The St. Louis Story—

INTEGRATED SCHOOLS HURTING BOTH WHITE, COLORED PUPILS

The NAACP calls itself an organization for the advancement of colored people.
And integrated education is the chief point around which it has built its campaign for that “advancement.”
The best means for colored people to evaluate the effects of the NAACP’s high-pressure campaign, therefore, is to take a look at what is happening in integrated schools.

For since St. Louis is perhaps better known to colored residents of this area than any other city in which segregation has been abolished during the last years, it is worth our time in this area to mention it.

Soldan High School, located on Union Boulevard, in St. Louis’ middle-class west end, offers a typical example of changes that have occurred since the end of segregated classes one year ago this month.

In February of 1955 Soldan High was a school of 900 white children in a community which even then was yielding to the westward influx of colored families from the downtown area.

Today Soldan High has 1,400 pupils, of whom 500 are colored.

Integration is complete, the faculty even including seven negro teachers.

On the surface it might appear that the NAACP has won a valuable victory for the colored children of the area.

But unbiased semi-official reports on what has happened at the academic level in this typical integrated St. Louis school give cause for concern to colored parents as well as to white parents.

According to a report prepared by persons generally favorable to integration, what happened at Soldan High last semester on the basis of the best interpretation that can be obtained from school records.

In English, 35 percent of the negro students failed, compared with 5 percent of the white students.

American history, 25 percent of the negro students failed, compared with 5 percent of the white.

In general science, 60 percent of the colored students failed, compared with 5 percent of the white.

In physics, 30 percent of the colored students failed, compared with 7 percent of the white.

In bookkeeping, 33 percent of the colored students failed, compared with 7 percent of the white.

On the basis of such reports, which represent the best available interpretation of class records from this typical integrated St. Louis high school, colored parents call well ask themselves:

“What do our children gain from being thrown into a school where a third of them fail their work and thereby they probably will become so discouraged they drop out of classes altogether?”

“They gain enough merely from attendance at mixed classes to offset the harm being done them by their inability to pass the work?”

“They not profit more from working at a slower pace and thereby remaining in school through the twelfth grade that they will from mixed classes conducted at a pace which is faster than they either can go or care to go?”

These are significant questions for colored parents as they ponder what the NAACP program will do to their children if it is successful here in the South.

And comment by teachers at this typical integrated St. Louis school give equal cause for concern to white parents whose children the NAACP would throw into classrooms with an even higher percentage of negroes—and with negroes who have not and the benefit of such good schools as St. Louis has been operating for its colored children.

Robert Lasch, an editorial writer of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, which strongly supports the city’s integration program, makes the following observation in comment which is as nearly unbiased as one can find:

“Distribution of marks does not tell the whole story.”

“Asked whether teachers have a tendency to make allowances for the poorer background or training of negroes and thus grade them more leniently than whites, Soldan faculty people say that the student who neither makes progress nor tries to do so is eligible for failure, but one who makes a discernible effort is sure of being passed even if no accomplishment is visible.”

“Many intangibles enter into the grading process.”

“Where one-third of a class, the colored group, is generally at a lower achievement level the rest, the natural tendency is for them to draw most of the teacher’s attention and energy while the rest find it easier to loaf through.”

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch editorial writer comments:

“Another situation taxing the faculty is the general tendency of negro students to be tardier to school, to cut to class, more prone to skip an afternoon’s classes, and more inclined to absenteeism.”

“Without reference to racial prejudice—and attributing the facts solely to differences in cultural and social or economic background, teachers say there is a definitely larger amount of slackness, irresponsibility and intellectual laziness among the colored students than among the whites.”

“As one teacher said, there have always been poor students irrespective of color. But a sudden increase in their numbers can change the tone and pace of an entire class.”

Thoughtful people, both colored and white, are justified in asking themselves, in view of such reports as this—and similar facts recently revealed by a study of integrated schools in Washington:

“What are colored children gaining from mixed classes that is worth the discouragement they suffer from repeated failure and eventual discontinuance of school work?”

“And what is America gaining from integration to balance our loss from the seriously reduced pace of study being offered the brighter students upon which our nation depends for leadership in science, medicine, education, business and all the other fields which form the basis of our country’s strength?”

“In Mississippi, in 1954, six negroes were killed by whites, eight whites were killed by negroes and

182 NEGROES WERE KILLED BY MEMBERS OF THEIR OWN RACE.”

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