Geneva News

School officials comment

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Noting that it is "unfortunate the state department officials would make reference to any school official as racist," board member Mrs. Ione Wellington said racist "is a word that is used much too loosely today and applied inappropriately to many people."

She said she feels the term has no proper application to local school officials.

Mrs. Wellington said she regretted the little reference made to conduct of students in the report.

"I think this is the real basis of trouble in the schools — not so much color as it is conduct.

"Showing respect for others will earn respect for themselves," she added.

Mrs. Wellington said the report's best feature is the recommendation that student leaders meet to openly discuss misunderstandings.

"I disagree that there aren't enough studies relative to black citizens and their contributions to American," she noted, adding that she has observed many stories relating to black citizens in her work as a substitute teacher.

She also disagreed with the recommendation that all teachers take in-service programs on race relations, saying "I do not believe there are many teachers who go into this profession lacking the desire to teach all children regardless of color and who will demonstrate unfair and unkind treatment and a deliberate malicious manner!"

COMAC still looking over racial report

Edward Jenkins, president of the Community Action Self-Development Committee, Inc., (COMAC), told The Times that he was not ready to make a press statement today and said his organization needs more time to study the recently received report by the NYS Education Dept.'s Intercultural Relations Division.

COMAC was the group which submitted demands to the Geneva Board of Education concerning the racial situation following trouble at the high school Feb. 29. COMAC was involved in the subsequent black student boycott and talks with the school board. The inability of COMAC and the school board to reach an agreement with mutual trust prompted the board to invite the state visitors to look at the situation April 19-21.

Pollution grant

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — Albany Medical College's Institute of Experimental Pathology and Toxicology, engaged in a largescale study of environmental pollutants, has been granted $1.6 million in federal funds for research and training.

Dr. Harold C. Wiggers, executive vice president and dean of the college, announcej the grant from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. It is to support the environmental research and toxicology training programs at the institute for five years.

Says he was ignored —

Scalise terms report 'unfortunate'

Geneva High School Principal Vincent Scalise today issued the following statement on the State Education Department's racial report:

"It is indeed unfortunate for students, school personnel and the entire community when officials from Albany can go into a school system when an incident occurs, question individuals while they are excited and irrational and then wait exactly three months later to submit a report which is poorly written, reports random statements, tends toward creating further polarity and comes up with recommendations, many of which are presently being carried out.

"A major concern is that in writing this report, the two individuals from Albany at no time had any discussions with the building principal. I talked with them in a group situation for approximately five minutes. They at no time questioned me concerning the curricular program, results of my investigation into the incident, nor did they elicit from me any response to allegations made by various individuals. It would appear to me that any investigative team would make arrangements to consult with the building principal.

"I choose not to point out all the errors in the report since there are so many, but one stands out so strongly that the people in the community should have it brought to their attention — and that is regarding the initial incident itself. The report implies that leaflets were being distributed all day in school and that "that afternoon several fights erupted at the high school." The fact is that fights broke out at 7:55 a.m. that day when students came to school enraged over a flyer that they received the afternoon before as stated in the opening paragraph. It is difficult for me to understand how this can be a valid report when the two from Albany missed the basic issue — very serious in that it implies I allowed leaflets to be distributed all day.

"As the incident of Feb. 29 developed, and in subsequent days, I documented every activity in detail using names of individuals for our records. The two from Albany never gave me the opportunity to give them a copy.

"As for being termed a "racist" by some, this is truly unfortunate. I should choose not to comment further on this, but to let those in the community decide for themselves.

"We are dealing with a most difficult situation in race relations. There is no question that much needs to be done and we at Geneva High have and will continue to work hard to resolve various differences. The report does very little in helping us in this difficult situation. I will continue to suspend students when they do not follow the rules and regulations set up for all students. The sooner people begin to discuss students without putting black and white before the word student, the faster we will eliminate this problem.

"The building principal is not only the educational leader in the school but also has the major responsibility of looking out for the health, safety and welfare of every student. During those initial few days of turmoil, no student was seriously injured, no class time lost and no damage was done to any part of the building or equipment which speaks well for students and staff. I can only repeat what I have said so many times before — we can handle our difficulties if only given a chance by the community.

