JCRC Statement on Schools Proposal

The parents of children in San Francisco's schools have been presented with a proposal for "quality-equality education" which includes a measure of integration. There has been unprecedented public turmoil revolving around this proposal.

The JCRC feels that the prime question at this moment is whether San Franciscans can handle the public discussion of a controversial issue rationally, within an orderly and democratic process. This schools proposal is a critical test.

The following facts and considerations are pertinent:

- The State Board of Education has ruled that a school is "racially imbalanced" when its minority student enrollment differs by more than 15 per cent from the percentage of minority youngsters in its total school district.

- A large number of San Francisco's schools are, by that definition, racially imbalanced.

- Local school boards are by state code under orders to "exert all effort" to find feasible plans to eliminate such racial imbalance.

- The current schools proposal makes a modest effort to begin such plans. In the Richmond District, for example, there is a proposal to "cluster" some elementary schools, to shift some children from one school to another within the Richmond district area. Some increased transportation would be necessary. No out-of-district or cross-town shifting of pupils is proposed. (The report also proposes a number of educational improvements which do not touch on the question of integration).

- This proposal has not been adopted by the Board of Education. The Board has adopted a plan whereby this proposal will be presented to the various parents' groups affected for discussion. The results of these discussions will lead to further evaluation and recommendations. It will have to come back to the Board of Education for final action.
Both the support and the opposition to this report have tended to skirt some real issues. The need for additional transportation is not in itself the chief issue. There is already a tremendous amount of school transportation taking place in San Francisco for one reason or another. The concerns more candidly expressed by some parents have to do with a) the question of how this proposal might affect educational standards; b) the question of how this proposal might affect interracial conflict between students, a currently publicized aspect of some San Francisco schools. These are not questions which rule out rational consideration of the proposal, and how it should be implemented.

For example, it has been suggested that certain educational reforms, such as smaller classes, special teachers, special programs should accompany plans for racial balance, to insure new educational excellence for all students. It has been suggested that real participation by parents and students affected by these plans would help create new levels of racial harmony. (And it has been pointed out that the promotion of racial harmony at elementary levels, as contemplated, would be a most important contribution towards racial harmony at secondary levels).

The JCRC itself has the following stance:

The Jewish community has a historic stake in a) a strong public school system; b) a well-educated general citizenry; c) the reduction of interracial conflict and violence. The JCRC believes strongly that the reduction of racial imbalance in the schools is an indispensable element in all three of these goals.

The JCRC has not specifically endorsed the details of the current proposal. But it does endorse the efforts of the Board of Education to seek solutions for this problem, which cannot be swept under the rug. And it does endorse the Board's plan for discussion by the various parents' groups affected.

The Jewish community has an essential stake in the orderly discussion of public issues, in the rational solution of problems which, if stubbornly unsolved or ignored, will tear apart our society. Therefore, the JCRC, above all, exhorts all parents and
citizens to approach this proposal with an open mind...to get the facts and reject the rumours...to help look for constructive alternatives and modifications, as suggested above...In short, to help mount a civilized discourse on this issue rather than simply to enlist in an ugly community warfare which could do us and our children ultimate harm.