

# CHRONICLE OF EVENTS LEADING TO DESEGREGATION

## THE BERKELEY STORY

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**Winter 1957** A letter was sent to the Berkeley Board of Education from the NAACP asking when the would be racial equality in education. The letter was followed by the visitation of a representative of the black community to the Superintendent and a presentation to the School Board by an NAACP representative. A community service group also wrote to the Board requesting an end to segregated schooling.

**Summer 1958** A citizens committee was appointed to "study certain interracial problems in the Berkeley schools and their effect on education."

**Fall 1959** The committee reported on ways to improve certain aspects of the human relations climate of the schools. It did not recommend any degree of desegregation.

Changes implemented as a result of the citizens' study included creation of an Intergroup Education Project Office, more hiring of minorities, and a reassessment of textbook content.

**During 1962** Spokesmen for the Congress of Racial Equality confronted the Board with the reality of de facto segregation in Berkeley's schools and asked that a study be made and changes effected. Other citizen groups supported this request.

**January 1963** Another citizens' committee was appointed, this one with 36 rather than 16 members and with a board representation of race, economic and occupational condition, and points of view.

**November 1963** The committee reported its finding that residential segregation had created racial isolation in Berkeley's schools—with almost all of the black youths located in four schools in the lower section of the community and in one of the city's three junior high schools. The committee recommended total desegregation kindergarten through secondary, and presented alternate plans by which this could be achieved.

**Winter 1963**

**Spring 1964** The meeting at which the committee reported its recommendation was attended by more than 2,000 persons. A subsequent series of public meetings was held, heavily attended, and spokesmen from a considerable segment of the community expressed strong opposition to racial integration in the schools.

**Early Spring 1964**

A five-member staff committee worked on a desegregation plan based on the committee's recommendation. Meanwhile, public meetings continued throughout the community. Staff was involved in workshops. Every school parent group in the city held a public meeting on the citizens' committee findings and recommendation for desegregation.

**March 1964**

The Superintendent recommended that the Board adopt the citizens' committee report in principle and assign staff to devise a plan incorporating the many suggested changes made by both staff and community.

**May 19, 1964**

The Superintendent recommended to the Board that it adopt the desegregation plan based on the citizens' committee report and staff revisions. It called for total desegregation, from kindergarten on up. The Board voted to adopt the secondary school part of the plan and to table the plan for desegregation of the city's 14 elementary schools. At this meeting, attended by more than 3,000 persons, opponents of integration formed into a group called Parents for Neighborhood Schools and indicated that they would take measures to reverse the Board's decision.

The Board vote was unanimous. One member had previously resigned, leaving the Board at four. The plan adopted reorganized the city's three junior high schools, leaving one for ninth graders only. The boundary line for the other two was drawn up the center of the city, from the bay to the hills. This brought desegregation to all three schools. With the city having only one high school, it was automatically integrated. Desegregation of the secondary schools involved no district-conducted busing. From grade seven on, transportation is provided by each family unit.

**After Board's Decision**

Petitions were circulated throughout the community calling for recall of the Board of Education and election of new members. Ten thousand signers were required and were obtained. The election was set for October. Pro-desegregation advocates formed the Friends for Better Schools and organized support of the Board and its action.

**Summer 1964**

The unanimous consensus of countless long-time Berkeleyans is that no other issue has ever engendered in this community the kind of emotional expiation that occurred during the debate over desegregation of the three secondary schools. Meetings were continuous and generally highly agitated. The controversy eventually touched almost everyone in the entire community.

**October 6, 1964**

The recall election resulted in a large plurality of citizen support for the Board and its desegregation action. Implementation of the plan had begun at the opening of school the month prior. The District's new superintendent was Neil Sullivan.

**February 1966**

With ESEA funds, 240 elementary students from the four predominantly black elementary schools were bused to white "hill" schools to lessen class size in the "flats" schools and to provide the community with the beginning of a model of interracial education.

**April 1967**

With very little prior community dialogue, but after hearing appeals from civil rights and teacher groups for an end to segregation in all grades, the Board unanimously agreed that it was time to bring integration to the elementary schools. The decision was preceded by a suggestion on the part of a small group of white parents for open enrollment of their children into the predominantly black schools as a public show of the immorality of segregated education.

**May 16, 1967**

The Board set a timetable for elementary desegregation. It was to be implemented no later than fall 1968. The Board was to adopt a specific plan no later than January 1968 so that time could be provided for preparation of staff, students and community.

**Summer 1967**

A seven-member district task force worked through the summer culling the many community suggestions on ways to desegregate and the many plans submitted nation-wide from institutes and study groups.

**Fall 1967**

At a meeting of all school staff and then at a huge community-wide public meeting, 47 plans were reported by the task force as to ways of achieving desegregation. A series of meetings was held to elicit views of staff and community. Careful attention was placed on keeping public and school staff closely informed of all developments. All views and suggestions were recorded on charts to be shared with those who would assist the Superintendent in selecting the plan he would recommend to the Board. Many community meetings were held and the District sent representatives to all of them.

**October 1967**

In making his selection of a plan, the Superintendent formed a committee of 35 educators and together with them selected the K-3, 4-6 prototype for reorganization of the elementary schools. The Superintendent's recommendation was announced at a mass meeting, and more community meetings ensued. An addendum to the plan finally adopted reflected considerable suggestions for modification made by community persons and groups.

An Office of Elementary Integration was established after the prototypes were devised and announced to the community. A Speakers' Bureau operated from this office, supplying resource persons for informational meetings on the forthcoming desegregation.

The dialogue continued through the winter but the debate did not reach the controversial level that had occurred during the prior struggle over secondary desegregation. The District directed the dialogue along the channel of "how to do it" rather than "should we do it or not." Opposition was sporadically loud but minor. Those who did not agree were largely submitting without strong resistance. One call for a ballot on the subject of elementary integration withered quickly and a substitute plan advanced by a citizen failed to gather substantial support. This plan would have involved one-way busing, of black youngsters only.

**Jan. 16, 1968**

At a meeting attended by over 2,000 people, the Board adopted the K-3, 4-6 organizational plan for desegregation of the elementary schools.

**From Then Until School Opened in September**

Through the Office of Elementary Integration, plans were effected to prepare community, staff and students for the forthcoming reorganization. A district Integration Council was created through which the various levels of preparation would be supervised and implemented.