

THE VIEW FROM THIS SIDE OF THE MICROPHONE

I have been serving as a member of the Newark Board of Education for nine months. During that time, I have deliberately not said much publicly regarding my view of education in Newark or my personal philosophies, or the challenge that I perceive.

Although in the recent past, other Board Members have done a lot of talking in justifying to the community positions that they were taking, I did not feel the immediate need to do this. I suppose I felt that my commitment to the improvement of the quality of education of Newark's children had been amply demonstrated by my remarkably consistent, 13 year, overt involvement in this city's socio-educational problems.

However, time marches on and people's memories are short. New activists constantly emerge, often with little understanding or appreciation of contemporary history. Nevertheless, open lines of communications are vital and people have a right to know what their educational leaders and policy makers believe. How does this board member view education in Newark 1974? What do the other Board Members and the Superintendent perceive as their roles in education during this time period? You, the community, have a right to know.

I hope that my statement tonight will persuade others seated on this platform to follow suit in subsequent public meetings. Certainly the rejuvenation or possible restructuring of Newark's educational system must begin with open communications among students, parents, teachers, administrators, Board of Education members, and community members. In this regard, I will ask the Secretary to make this statement which I will entitle "The View From This Side of the Microphone," a part of the permanent record of the March 26, 1974 public meeting of the Newark Board of Education.

Conceptually, my views are perceived in three major components: (1) Where have we been? (2) Where are we now? (3) Where are we going?

In 1950, blacks represented 17.2 percent of Newark's population. In 1960, the black population had grown to 34.1 percent, while the Spanish speaking population was 9.7 percent.

In 1970, blacks represented 54.2 percent of the population, while 11.9 percent of Newark's people were Spanish speaking. Today, the population of Newark is, clearly, predominately black and Spanish speaking. This rapid transition from predominately white to a majority of black and Spanish speaking people, becomes more dramatic with an analysis of the school population shift. In 1950 the black student population was approximately 25 percent. In 1961 it had grown to 55 percent while the Puerto Rican student population was 4 percent. In October of 1973 the black student population reached 72.3 percent while the Spanish surname population, (which includes Puerto Ricans and Cubans among others) was 16.1 percent. So the black student population doubled between 1950 and 1960 and increased another 30 percent between 1960 and 1973.

This whirlwind population shift, with a concomitant inability of those in charge to cope, has caused entropy, or a tendency of a system towards increasing disorder, to occur.

As a product of the Newark schools in the 1950's and as an employee and observer of the system in the 1960's, it is my opinion that the quality of the educational offering has continued to spiral downward. An analysis of reading and math scores, drop-out rates, follow-up of high school graduates, pupil and teacher attendance records, as well as other indices would support the assumption.

The reason for this steady decline in quality can neither be viewed in simplistic terms nor attributed to any one group or element.

Discontent with the schools by the Black community in particular and the remaining community generally was evident during the 1960's and early 1970's. As Bill Phillips of Rutgers has suggested, the discontent of blacks rested upon the knowledge that they experienced "unusual provocation and difficulty in transforming collective preference into effective policy." While watching the forces of pervasive racism shower inferior educational offerings on their children, the black community struggled to have a say in their own destiny.

The battle for self determination and quality education in the early 1960's can be seen in several developments as stated by Bill Phillips and Joe Conforti:

- (1) the school buildings have severely deteriorated after long years of use with little expansion and inadequate maintenance;
- (2) the population of the city was younger, poorer and less Catholic, indicating that the number of students who would have to be accommodated in the public schools, would probably rise continually for the next decade or two;
- (3) the percentage of black students was rising;
- (4) the flight to the suburbs by black and white middle-class families accelerated as parents sought to place their children in schools that they defined as superior in quality to the Newark schools;
- (5) the long dominant Newark Teachers Association (NTA), a professional organization, found itself contending with the rival Newark Teacher's Union (NTU), a trade union affiliated with the AFL-CIO, as each sought to represent the teachers of the entire school system;
- (6) educational requirements for employment were rising;
- (7) the growing

civil rights movement focused its attention in Newark on the school system, around issues such as the shortage of facilities for a student population increasingly black and poor, and the deterioration in quality of the education they were receiving."

Sometime I see education as a triangle. Education is at the top, while politics and economic's represent the two corner bases. Roscoe Brown of NYU says we should not be naive, "education in cities are social-political problems more than educational." How do you see education?

In May of 1967, I remember being on the other side of the microphone championing the course of Parker over Callahan before an Addonizio dominated Board of Education, insensitive to the cries of the black community for simple justice. Perhaps that incident marked the move of the struggle from the courts as an avenue of redress to a strategy of disruption of public meetings. Frederick Douglass had earlier remarked that, "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will".

