

February, 1966

STATEMENT OF MILWAUKEE JEWISH COUNCIL  
ON 'DE FACTO' SCHOOL SEGREGATION

The Milwaukee Jewish Council is committed to the principle of equality of opportunity. For a quarter century, the Council has worked to eliminate all forms of racial segregation because we believe it is contrary to our democratic principles and to the traditions and ethics of Judaism.

We have been particularly concerned with the problem of "de facto" segregation in the public schools of Milwaukee because it is in the public schools that racial segregation is most destructive. The United States Supreme Court said in 1954 when it struck down southern 'de jure' school segregation

"to separate some children from others of a similar age and qualification because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone".

The Negro child stigmatized by racial segregation in Northern cities - practiced by custom or by patterns of housing discrimination - is similarly impaired in his motivation and capability to learn. He is alienated from and ill prepared to function in our society and to contribute to its general well being. Recognized authorities have clearly established that school segregation and quality education for Negro and white children are incompatible.

We cite the nation's experts:

"Let us be clear about school segregation. Whether it exist by law or by custom, by edict or by tradition, by patterns of employment or patterns of housing, segregation hurts our children, Negro and white alike. And nowhere is this damage more devastating than in education for democracy."

Dr. Francis Keppel, former United States Commissioner of Education, Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

"The common school has long been viewed as a basic social instrument in attaining our traditional American goals of equal opportunity and personal fulfillment. The presence in a single school of children from varied racial, cultural, socio-economic and religious backgrounds is an important element in the preparation of young people for active participation in the social and political affairs of our democracy."

New York State Advisory Committee on Human Relations and Community Tensions - Chairman, Dr. John H. Fischer President Teacher's College Columbia University.

".....Aspirations to go on to college or to get training for the higher status occupations are not encouraged (in segregated schools); teachers gear themselves primarily to meet the needs of the more numerous average-to-dull students. The brighter Negroes have no opportunity to associate with the white children who will naturally succeed to the leadership positions in the community which their parents now hold. Thus, an unplanned and unintended "vicious circle" operates through the mechanism of 'de facto' segregation to hold down the Negro pupils with the greatest potentiality. 'De facto' segregation is thus, for many reasons, almost as discriminatory against Negroes as is legal segregation."

Professor Arnold Rose, University of Minnesota, national authority on race relations.

'De facto' school segregation also contributes to the creation of slums and to the decay of our city upon which the economy of the whole metropolitan area depends. It hastens the flight of middle class families and their tax base to the suburbs, leaving the city unequipped to meet such complex social problems as school segregation and its ill effects.

We are aware that segregation is the result of many forces - 300 years of slavery and second class citizenship, of prejudice and discrimination. The complex social problems involved require the effort of all forces in the community: government, welfare, business, and civil rights groups. But the educational system bears a primary responsibility for initiative in overcoming racial segregation in the public schools as they have a responsibility to overcome any other impediment to sound education.

But any effort to meet the problem of 'de facto' school segregation must begin with recognition of the school system's responsibility to deal with this problem. Milwaukee is perhaps a lone exception among major northern cities in its refusal to declare as a policy its intention to diminish segregation. In fact, it has not officially recognized the existence of the problem.

There is no single solution to the problem of northern school segregation, but the nation's experts in education and sociology have offered a number of approaches. We endorse the following:

1. Revise school district boundaries in order to make school populations more nearly balanced.
2. Change the "feeder patterns" of pupil movement from elementary to junior high to high schools. High school and junior high school populations are based upon the student bodies of lower level schools which feed into them.
3. Select sites for new schools so as to draw on multi-racial school population.
4. Pair two existing schools and draw school population from an entire area previously served by both.
5. Create educational parks including schools at all levels drawing pupils from a larger geographic area.
6. End the practice of 'intact bussing' by integrating children from "inner core schools" into receiving schools where they are sent for extended periods during repairs to their home schools.

A program to end 'de facto' school segregation does not preclude programs of compensatory education - smaller classes, expanded remedial programs, increased counseling services, after school tutoring. Milwaukee's Jewish community organizations are urged to offer their volunteer services, as many have.

The neighborhood school concept is said to be endangered by programs to offset 'de facto' school segregation. While we regard the neighborhood school as having educational value, including accessibility to pupils, after school association of students, and convenience for interested parental groups, we, nevertheless, urge school officials to administer the neighborhood school principle so that it does not become an instrument for the perpetuation of segregation, thereby doing damage to the education of children.

We view with concern the use of the scare term "bussing" which has been raised by opponents of school integration to thwart constructive action by school authorities. No responsible Milwaukee organization has proposed mass bussing as a solution to the problem of 'de facto' school segregation.

To date, the Milwaukee Board of School Directors has steadfastly refused to undertake any responsibility to diminish school segregation. The Milwaukee Jewish Council has three times (April 20, 1964, September 21, 1965 and October 13, 1965) called on the Milwaukee School Board "to publicly recognize the problem, to adopt a statement of principle which would declare a policy of greater integration, and to adopt positive programs in the public schools of Milwaukee to achieve that goal."

The Jewish community has a deep understanding of the need for quality education and equal opportunity. It is a basic part of our religious commitment and our tradition. These goals will create a world in which all children, including our own, will function as free men.

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