

Earl Raab's first article
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School Integration — Harmful or Good?

By Earl Raab
(Jewish Bulletin Special Writer)

School integration is a hot issue in San Francisco and its success is of more than passing interest to the Jewish community. The very phrase fills some with dark panic; and others with happy hysteria. Our children's welfare calls for neither hysteria nor panic, but a hard-headed look at the national experience.

The experience shows that integration efforts, if they are done well, can improve the quality of education for every child. This is not a matter of equating integrated education with quality education. Integration has proved to be a vehicle through which every parent can gain more control over the nature of his child's education.

The experience also shows that integration efforts, if they are badly done, can do more harm than good for all children.

In short, it is important to remember what the purposes of school integration are: 1) To improve social relations among children and develop the habit of friendly integration; 2) To raise levels of educational achievement.

There is a kind of racial mixing which can serve the purposes of integration; and a kind of racial-mixing which can defeat the purposes of integration.

James Coleman, John Hopkins scholar and analyst of the most definitive study ever made of school integration wrote, in simple summary of the findings:

"If the school's influences are not only alike for the two groups, but very strong relative to the divergent (outside) influences, then the two groups will move together. If school influences are very weak, then the two groups will move apart."

The "divergent influences" to which Coleman refers are: Differences in the self-esteem of the students; in the involvement of the parents in educational background. Thus, school influences are "weak" and self-defeating if integration plans do not have effective involvement of parents in planning as well as administering those plans.

Then, there is the school system's effect on the population patterns of the city. Parents have often fled a city, fleeing its public schools, leaving both city and schools incapable of being integrated. There is, of course, no reason for integration efforts to have this effect. The key to this, as to the other problems, is planning; and effective involvement of parents in that planning.

This means, in a city of San Francisco's size, district plans on the order of the Richmond Complex, where 211 parents can be effectively involved and have some sense of control. It means, in a city of San Francisco's unusual ethnic diversity, maintaining programs of cultural identity, and bilingual study, for large numbers of Spanish speaking, Chinese and Filipino students. It means special educational programs which will give all parents confidence that the schools are still there for the purpose of giving their children an education according to their needs.

The Jewish Community Relations Council was a prime part of the coalition that kicked off the integration issue in San Francisco and made it part of the city's active agenda. The Jewish community has a critical stake in the development of an integrated America, and in the health of the public school system. Anyone who thinks that Jews or Jewish institutions — religious, educational, social — can flourish in a fragmented and undemocratic America . . . any Jewish parents who think they are doing their child a favor by trying to escape the issue . . . have missed or misread 50 years of Jewish history.