

EVANSTON

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EVANSTON, A LARGE SUBURB north of Chicago, has a population of 80,000 of which 11.5% is Negro. It borders Chicago on the south, Skokie on the west, the village of Wilmette on the north, and Lake Michigan on the east. The median family income in 1960 was \$9,193 (the median for the lowest census tract was \$5,605 and for the highest \$17,250); yet Evanston comprises the entire income spectrum, with almost 7% of its population in families with annual incomes of \$3,000 or less. Evanston is significantly above the national average in education—the median number of school years completed being 12.8 (the lowest tract averaged 9.6 and the highest was over 16). Twenty-seven per cent of Evanston's adult population are college graduates.

The Negro population is for the most part residentially segregated and has a median family income which is significantly lower than the white community's median income (\$5,607 for Negroes as compared with \$9,193 for the *city* as a whole). Negroes in Evanston are at least as likely to be homeowners as whites even though the city-wide proportion of owner occupancy is 43%. Negroes are also as likely, or more likely, to be long-time Evanston residents with deep roots in the community. Further, while difficult to quantify, it is clear that an unusual proportion of Negroes in Evanston are professionals—lawyers, doctors, teachers, and technicians of various sorts. There thus exists a substantial number of educated and relatively affluent Negroes.

EDITORS' NOTE: *This is a condensation by the staff of the Law & Society Review of a larger study ("Illinois Elementary District 65," 54 pp.), conducted in 1965 for the United States Office of Education.*

While there have been no major civil rights controversies in Evanston's past, there have been numerous minor "incidents," particularly at the single, and thus integrated, high school. There have been complaints about the tracking system which often has the effect of segregating students by race, some about the school counselors' advice to Negro students, and about other forms of subtle discrimination. In the 1950s and early 1960s local civil rights organizations pointed out these inequalities and sought remedies, but apparently none of the incidents reported became a highly visible community-wide issue.

In 1964, however, a bond issue proposal was transformed into a controversy over de facto school segregation. In 1965, of the seventeen elementary schools one (Foster) was 99% Negro, another (Dewey) was 67% Negro, and three others were between 30 and 45% Negro. The remaining twelve schools had minimal Negro enrollments. The racial composition of the junior high schools was more evenly distributed, with percentages at 14, 20, and 25. In the single high school there was, of course, no overall problem of racial balance.

As is seen, two schools in particular (Foster and Dewey) had a highly disproportionate percentage of Negro students, especially when it is noted that Negroes constitute only 20% of the school-age children in the Evanston community. It was the parents of students at these two schools who, for several years, had pressed to alleviate the long standing segregated conditions in the schools. Foster School parents were interested in a plan to integrate their school, and Dewey School parents—both white and Negro—were concerned about their school's shrinking white enrollment (from 189 in 1962 to 164 in 1965).

It is most remarkable that the Dewey School, which for a number of years has been approximately 70% Negro, has retained any white students at all. The stability of the white student population at Dewey is a function of many factors but two appear to be of paramount importance. First, quite simply, the Dewey School is a good school. Like the other schools of Evanston it does not have to depend upon substitute teachers. Its classes average 25–26 in size. Its faculty averages eleven years in experience and five years at Dewey School. The atmosphere seems warm and positive and the principal and his staff have good relations with the children and the community. Second, and unique to the Dewey School, the community it serves has found unity and expression in a potent active organization—The Dewey Community Conference. Interested in maintaining an integrated school and neighborhood, the Conference has taken

on some of the functions of real estate brokerage when regular Evanston realtors have failed or refused to show houses in integrated neighborhoods to white buyers. In part, as a result of these efforts the integrated neighborhoods in the Dewey zone are well stabilized, and whites are both looking for and buying homes.

