



CITY OF DETROIT

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MEMORANDUM TO: The Honorable Common Council

FROM: Denise J. Lewis, Secretary-Director

SUBJECT: Report of Commission on School Unrest and Disorder

On July 28 your Honorable Body requested this Commission to evaluate the report of a Detroit Public School's Commission on Unrest and Disorder, and together with the Detroit Police Department and Board of Education offer recommendations to the Common Council as to what it can do to assist in avoiding such school disturbances in the future.

The Commission on Unrest and Disorder found that "the expressions of unrest are basically of two diverse origins, those originating in the school and those that are an in-school reflection of unrest in the larger community." It appears that it is with the latter that City government and the Common Council can best assist in avoiding future school disturbances.

There are three aspects of unrest in the larger community with which our City government can work effectively: (1) unemployment among teenagers, (2) police-community relations and (3) the lack of bridges between adolescence and adulthood in contemporary society. What follows is an analysis of each problem with practical programs aiming toward a solution.

I. TEEN UNEMPLOYMENT

Throughout the report of the Commission on Unrest and Disorder there are numerous references to non-students, both dropouts and graduates, who come back into the schools, and, in the opinion of the Commission, represent a source of unrest and disorder. Mayor Gribbs has reported to the Common Council on several occasions that the unemployment rate in the City of Detroit is 15% for the total work force compared to a metropolitan area unemployment rate of 9%. In the inner city the unemployment rate ranges to 25% and among teenagers ranges to 50%. As Councilman Browne has often said, the real unemployment among inner city teenagers may be far above 50%. The present problem of teen unemployment reached the public's attention this summer with the dearth of job placements available for youth. It is not merely a reflection

of the current recession. Back in 1968 when the overall employment was at a peak, the summer youth employment program of the National Alliance of Businessmen obtained only slightly more than half of its quota. Surveys in the fall of 1967 by the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated that inner city teenage unemployment ran to ten times the national unemployment figures.

From the early years of school, youngsters and their parents are led to expect that getting an education will result in getting a better job. Yet, students in Detroit high schools see all around them members of last year's graduating class and that of the years before who still do not have a job. Part of the frustration with the school situation comes from this shattering of this belief in the employment benefits of an education. Minority youngsters are least likely to secure gainful employment on leaving school for two basic reasons: the quality of the education received is lower, as reflected in scores below the national norm on achievement tests, thus leaving them less prepared for skilled jobs, and the continuing existence of pervasive employment discrimination sharply decreases employment opportunities open to them. Although the schools as well as the larger society are responsible for the employment crisis faced by minority youth, expressions of unrest have been directed against the school system.

The Common Council can assist in alleviating the employment problems faced by youth through support of programs aimed at increasing the supply of jobs for teens and eliminating job discrimination. The Commission's contract compliance program directly addresses itself to the teen employment program affecting Detroit schools, because movement of business firms to open opportunity to minority groups is the only way to bring unemployment rates among minority youth into parity with other groups. The problem with the CCR contract compliance program is that it is too small -- because of staff limitations we are not able to review all of the purchasing contracts of the City of Detroit. In addition, City of Detroit purchasing power is only a fraction of all the government purchasing power in the Detroit area. There are 25 school districts in the metropolitan area, all of which have had equal opportunity clauses in their contracts since 1955 -- only the Detroit Public Schools has taken steps to inspect compliance with this clause in their contracts. The Commission recommends that the Common Council give greater support to the contract compliance efforts of the CCR and that the Common Council call upon the Legislature to mandate compliance efforts by all political subdivisions of the State.

Bridges to the "World of work" through cooperative jobs for high schoolers have been recommended strongly in the President's Manpower Reports. The CCR has promoted the extension of cooperative opportunities to black high schoolers when it discovered several years ago that businessmen were hiring white co-ops from the Detroit Public Schools, while schools with black students had to limit themselves to volunteer jobs. There has been some acceptance of co-op students in City government. The CCR recommends that the City expand this commitment and that other units of government take co-ops from the Detroit Public Schools.

II. POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

School unrest and disorders have been on and off the agenda of the CCR's Committee on Police-Community Relations for many years. Inevitably, disorder within the schools becomes one of the more sensitive law enforcement issues that face the City. All too often, however, the manner of police involvement generates peripheral issues that complicate the solution of strictly school problems. A Police force that is 89% white, some of whom are suburbanites, has a credibility gap in today's high schools, especially those with large black enrollment. The CCR recommends that integration of the Detroit Police Department become a matter of highest priority. The CCR also recommends that the ordinance on residency be immediately fully enforced.

For those police officers assigned to duty in potential school disorder situations, additional training in relating to minority groups and youth would better equip them for their sensitive assignments. There have been efforts to train carefully selected officers for roles that are closely tied to schools. This training should be expanded to other officers in the precincts who will be called into school situations when additional manpower is mobilized.

The CCR is further concerned about the continuing trend toward the isolation of the Police Precinct Station from the community it serves. By allowing young people access to the stations and by more involvement of young people in police programs, the Police Department could lessen some of the hostility and alienation that they confront once they are called to the scene of disorder.

