and discontinuity of his school day has lowered his academic standing, and his overall interest in schooling. How many similar cases are there in Milwaukee inner core schools?

In the present "temporary" transportation of pupils by bus from a school being remodeled to the receiving school, CORE strongly believes that the effected students are being denied an equal chance for education, and are handled in such a way as to cause damaging psychological and sociological consequences. The students of inner core schools are not treated in the same way as others in Milwaukee public schools, and this obvious "special treatment" causes a disruption in the ordinary life and schooling of these children.

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The students are picked up at normal class time from the regular school - perhaps this is unavoidable, but with the present policy of transporting the pupils back and forth at mealtime, much more time is unnecessarily lost. If there are enough classrooms in the receiving school to take care of the transferred students, then the school must be able to provide some sort of satisfactory temporary lunch facilities.

But more crucial than even the unnecessary time loss is the disruption of normal school routine. A pupil who spends the noon period riding back to his old school for lunch cannot be adequately prepared to study, and feels too transient to fit into a school routine. Receiving schools complaining about discipline problems of the bus transported students should think of what would happen if the situation were reversed - and their students were bussed around during noon meal period. The School Board should have analyzed the detrimental effects of its transfer policy before instigating it - and certainly should have eliminated the many problems, both academic and psychological, before starting the plan. In the transportation of students, CORE objects to the present plan of bussing students back to their home schools for lunch, not in bussing per se. If at some future time, as a concrete and positive step in fighting school segregation, a policy is devised to bus school children once a day at the beginning and end of regular class periods out of their segregated district, this will be viewed in an entirely different light by CORE.

Once the transferred students arrive at the receiving school, some of the most unequal, and what CORE feels to be direct and purposeful segregation begins. There seems to be a definite policy of keeping the transferred children directly separated from the regular student body. Even conversation is discouraged - the pupils are herded into the school without a chance to mingle, or even have normal contact with the other students. At recess, only a very small token integration has occurred, letting a few lower grade classes mix in with the regular school pupils. Of course, there is no mingling in the lunchroom, since the pupils are transferred back to their home school. The separation of the classes within the school is complete, in many cases giving almost 100% segregation within the school classrooms. Is this the way the Milwaukee School Board wants to start integrating its schools? An even more damaging separation is the case of school principals, where the transferred pupils are denied the use of the receiving school's principal. How is it possible for the home school principal sitting a mile or so away, out of contact with his students, teachers, and counselors, to properly evaluate disciplinary and academic problems relating to the students?

The reverse situation does not seem to occur; when children of a predominantly white school are transferred for building remodeling, they do not regularly come into the inner core schools, although these are in many cases the most convenient for this purpose. If the argument is used that the core schools are inferior, is this not the most obvious recognition that an

immediate special effort must be made to bring them up to standards? And if no excuse is given, then what policy does the Milwaukee School Board hold in regard to transfers?

A former member of the Milwaukee School Board, Mr. Hampel, suggested that the temporarily transferred children be integrated into the receiving school. Evidently, nothing has been done yet with this good, constructive suggestion. CORE feels strongly that here is an excellent place for the beginning of total integration in our schools. Since the children have to be transferred, why not make a determined effort to integrate the children into the receiving school? As a beginning toward integration, and an excellent way to put students into contact with each other, this would cost no money, would involve at the present time no redistricting or inconvenience, and would pave the way for useful cooperation and understanding between all students.

The Milwaukee CORE chapter is urging the immediate investigation of these problems in transferring students, and correction of abuses not only to speed integration per se, but to correct the very damaging personal and academic disruption and confusion in pupils' school life. Is it reasonable to expect students to be bussed around the city twice in the middle of a school day, to be treated in the receiving school as outsiders, as somehow different from the regular pupils, and still expect them to receive a normal, adequate education?

The Milwaukee School Board, CORE feels, will have to take an increased interest in and pay more attention to the problems of minority group pupils, and the inner core school inequalities. There is a growing interest and concern of students and parents about the quality of their schools, and the city's efforts to correct problems. The School Board will have to show in the very near future concrete and constructive plan changes in the operation of many Milwaukee schools. The beginning of integrating Milwaukee's school children is no insurmountable, or even very difficult job if the problem is looked at constructively. Such measures as pointed out above, in integrating the already bussed students, cost nothing, and will show a willingness on the part of the Board to end school segregation in Milwaukee.

The Superintendent of Schools has stated that he has no data on the racial makeup of the city's public school children. CORE hopes this very serious omission is just an oversight, which will be immediately corrected, and not a deliberate policy of keeping the status quo in the city's schools. It is, of course, obvious that even to begin a serious study of needed changes and plans in our schools, the statistical data will have to be collected, and should be made public to any interested parents or groups, as well as the Board, to let all interested Milwaukee citizens work towards totally integrated and equal schools.

The School Board must also take the initiative in keeping parents informed about its practices. As an example of a lax policy, the PTA at McKinley school has met only once this year. Some teachers have voiced the opinion that they don't want to come out for these meetings. Regardless of who is at fault - the School Board, teachers, the school administration, or parents, Milwaukee schools should have definite policies to meet such conditions, and spark the interest of both teachers and parents in democratic meetings where school problems can be discussed on the district level.

We assume that there is no need to point up to the School Board, or any Milwaukee citizens, the positive results of integrating school children in our public schools. The unwarranted prejudices, stereotyped myths and anger resulting in many Milwaukee and American adults could so easily have been avoided, and CORE hopes will be avoided in the future generation of Americans, by the mixing and contact between all school children, regardless of their race, school grade, or location in the city. Through integration and the upgrading of academic standards in our schools, CORE hopes Milwaukee will take definite steps to correct existing inequalities.