THE STRUGGLE OVER THE BOND ISSUE

In May of 1964, the Boards of Education of District 65 (elementary) and the geographically identical District 202 (high school) received a report made by a firm of educational consultants which had been employed to survey the school building needs of the Evanston public school system. The report indicated serious problems of space and/or deterioration at a number of elementary schools and at the high school. The two Boards adopted most of the recommendations of the consultant's report and, on October 26, 1964, announced the bond issues to be presented to the public in a January 30 referendum. District 65's portion of the proposal authorized improvements to be financed through bond sales of \$6,485,000.

What makes the bond proposal of particular interest was the manner in which it was transformed from a fairly "routine" proposal to a major civil rights issue in the city. It contained three main propositions: (1) to build a new junior high school; (2) to replace or renovate old portions of several existing schools and acquire land for future school sites; and (3) to enlarge and improve playground facilities at several elementary schools. These proposals would have done little to alter the existing degree of de facto segregation in the schools as it was estimated that the new junior high school would be about 92% white.

This bond issue proposal soon became the focus of attention for an integrationist movement springing from the Foster and Dewey parents associations' concern over the existing situations in these two schools, and by a report presented by the Citizen's Advisory Committee in Intercultural Relations (CIR). This Committee had been appointed about a year prior to the announcement of the bond issue for the purpose of reviewing the problems of racial composition in the schools and to prepare a report on conditions, with recommendations on how to alleviate any undesirable conditions. The convergence of the Committee's report and the Foster School protest were to turn the bond issue into a lever for desegregation.

At an open meeting of the School Board on November 16, 1964, before the CIR report was made public, a battery of prominent white and

Negro citizens—largely on behalf of the Foster PTA—gave prepared statements protesting the existing situations at Foster and Dewey schools. The Board responded by appointing a fifteen-member committee to study the “Foster problem.” Members of the committee were selected from the Foster PTA, the School Board administration, and the Council of Evanston PTA’s.

Within a month after the November 16 meeting, the School Board adopted a strongly worded resolution deploring the continuance of de facto segregation in the Evanston public schools. At this juncture the CIR report was issued—accompanied by a *Supplementary Report on Attendance Areas and Neighborhood Schools* filed by six dissenting members of the Committee. The majority recommended open enrollment on a space available basis within a neighborhood system. Further, it added (somewhat cryptically) that “all educationally sound measures for desegregating Foster School should be explored,” and that “the Foster School situation should not be allowed to continue.” The minority or “supplementary” report also accepted the open enrollment plan even though it felt constrained to warn against possible abuses. This report also set forth a somewhat more detailed but consistent plan for desegregating Foster. Since there was no serious dispute of substance, one is left with the impression that the Committee was driven by personality clashes that found expression between the lines of the supplementary report.

In late December, these differences eventually found expression in the response of the liberals and the Negro community to the bond proposal. The Board’s resolution of December 14 still had not satisfied them that it meant business. White church leaders, the NAACP, and the Urban League were all in opposition to the bond issue. It seems likely that much of this resistance is attributable to the substantial influence in those groups of the “minority” on the Intercultural Committee, the Dewey Conference, and others, who wanted a timetable and specifications from the Board of Education on the integration of the schools and felt that it was a now or never opportunity to get it.

On January 10, 1965, at a special meeting of the Board, this group achieved its objective without much difficulty. The Board agreed unanimously on the following proposition which it formally adopted on January 18:

[The plan] shall include an overall timetable for the integration of District 65 schools, developed in conjunction with building plans. This plan also

shall provide . . . that the Foster School population be reduced by removing approximately one-third of the pupils to other schools in the District by the time the proposed building program is completed.

After the announcement of this resolution, the informal coalition of integrationists—having won its objective—publicly endorsed the bond issue. On January 14, a rally of the NAACP which had been planned to protest and oppose the bond issue was turned into a rally of support. On January 30, the bond issue for both districts passed easily, with no organized opposition. The bond issue, which received large majorities in all precincts, carried by 4.5 to 1.

