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DRAFT STATEMENT

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The Jewish community has always had a special concern for the stability and excellence of the public school system; it has also always had a special concern for the equality of the educational opportunity which that school system affords. Out of both concerns, the Jewish Community Relations Council is deeply troubled by the pervasive racial imbalance which exists in the San Francisco school system.

Therefore, the Council feels strongly that affirmative action must be taken promptly by the Board of Education to integrate the schools by any means practicable, within the context of high educational standards.

Towards that end, and towards the end of reducing the tension which has developed, major steps must be taken by the Board to improve its communication on this issue with interested citizens groups and on bringing these groups into more effective and ongoing consultation with the Board. The currently proposed working conference for an open exchange on this issue is a commendable step in this direction. The development of an ongoing citizens advisory committee is a recurrent suggestion which should be explored in its various variations and alternatives. But whatever the technique, improved communication with and responsiveness to the various interested citizens groups is essential.

An inherent element of that improved communication must be the increased flow of pertinent information to the public. The issue is too explosive, too subject to misapprehension for any dark corners of information to be allowed to remain. All facts which are pertinent should be gathered and should be turned over to the public.

But there is another danger on the horizon. The public school systems are in effect beginning to break up in many metropolitan areas for other reasons. In New York City more than half of the white children are now attending non-public schools, and the proportion is growing. This is happening in other cities, as a result of the racial situation in these cities, and the educational problems that accompany these situations.

This is not yet happening in the San Francisco area, but the same community racial situation is developing in this area. Eventually it will develop in the surrounding areas as well, as San Francisco to San Jose becomes a kind of continuous metropolitan growth. It is happening also in Los Angeles. There is a kind of double hazard involved in this potential development: the decline of the public schools themselves, and the possibility that under these conditions, religious denominational schools will be stimulated - as they already have been in some localities - resulting in a multiple religious fragmentation of our youth. (In Norfolk, Va., when the public schools were closed, this is exactly what happened in dramatic form. Jewish parents found themselves with the alternatives of setting up Jewish schools, or sending their children to denominational schools held in church facilities.)

Consequently it seems appropriate for the Jewish Community Relations Council to be alert to these developments, particularly insofar as the causative factors lie within the realm of intergroup relations generally.

For this reason it is felt that the JCRC should take particular interest in and be explicitly supportive of those activities in the community and those measures which might be remedial of this foreboding situation. In point are those programs which are designed to raise the educational and motivational levels of the culturally and racially disadvantaged segments of the school population, for this is at the heart of the "declining public school" problem in the cities mentioned earlier.