III. BRIDGES BETWEEN ADOLESCENTS AND ADULTS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

There have been a number of recent studies and statements by sociologists that the divergence of values and attitudes between adults and adolescents is increasing and is due to the decreasing contact of adolescents and adults. These statements point out that schools are increasingly isolated from the adult world and the lack of teen jobs and adolescent roles in adult activities precludes meaningful interaction of adolescents and adults in mutually beneficial and functionally significant activities.

The Commission suggests that City government can do many things to build these necessary bridges between adults and adolescents. The Commission recommends that teenagers and young adults be appointed to City commissions and that youth activity committees be formed where possible to participate in decision-making. The Commission believes that this would help to promote more favorable attitudes on the part of young people towards the Public Lighting Commission, the Fire Department, Police Department, Department of Parks and Recreation, etc.

Because of the increasing significance of leisure time in our automated society, the Commission recommends that there be a recreation advisory committee representing teenagers and young adults for every recreation facility and school play lot. These committees should be involved in the decision-making of such facilities including the granting of permits for their use.

The CCR also believes that substitutes have to be sought for the decline of the number of places where teenagers could relax and discuss their concerns in small groups. There is a decreasing number of businesses that accommodate this necessary activity -- there are very few drug store soda fountains left. Therefore, the CCR suggests that Teen Drop In Centers be provided in recreation centers and that efforts be made to integrate these into other aspects of the centers' programs, such as the Senior Citizen program.

Because of overcrowding, many high schools are on half-day sessions. CCR recognizes that this is a factor contributing to a climate of dissatisfaction in the schools and that equal protection of the law requires that all Detroit schools be on full-day schedules. This requires a remedy at the State level. However, the current situation could be alleviated in part through effort by Parks and Recreation to develop special programs for the high schools that are on half-day sessions. Because of unemployment problems, most of the students have no constructive activity to fill their extra free hours.

It would take a sizeable facility and staff to adequately serve the numbers of students involved in some of the half-day schools, but a beginning should be made. The CCR suggests that facilities be opened near each school in which the program would be planned, administered and evaluated with the full participation of the School-Community Council.

Periodic consultations or seminars between recreation staff and the counselors or administrators of the high schools could bring the recreation programs closer to the entire school programs. It would be possible for recreation centers to provide space and encouragement for homework centers, tutoring, discussion groups centering around school concerns, etc.

The CCR believes that the Summer Youth Program should be made year-around following the proposals made by the Metropolitan Detroit Youth Foundation.

IV. UNREST IN THE SCHOOLS

In general terms, the report of the Commission on Unrest and Disorder in the Schools, when treating the disorders originating in the schools, focuses on a variety of symptoms and reflects some variety of opinions.

In some schools, it appears that students, parents, and community groups feel that the administration and faculty are acting at variance to their legitimate educational aspirations and objectives. Racial overtones in the disorders were evident in many cases. In citing the causes of unrest, the Disorder Commission included the tensions which accompany desegregation of a school, the lack of sufficient recognition and participation of minority groups, and the failure of some teachers to show understanding and appreciation of the students with whom they work. CCR highlights these causes and the solutions offered by the Disorder Commission on these problems because these matters, in CCR's view, are central to any solution of racial conflict in the schools. The CCR would particularly support those recommendations of the Disorder Commission calling for:

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1. Incorporation of an accurate accounting of minority group history and literature into the regular mandatory American History and Literature courses.
2. Serious consideration to holding students and teachers accountable for achieving minimum standards of proficiency in reading at various grade levels.
3. The counselling of teachers who find it impossible to serve all cultural groups and the subsequent dismissal of these teachers should this counselling fail.
4. In-service training of the school staff to improve in understanding of racial, ethnic and urban problems.

Because of the many studies that have demonstrated the important correlations between teacher attitudes and expectations, parental attitudes and expectations, and student achievement, it is important that mechanisms be found to increase the cooperation between parents, peer groups and educators. The CCR believes that the formation of local school-community councils to have meaningful roles in the running of the school and to represent the inputs of teachers, administrators, parents, students, and community leaders could play a helpful role in resolving these conflicts and differential perceptions. The community council should establish the basis for that mutual reinforcement and consistency that is so necessary for the good of the student and the efficacy of both parent and educator.

The CCR has committed itself to facilitating the formation of such community councils by working in conjunction with school officials and community organizations. The CCR believes it is able to facilitate the necessary settings in which attitudes and understandings can coalesce around the interests of the students.

V. ADDITIONAL CCR STAFF

Your Honorable Body has asked the CCR to report if it needs additional resources to work on the various community relations issues surrounding the schools. Having begun to serve as a neutral convenor and facilitator in several school settings where community councils were being formed, the CCR can now indicate that additional CCR staff members can be efficiently assigned to work with the schools, the Regional Boards, and community groups.

The CCR will continue to work with the Board of Education and community groups in attempting to build a consensus necessary for effective schools.

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