September 12, 1964

Norma Becker and Sandra Adickes

Hi. How was your summer. Sorry I didn't see you before you left. I've been meaning to write to you for some time to outline another plan for the UFT, but I've been slow to do it. If you think this is feasible, please reply.

We're faced statewide with school boycotts. The idea has caught on like wildfire with the Freedom School students. Furthermore, the lawyers are planning more school desegregation suits in more school districts. Between all these pressures it seems likely that at least one school district will close down rather than desegregate. And at least some of the students will feel that a one-day school boycott is not enough, and launch a protracted boycott. If either of these situations should occur, we feel that the Freedom School program should try to meet it in as responsible and comprehensive a fashion as we possibly can. This means that if the schools should close for whatever reason, the Freedom Schools should try to provide parallel education for the duration. We already tried this in Shaw when they closed the schools for a few days. I think that with adequate preparation we could probably meet this challenge (provided it did not happen all over the state of course). This is my plan:

Could you, still working with the UFT Human Rights Committee, organize standby teachers? I'm sure that we could rally churches, homes, etc. in a community for extra Freedom Schools, and we could get money from outside to support the emergency Freedom Schools, but teachers do not seem to emerge from air, even in crises. At least not enough of them. If, however, we could have teachers outside the state who were committed to come for an emergency period (a few days to possibly months), we could plan definitely on Freedom School education to bridge the gap. Naturally, we could make more specific plans when we saw a dangerous situation brewing. But we would need to count on teachers who could augment the regular Freedom School staff. I'm sure that there are teachers like the UFT teachers who came during the summer who are not teaching. Do you think you could find teachers who are retired, or substitute teachers, or even striking teachers who would go to Mississippi if they were needed? As of now it seems that the Leake County schools will not close (the parents were intimidated from even trying to send their children to the white schools), but we will not know what the school board plans for the Shaw school until it reopens in October. If the administration tries to punish the students who led the wildcat ELMWOOD boycott in August, the students are already committed to walk out. That remains our only sore spot right now. The statewide one-day boycott will probably come in November or early December. There may be extreme reaction to that in some places.
Please excuse the wandering thoughts; I'm just writing down this stuff as it comes to me. If you would like a better-written request from either Liz or me, to present formally, just ask and we'll send something better. I hope you get the idea, though.

The second thing is this: I've been reading about the stuff the American Federation of Teachers did at its summer convention—election of Negro officials, especially on the Human Rights or whatever committee, and resolutions recommending that teachers involve themselves with the civil rights movement. Could you help us get some good contacts with that group, so that we could possibly develop a relationship something like what we have with the UFT? We would like to have all the teachers rolling. Same with the NEA if possible, but I'm not planning to hold my breath until that day comes.

Things are all torn up right now, but I hope they'll shape up by October. Incidentally, Dick Jewett says that the fall recruitment by CORE is not catching on—applications are very sparse. We're DESPERATE for long-term community center and freedom school workers as well and the emergency squads. Tell all your friends who could come for a minimum of 2 months. Please. Thanks.

Yours truly

Lois Chaffee