The Newark Teachers Union engaged the school system in two long and bitter strikes. I will not attempt to evaluate the strikes. However, it is certain that those struggles seriously afflicted the relationships among the students, teachers, parents, administrators, community members, and members of the Board of Education. Clearly, new and productive relationships must be established.

Another part of the struggle during the 1960's was the effort to gain a more representative number of blacks included in the ranks of teachers and administrators. As a result of racist policies and practices of the school system, as late as 1967, there was one black vice principal and no black principals in the city of Newark.

Although approximately 70 percent of the students were black, less than 25 percent of the teachers were blacks. Moreover, these teachers tended not to be placed in predominately white schools.

During the late 1960's and early 1970's black parents in particular, increasingly exercised influence in their local schools over such issues as removal and appointment of principals and teachers. The school boycott became a favorite ultimate weapon used by the parents. It is my opinion that parents were being forced to monitor the local schools because 31 Green Street did not do the job. A leadership vacuum, existing at the top of the school system, was filled by parents concerned about the inferior education their children were receiving.

Some have said that there are two basic reasons for the present state of the Newark schools; (1) the extensive use of the school system as a major source of political patronage in the city; (2) the lack of long-range planning for the system.

Appointments made to the Board by former Mayors Carlin and Addonizio seem to value political considerations above concern for education. Although the 1958 to 1962 period witnessed only one black, seven distinct ethnic groups in Newark had been represented on the Board. Geopolitical areas of the city as well as corporate, professional, proprietary, and religious categories were used as the major criterion for selection to Board membership. There is some evidence that Mayor Gibson is beginning to establish different criteria for selecting Board members. A continuation of this trend is highly desirable and should be applauded and encouraged. The major criteria for Board membership should be commitment and talent. ^{EDWIN BRIDGES} ~~Richard Carlson~~, the educational researcher, calls it "personal stake" and "expertise."

Rather than being matched on political grounds, Board members should be matched according to interlocking expertise. The Board needs people with a corporate understanding of finance and budgets; a knowledge of school-house construction and bidding; an appreciation of sophisticated techniques of management; a feel for modern personnel practices and procedures; an involvement with the teaching-learning process. In order to do a successful job as Board members, these persons must be as free from political obligations and entanglements as is humanly possible.

People who served as Board members during the Addonizio administration often tell of meeting with the Mayor monthly prior to the public meeting to allow for political dictates. It is said that appointees to major positions in the school system had to go through a political process. Mayor Gibson seems to be making an honest effort to avoid this kind of political interference in the decision making process of the Board of Education.

City council members would bring lists of people to Board Members for jobs in the school system. Most times talent was not a part of this political patronage system. Since I have been a Board Member, it has become crystal clear to me that I could spend all of my time dispensing political patronage. If I did that, probably many of you out there would not be surprised or disappointed. Many have come to expect this of their Board Members.

So that there are no miscalculations, let me make it clear, I do not view my role on the Board as a dispenser of political patronage. During my brief tenure as a Board Member, my decisions will be based on considerations of what is in the best interest of Newark's children. As I fulfill my role as trustee of the people, I will try like hell to maintain education at the top of the triangle.

It is difficult for me to tell how you see education in Newark, 1974. Let me say that the view from this side of the microphone is exciting, exhilarating, and hopeful. I think that we have strong leadership in the Superintendency. The Board is engaging in a rational process of decision-making to a far greater extent than I have witnessed in the last 13 years. How do we begin to counter entropy in the Newark school system?

Stanley Taylor talks about moving the system:

<u>FROM</u>	<u>TO</u>
Lack of communications	Clearly defined lines of communications
Non-involvement in decision making	Involvement in decision making
Confusion over role & purpose	Clarity regarding role & purpose
Closed system	Open System
Tinkering with symptoms of problems	System actualization

Organizational reform does not evolve, rather it requires planning and leadership. During this process, our expectations have to reasonable approach our reality. As I said earlier, the Newark school system has been in decline for many years. During the next two or three years, I will be well pleased if we can stabilize the downward spiral of education in Newark. For those who pick up the torch, the challenge will be to reverse the spiral. Let this mark the period during which the decline was halted. This is an achievable goal to which I dedicate myself. What about you? The support of all systems in the city will be required.

If this Superintendent and this Board fail to meet this goal it will be because status quo forces either within the school system and/or within the city system prevented achievement. Beware political entanglements!

There are many other questions that should be raised and things that I think need saying. However this will be the first of a series of statements of my view from this side of the microphone and I can only hope that others will state their positions.

SUBMITTED BY :

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