

City of Detroit

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

TO: Richard V. Marks, Lonnie Saunders

DATE May 27, 1969

FROM: Robert Holland

SUBJECT: Meeting with concerned Black parents
of Finney High School

May 23, 1969, 6:00 P.M.

Concondia Hall, 4105 Sylvester

Present: Mrs. Geraldine Williams, EVSID, Mr. Stanley Webb, Inter-Group Relations, Detroit Board of Education, Mr. and Mrs. Ronnell Tyner, Concerned Black Parents, Finney High School, Mr. Frank Ditto, ESVID, Mr. John L. Davis Jr., Deputy Minister of the Interior, RNA, Mary Francis Musgrove, ESVID, Mr. Clem Peoples, RNA, Community Patrol Corps, 24 other Black parents, approximately 100 Black students from Finney High School, and Attorney Dave Nissen.

Mrs. Geraldine Williams opened the meeting with a statement that something must be done to alleviate the tense atmosphere at Finney High School. Mrs. Williams further stated that she believes the education at Finney is better, but the atmosphere is one of constant tension. A decision on whether to ask the Black children to return to this situation alone, or to ask the Black parents to go with their children must be reached during the meeting. Mrs. Williams said that consideration must be given to: 1) a freedom school 2) petitioning of the Detroit Board of Education, for students to receive their grades now, instead of waiting until after finals 3) petitioning of the Detroit Board of Education for a new high school in their area 4) petitioning the Detroit Board of Education for Black students not to return to Finney High School.

Mr. Calvin Clemens stated that at the present he has a son at, ^{FINNEY} and a daughter would be going there in September. Mr. Clemens said that he believed Finney High to be a better school to prepare the Black youth of today. Mr. Clemens further added that Finney is not the problem, but it is the entire school system that is the problem. "I think that a Black youth should be prepared for the system from grade school to high school. My son will be at Finney High School on Monday, this is his own thing, I won't be there with him."

Mr. John L. Davis, Deputy Minister of the Interior, RNA stated: "We the government of the Republic of New Africa view your solution as ridiculous. We urge you to consider racist white teachers, and racist white policemen-- what can you expect of that system? Separate, but quality education is possible. Our education minister in New York is preparing for an educational system to meet the needs of the Black youth. If you decide to send the kids back to Finney, I would say go with them. Can you afford to wait until one of them is killed? Our government does not defend Black people as a whole, our first allegiance is to the RNA. But, if you decide that you want the children to go back to Finney on Monday, we will provide you with trained legionnaires who will instigate the children in strategy necessary to guarantee their safety to and from school."

Mrs. Ronnell Tyner suggested that the teachers at Finney have no concern for the Black students. "The teachers that I have talked with at PTA meeting left me with the impression that students at Finney differ, that is, Black vis-a-vis White." "Being Black should not be a criteria for being denied the right to learn."

Black student views:

"The Black teachers at Finney don't give us any support they only stand by, and smile."

✓ "When that white boy was killed at Cobo Hall--he was in the band at Finney--we had to stay home for two weeks."

"I was almost ran down by a car on Thursday, I told the police, and they just looked at me."

✓ "The police told us," "you better get the hell out of here, we can't hold them back any longer."

"There is no meaningful relationship between students or faculty. This problem is not new to Finney, everyday it has been building up to this."

"I want my diploma, but if the decision is that we stay away from Finney, I will go along."

✓ "The education is not necessarily better at Finney. The teachers can let you sit there and not learn you anything, or you can sit out in the halls during some classes and no one will bother you."

✓ The overall consensus of opinions among the students was that they will go back to Finney, but they will not runaway. The parents, in general, expressed the belief that all students should return, but there was a great deal of indecision on their part. Of special interest to this observer was the apparent psychological hang-up of the parents, that is, they were forced to adopt a more militant attitude due to the circumstances surrounding Finney High.

Mr. Clem Peoples stated that the present confrontation at Finney High is one of life and death. Following his arrest on May 22, 1969 Mr. Peoples stated that he observed the police bringing in some of the white youths they arrested on 5/23/69. "Some of the weapons taken were hand grenades, knives, chains, and guns. You better believe that they weren't comin' out to Finney to talk, they were comin' out there to kill Black People. All you parents can send your children out there if you want too. But, believe you me, somebody's gonna get killed, and it will be your Black children. They are not only your children, but mine also."

Mary Francis Musgrove stated that she was sitting in the ESVID office on 5/22/69 when a call came in from Finney High School. The caller was one of the Black students at Finney High, and the caller stated that they were being attacked. Miss Musgrove, Mr. Peoples, and Mr. Lyons got in an auto, and proceeded to Finney High. Upon arriving they observed Black students preparing to meet the attack of the White students. Miss Musgrove said that the police were standing between the two groups, but their presence seemed not to deter the White students. Miss Musgrove said they told all Black

students to go to an adjacent park, and sit in the rows of bleacher seats. There she talked with them, and then moved them to the bus stop at Cadieux and Warren where she hoped they could board buses. Instead of the buses stopping Miss Musgrove stated that two white drivers, and one Black driver passed them by. Miss Musgrove stated that she was told by a bus driver that they had specific order not to stop (this order was later rescinded). It was then decided that the Black students should be transported home in private vehicles, which they proceeded to do. On one of their trips back to the school Miss Musgrove states that eight police cars converged on her auto, and they were arrested. Miss Musgrove concluded that if Black students decided to return to Finney, the parents should back them up with their physical presence.

A vote was asked of all parents presence on these solutions 1) establish a freedom school at Concordia Hall beginning May 26, 1969 2) Petition the Board of Education to give students their final grades now 3) circulate a petition protesting Joy Jr. High being used as a feeder school for Finney 4) petition for a new high school in their community.

Ten parents signed an informal petition declaring that they were in favor of a freedom school. It was decided that the parents present was not a sufficient number to make a decision that was to be binding on all parents, so a meeting was scheduled for May 24, 1969, East Grand Blvd. Methodist Church, 6:00 P.M. The meeting was to be advertised by the use of flyers which were to be circulated by the Black students of Finney to all parents. This meeting was attended by CCR staff Mr. C. Douglas.

Staff observations

While staff is not sufficiently apprised of the facts surrounding the tension at Finney High, I am in agreement with other parties that:

- 1) the aggressor in this instance was a White student
- 2) the Board of Education should look long and hard at its decisions, and not be appalled that what occurred did occur
- 3) The Detroit Police Department should fully utilize its C.O.P. units as in the incident on Moore Pl (see file-cases not opened).
- 4) local policy making authorities should take a firm commitment to "enforce equally" all laws without bowing to community pressures

RH:pb