

July 15, 1964

TO: Freedom School Directors  
FROM: Dan Wood and Gloria Bishop  
RE: Freedom Schools in Rural Madison County

School opened officially on Monday, July 6th, at St. John Church (Valley View) and at Pleasant Green Church (Sharon) with an enrollment of 25 and 19 students, respectively. Since the first day of school, enrollment has increased, and, presently, St. John has between 40 and 50 students and Pleasant Green between 30 and 35.

At St. John the age range is seven to sixty-seven. The student body is divided into four age groups, and each teacher is assigned to one age group which she or he teaches for the entire day. Much to the surprise of the staff, the students begged (and we do mean begged) for a foreign language - any foreign language. We realize that we can not begin to teach the students a foreign language and there is some question about the advisability of including a foreign language in a Freedom School Curriculum. However, the students' unbelievable enthusiasm made it impossible for us not to teach a foreign language. Except for the addition of foreign languages, the curriculum is essentially that given to us at the orientation program in Oxford, though the emphasis on various subjects might vary with the emphasis given these subjects in the curriculum. Our curriculum consists of citizenship, Negro history, English, reading, math, and foreign languages.

We are teaching these subjects in time blocks of an hour each. However, quite often, citizenship and Negro history take more than an hour, especially when the discussion for the day is "unstoppable". On paper our schedule is as follows:

8:30 to 9:30 ..... Citizenship and Negro History  
9:30 to 10:30 ..... English and Reading  
10:30 to 11:30 ..... Library and Conferences

(During this hour, students select books from the library and read them in school. We set aside an hour for silent reading, because living conditions in the rurals make reading difficult in many homes. Also, we have found that we can better emphasize the importance of reading by making it a part of our school program. Let us stress that the library is the pride of the school. Students, rather than teachers, serve as librarians. During library hour, teachers hold conferences with students and give special help to students who can not read or write.

11:30 to 12:30 ..... LUNCH

(Students bring lunches to school and eat with the teachers. This gives us an opportunity to socialize with the students, to play games with them, and, in a few instances, to teach them folk dancing, which they seem to love.

12:30 to 1:30 ..... Math  
1:30 to 2:00 ..... Foreign Languages (German, French, and Spanish)  
2:00 to 2:30 ..... Closing Session

(This period is spent singing Freedom Songs and enjoying programs sponsored by the students.)

We have begun work on a newspaper and hope to send you our first paper by next week.

The organization of the Pleasant Green Freedom School has been determined largely by the composition of the students. There are three general age groups in the school: the adults, from ages thirty to sixty, number about half dozen or more; the teenage groups range from twelve to nineteen and number about a dozen and a half; and there are less than a dozen children under twelve. The total enrollment ranges daily from twenty-five to thirty-five students. There are four different self-contained classes: one for the adults, two for the teenage groups, and one for the younger set. The school day begins at eight-thirty in the morning and runs until two in the afternoon. The day is begun with a brief general session, including announcements, prayer, and Freedom Songs. Then the general session is broken down into self-contained classes for the entire morning.

The adult class is working primarily on a citizenship curriculum with emphasis on the Federal and State Constitutions. Included in this class is a time block set aside for adult literacy. The teenage group is divided into two classes. The successful establishment of a working student relationship in these two classes was done through an emphasis on forum discussions using the citizenship curriculum. The incorporation of Negro history, reading, and writing is presently being initiated. This week we began devoting the first hour and a half to Negro history, with the entire student body attending a lecture given by one teacher and then individual groups of students discussing the lecture with their respective teachers. Special areas of interest, such as math and science, are scheduled to be covered in the afternoon when students divide up in accordance with their relative interests. The younger group has been too small to be included in the school other than on a basic reading level.

The Pleasant Green teachers have been concentrating on gaining a classroom based on the students' interest and motivation, letting the students structure the type of curriculum to be covered. There is a problem of being able to extend the Freedom School program over the entire six hours. However, with the inclusion of Negro History lectures, this problem may be overcome. The students and the staff at Pleasant Green are now working on a newspaper and, hopefully, we will be able to send you our first paper by next week.

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We have encountered a number of problems, of course, but some of them were unexpected ones. The problem ~~ix~~ that is of greatest concern to us is the lack of interest on the part of older boys in the Freedom Schools. Although they frequent the Freedom House and discuss with us here, they do not attend the schools. People in the community explain their absence from school in terms of the farm chores that the older boys must perform each day. Also, most of the boys are dropouts and just the word "school" falls dead on their ears. We can not do anything about their farm chores, of course, but we do hope to better use the time that they spend around the Freedom House. Dan Wood, E. J. Brisker, and Phil Sharp (Community Center) are now working on ways to pull the older boys into our program. Such an effort might involve more emphasis on sports, community action, and social seminars.

Although families in the area are excited over our program, they are, nevertheless, experiencing concern and, in some cases, fear over the presence of whites in their homes. Consequently, we have had to move teachers from one family to another. At this time, however, every teacher is living with a family which seems to accept the living arrangements as permanent for the length of the Project.

All of us are still deeply concerned over the lack of communications in our area. We spend so much time trying to find ways of communicating and we make too many trips into Canton for small matters that could be handled over the phone. A fifty dollar deposit has been put down on a phone and, hopefully, we will have a phone by the end of the week. The two-way radio system is not working.

As you have no doubt noticed, we are spending more time on "hard-core" subjects than the suggested curriculum emphasizes. Let us explain this. We found, first of all, that we are not working with many eleventh and twelfth grade students. We found, secondly, that the reading level of students is extremely low. Many of our older teenagers can not read or write or work simple math problems. (The math in the curriculum can not be used in rural Madison County.) There has been a great deal of discussion among staff members as to the wisdom of spending time on the hard-core subjects, since we will be here for such a brief time. Some of us feel that we should spend most of our time on Negro history and citizenship, while others of us feel that we should divide the time equally among the subjects given in the curriculum. We have set aside an hour for Negro history and citizenship, but we let the time spent on these subjects be gauged by, what you might call, the "spirit of the day". The students are able to get a deal of citizenship and Negro history in the schools, at the Freedom House, and at the community centers. It is no wonder that we are experiencing great frustration over the impossibility of doing all that we'd like to do and think we should do.

We are fortunate to be living and working in rural Madison County, because the people are wonderful and the country is beautiful. The success of our program can be seen on the faces of the children as they begin their four mile walk to school at seven and seven thirty in the morning, be the morning clear or cloudy. The success of our program can be heard during our song period, when the students and staff sing about freedom and the lack of freedom with great emotion. If we ever question our success, we do so for just a short time, in those moments when we want to change the System overnight. The students at the schools and the people in the community convince us of our success when they ask repeatedly and sincerely, "Will you stay here with us? Don't leave." Perhaps we should, and some of us will.