EDITORS' POSTSCRIPT

The approval of the bond issue was just the beginning of a bold new plan to fully integrate the Evanston school system. Acting upon the December 1964 resolution of the Board to "eliminate de facto segregation of the district and to develop a plan and timetable to achieve this end" an eighteen-member Citizen's Advisory Commission on Integration spent a full year devising a new approach to organizing the system. The Commission examined many plans in its search for the best solution to the problem of racial imbalance. One of the ideas given high priority was the establishment of a laboratory school at the all-Negro Foster School and the reassignment of students presently attending the school. The plan was given careful examination and money was allocated to retain consultants from the computer laboratory at the Illinois Institute of Technology Research Institute.¹ On August 1, 1966 the Board adopted the Superintendent's recommendation that the laboratory school be established in September of 1967. But both the Board and the Superintendent felt that some further steps toward integration should be taken for the 1966-67 school year. It was decided that, as a forerunner to the laboratory school plan, a kindergarten laboratory center would be established at Foster School for September 1966.

1. Raw data listing the school, grade, sex, race, birthdate, and location by city block, of each child in the system was fed into a computer. These pupil data were keyed to geographic block locations and transferred, with school capacity and location data, to a computer file suitable for generating TV-style displays on the computer system. Displays and tabulations of school assignments were calculated on the basis of minimizing total pupil-travel distance under various conditions suggested by the commission. Many plans were devised and it was found that eliminating Foster School, maintaining a Negro enrollment of up to 25% in all other schools, and busing of otherwise unassigned children resulted in only eleven unassigned students.

After the decision was made there were only five weeks to plan the new kindergarten program and find the students for it. It was originally expected that perhaps one hundred white students could be induced to volunteer for the program despite the problems of being bused into an all-Negro school. These one hundred would match up with the one hundred Negro students in the Foster kindergarten. To everyone's surprise, 170 white students volunteered for the program. The original plan to have four kindergarten rooms and eight sessions was stretched to five rooms and ten sessions, and the building was filled to capacity. Not only was a 60% white-40% Negro racial mix adopted for the kindergarten lab, it was also decided that sections be established so that the socio-economic levels of the community be as representative as possible in each class. Children bused from the same neighborhood were assigned to the same half-day session to insure continuity between school and neighborhood, although this was a departure from the regular program of assigning younger children to morning sessions and older children to afternoon sessions.

The program was regarded as an immediate success. Much of the credit was attributed to the experimentation in the curriculum that provided such programs as creative dramatics, industrial arts, and reading for those ready for it, and to the tremendous warmth and dedication of the faculty. As the principal of the school pointed out: "This was a center for academic as well as social and emotional learning. Each boy and girl was offered a program geared to meet his particular needs, to build on his strengths, and to eliminate his weaknesses."

In November 1966, a plan for the integration of the entire school system was adopted by the Board. The plan redraws the school attendance areas for all elementary schools, eliminates all-Negro Foster School as a regular elementary school and reassigns all its present pupils—excepting the laboratory kindergarten group—to other schools. It re-establishes Foster as a laboratory elementary school to be attended by pupils drawn from throughout the district on a voluntary basis. The lab school is designed as a microcosm of the district school population, reflecting racial, socioeconomic and learning aptitude factors. According to projections, the new plan will so redistribute Negro children throughout the *entire* system that the lowest percentage of Negroes at a single school is expected to be 17% and the highest 24%. Those students who live more than a mile from their new school are to be bused at

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public expense.² A survey of the 90% of the parents whose children would be bused showed that 92.5% of them responded favorably to the busing outside their present attendance areas. This, plus the overwhelming approval of a myriad of community organizations, seems to indicate widespread approval of the new plan.

The Evanston school story will enter its most significant period in the fall of 1967 when the full integration plan takes effect. Proponents of the new plan, pointing to the success of the kindergarten program and the widespread approval of the new program, predict success.

2. As of August 1967, it was estimated that 450 students would be bused, at a cost of \$66,000.