"A whole new format in curriculum and scheduling begins at Geneva High in September. Much of this change in programming we hope will help to solve our difficulties. In the weeks ahead, the community will be given insights to our new programming and will be asked to work with us.

"It is the hope of all the staff at Geneva High that such a negative activity on the part of some students can bring forth positive results. If indeed students are affected by all the verbiage in a way that causes them to lose interest in their education, then a great wrong has been done. There is no question that much work needs to be done. I agree that there must be better communication and with that, all of us are going to have to be better listeners."

Introductory letter to state team's report

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12224

DIVISION OF INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS IN EDUCATION — BUREAU OF EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION

July 10, 1972

Mr. Lee E. Thomas
Acting Clerk
Board of Education
Geneva Public Schools
248 Exchange Street
Geneva, New York 14456

Dear Mr. Thomas:

I am sending you ten copies of the final report of the visit to Geneva which was undertaken in April by members of our staff. You are receiving this number of copies so that you can distribute these to members of your Board of Education and others whom you consider appropriate recipients.

I wish to take this opportunity to apologize for the lengthy delay in sending this report to you. As I know you are aware, we have had severe staff shortages and extensive technical assistance commitments throughout the State. I want to assure you that it is not because of any lack of interest or concern that this has been delayed.

The report is basically what our staff heard people say, not what we necessarily believe or might agree with. As to the conclusions and recommendations in the report, we believe they constitute a beginning point of departure from which the Geneva City School District can move ahead toward providing equality of educational opportunity for all of its students. As you will note, there are several mentions of technical assistance available from this Division and I am delighted to reiterate those offers. Both Mrs. Larsen and Mr. Harrison join me in thanking you and your colleagues for your cooperation and hospitality. I hope we can continue to be in close touch now and in the future.

Sincerely yours,

Morton J. Sobel
Specialist in Educational Integration

Report on school boycott

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While most of the expressions dealt with the double standards of treatment of black and white students by school authorities and much of the blame for the troubles was placed on black students and COMAC, there was an impassioned plea by one parent for tolerance and understanding. He suggested that church groups and all forces within the community be brought together to deal with this problem and that the community help raise the economic level of black families. He urged that whites try to listen to and understand the black student.

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Conclusions

A review of the discussions in which State Education Department staff participated seems to indicate concerns in the following areas:

1. Unsatisfactory race relations between students.
2. Inadequacy of the curriculum to deal with the role of blacks in American history and culture.
3. Inequitable disciplinary treatment of black and white students
4. The tracking system and its effect on equal educational opportunity for student, particularly blacks.
5. Student counseling programs
6. Teacher awareness and preparation for dealing with problems of race relations in the classroom.
7. Administrative responsibility and performance in preventing and dealing with crisis situations.
8. The responsibility of the Board of Education toward its relationship with community groups
9. Extra curricular activities
10. The use of corporal punishment
11. The community's role in achieving better race relations.

In view of these concerns the following are recommended:

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RECOMMENDATIONS TO:

TEACHING AND NON-TEACHING FACULTY

1) Inservice

An ongoing inservice training program for teachers, pupil personnel services staff and other non-teaching faculty should be instituted at the earliest possible moment. The thrust of the inservice program should be in the area of race relations.

Funds for inservice training may be available under Title IV Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Technical assistance from the Division of Intercultural Relations of the State Education Department is available for developing such a program.

Teachers should be prepared for instructional changes that may be necessary.

The inservice program should be compulsory for all teaching and non-teaching staffs. The staffs should be directly involved in the planning of the program and should solicit the desires and goals of the community and involve parents and students in the design and conduct of inservice programs.

2) Curriculum

Teachers should be directly involved in developing multi-ethnic curriculums and materials, and should help design programs that would help them to use these materials effectively.

GUIDANCE

It is recommended that a review of the guidance department be undertaken. The Bureau of Guidance of the State Education Department may be requested to assist the Division of Intercultural Relations in undertaking such a review.

STUDENTS

Students have a responsibility for resolving racial misunderstandings.

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It is recommended that student leadership develop small rap sessions where these misunderstandings can be openly discussed and then make earnest efforts to understand those who are different. The goal should be a change toward more positive behavior and cooperation with others, as well as change toward more open minded attitudes

COMMUNITY

Student unrest is not just a student-administration issue, but has many facets in the community. It often involves discrimination and the manner in which minority citizens are treated by other citizens, civic officials and the law enforcement agencies.

