

1614 ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION AMENDMENTS

Jonesboro is a rather unexciting example of progress. The school district is in the Northeastern part of the State and well ahead of the State average in desegregation. The officials are willing but not eager to take part in a documentary. In the presence of his board chairman, the superintendent contributed little of interest during the interview. He provided no leads on community or faculty people who might be helpful in putting together a documentary picture. The key figure in Jonesboro is the board chairman, Lalley, who could be quite helpful with a little encouragement from a TV network or the State education agency.

Searcy School District, Arkansas (White County)

White students, 2,351; Negro students, 168.

Searcy School District adopted a freedom of choice plan for the 1965-66 school year, ceased providing education for some 40 to 50 Negro children from neighboring districts, and proceeded to desegregate its own.

What formerly served as a Negro school for all grades from 1-12 has been converted into a desegregated elementary school with more white students than Negroes. With only a small percentage of Negro students, Searcy does not consider desegregation a major problem nor has it been one. The community has quietly accepted the changes proposed by the school administration. One factor in the community support was the favorable attitude of the Searcy Daily Citizen, which has backed the school board in its decisions. The editor, Perrin Jones, is said to be progressive in his attitude toward desegregation and influential in State education policy.

School Superintendent James W. Ahlf says that all actions leading to desegregation were carefully and thoroughly explained to community leaders, including the P-TA, Chamber of Commerce, and other civic organizations.

Searcy is about 50 miles North of Little Rock, the biggest trade center for miles around.

The school district has at least one Negro teacher in all its schools. Its only difficulty in the beginning was that it dropped half-a-dozen Negro teachers whose salaries had been paid by neighboring districts who sent their Negro children to Searcy. For this, the school district was investigated by the FBI but nothing came of it. Ahlf is aware of his vulnerability on faculty desegregation but believes the issue is dead. His district has moved from 441-B to 441 status this year.

Guy Perkins School District, Arkansas (Faulkner County)

White students, 167; Negro students, 117.

The residents of this small rural school district voted, in effect, to desegregate. The vote came about because Superintendent I. H. Fielder proposed to close the Negro elementary school and absorb all the students in the comprehensive school system that has already desegregated at the high school level. A new wing was needed on the white elementary school. The residents voted for the increased tax knowing that the purpose was to achieve complete desegregation. The vote: 93 to 26.

Superintendent Fielder has arranged for testing of all his students by a nearby college and expects to know within a few days where each stands. He is certain that the Negro children are behind white children of the same age at least two or three years and hopes to use the specific test information to gear his curriculum to the change.

The superintendent is a dairyman who presides over his red-dust domain in a khaki shirt and trousers.

Among the possibilities for camera coverage is a breakfast program conducted for about 60 Negro elementary students under Title I, ESEA.

The superintendent says all the children in his district are from poor families. He is quite willing, in fact anxious, to participate in the proposed TV