It is therefore recommended that organizations such as churches, civic associations and parent-teacher associations take the initiative in developing dialogues between majority and minority group members to deal with these problems, to take steps to dissipate negative attitudes and behavior toward one another and to work toward a harmonious community.

EDUCATIONAL ADVISORY SPECIALIST

Efforts and responsibilities for dealing with race relations, integration and school-community relations have been generally diffused and often inadequate. Those responsible for dealing with these problems often are busily engaged in other responsibilities.

It is therefore recommended that there be appointed an Educational Advisory Specialist whose responsibilities would include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Dealing with race relations problems, both in crisis situations which may arise and in long-range planning for the elimination of racial misunderstanding and tensions.

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2. Helping to develop and coordinate inservice education for all school personnel.

3. Coordinating the development of multi-ethnic curriculums and materials.

4. Working with the community in developing a better understanding of, and relationship with, the schools and acting as the liaison between the schools and community.

The Educational Advisory Specialist should be responsible to and report directly to the superintendent of schools.

Funds for the support of such a position or office may be available under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The Division of Intercultural Relations of the State Education Department is available for advice and technical assistance in the establishment and functioning of such an office.

ADMINISTRATION

1. Inservice

All administrators should participate in inservice program on race relations similar to the one described for other educators. They should develop skills in responding promptly, fairly, and effectively to crisis situations that may arise. They should develop skills in responding to reactions of staff, students and the community. They should also devise programs and procedures to eliminate the causes of tensions.

2. Grievance Procedure

The school superintendent and his administrative staff ought to devise a uniform procedure for dealing with student grievances and, in addition, disciplinary

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action that would be fair to all. Teachers, students and parents should be invited to assist in designing these procedures.

3. Multi-Ethnic Curricula

To help counteract prejudicial attitudes and behavior, an immediate effort should be made "...to have, in all our classrooms, textbooks and other teaching materials that reflect in their content and presentation the ethnic and cultural diversity of our world, and in particular of American life. The curriculum should provide for all children an understanding of the contributions of the Negro, Puerto Rican, and other minority groups, and the background and nature of the present struggle for justice and equality of opportunity." (Regents Policy on Integration and the Schools, January 1968, recommedation No. 10)

The staff should be involved in the preparation of such curricula and materials.

4. Integrated Staff

An integrated school means more than just an integrated student body. It means a professional and non-professional staff which reflects the ethnic and racial composition of the student body.

It is therefore recommended that an active recruitment program be undertaken to add black and other minority people to the staff.

5. Communication

a) School administrators and the superintendent should establish a method whereby they would be more accessible to parents, students and teachers who would wish to discuss with them those issues which are of deep concern. A student should be able to go directly to the principal's office or the superintendent's office if he does not feel that regular channels of communication would solve certain problems.

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b) The district should send out periodical, and if necessary, special mailings to parents keeping them informed of how programs, both current and new, are operating. In these mailings, the district should try to solicit from and to respond to parental concerns about the breadth and quality of educational opportunities available to each child.

c) The district should establish an information center at the district office, manned by non-school personnel, where rumors may be checked for fact before others get started. This may help to dissolve some community fears.

BOARD OF EDUCATION

The board of education should issue a statement declaring it to be the policy of the board to achieve equal educational opportunity for all students in the Geneva Public Schools. It should commit itself to:

a) Mandatory inservice education in race relations for all school personnel.
b) Development of multi-ethnic curricula and materials and instruction on multi-ethnic concerns and content in all subject areas.
c) Active recruitment of minority staff.
d) The establishment of a student-faculty-administration-community group that would help it to develop school policy.
e) Make itself accessible to all groups.
f) The establishment of grievance procedures which would be fair to all.
g) The creation of the position of Educational Advisory Specialist

This may mean the Board will enter into a new phase of its relationship with students, faculty, administrators and parents. It may mean a willingness to share some responsibilities with others. It will mean the establishment of healthy and meaningful communications with all of those concerned with the education of children and a continuous resolve to give students in the Geneva Public Schools the best possible education, preparing them to live and work in a multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-cultural society.