



MR. GARMENT

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

March 11, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Dear Mr. President:

As you know, I have a longstanding commitment to the elimination in the Nation of racial segregation in education. This is, in my opinion, the most important educational challenge of our times.

Because of this commitment and recent concerns expressed to me from throughout the educational community, I have prepared a memorandum, addressed to the educators of the Nation, which I had intended to send out this week. I am delaying sending this in view of the announcement that you are preparing, for release in the near future, a statement on this subject.

Enclosed is a copy of my message which I hope you will have the opportunity to read before your statement is completed.

I fully endorse the commitment to equal educational opportunity, expressed in your Message on Education Reform, and want to do all in my power to support you in furthering this goal. I believe my memorandum is a needed step in that direction.

James E. Allen, Jr.
Assistant Secretary/Commissioner of Education

Enclosure



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March 10, 1970

Memorandum to: The American Education Community

From: James E. Allen, Jr.
Assistant Secretary/Commissioner of Education

Subject: School Desegregation: The Obligation of the Educator

The growing confusion about the purpose, the value and the feasibility of school desegregation which is becoming increasingly evident throughout the Nation must be a matter of grave concern to all educators.

Equal educational opportunity is the principle upon which our educational system is founded and must be the goal of all of our efforts.

In the present situation the greatest single barrier to progress in achieving this goal is the continuing existence of racially segregated schools. No one can deny that this is probably the most sensitive and serious problem ever faced in the development of American education. But undeniable also is the fact that despite the complex social and economic causes of segregation and the enormous difficulties involved in eliminating it, segregation in our schools simply makes a mockery of the concept of equal educational opportunity.

When confronted with an issue that has such deep emotional and social impact, it is natural to seek the easiest and least disruptive means of dealing with it. But with the issues of desegregation and integration, it is inescapably evident that, when considered in fundamental terms, there is no way, no argument as to means, no sophistry or evasion whereby the principle of equality of educational opportunity can be made to accommodate the continuing existence of segregated schools in a democratic society -- no matter how difficult the problems involved in eliminating them may be.

It follows therefore that no educator dedicated to this principle can ignore or escape his responsibility for working toward the elimination of school segregation and the achievement of educational integration.

The social, economic and humanitarian implications of integration are, of course, a part of the reason for the desegregation of our schools, but the primary objective is educational -- the conviction that equal educational opportunity will be best achieved by providing for all children **quality** education in an integrated setting.

More and more research evidence, more reports are pointing out that not only is separation by race or class within a democracy inherently wrong but that the health of our democracy cannot thrive as long as such separation continues. This condition affects all elements of life in our society -- school, housing, employment -- and all levels of government and all sectors of society bear a responsibility for it. But education has, I believe, a particular responsibility because of its unique formative influence which comes into play so early in the life of the individual.

The public schools exist in order to educate the individual and to assure an educated populace. When a condition exists which stands in the way of both of these goals, it is the obligation of all those responsible for the public schools to do everything within their power to correct it.

I am, therefore, calling upon all educators throughout the Nation not only to persevere in their efforts to eliminate segregation in our schools, but to assume with increased and dedicated vigor their role as leaders in helping to convince the public of the harmful educational effects of segregation and the necessity for its elimination if the public schools are to serve equally well all the people of America.

It is the educator who must see to it that all the extraneous issues of busing, neighborhood schools, district boundaries, etc., are not allowed to obscure the fact that in seeking to eliminate segregation we are acting in faithfulness to the fundamental principle of equality of educational opportunity.

It is clear that the conscience of the Nation is troubled. This, I believe, is a most hopeful sign that we shall eventually emerge from the thicket of controversy which now ensnares us and find a way to accomplish the integration which we know must exist if our public schools are to reflect and reinforce the democratic principles of our Nation.

I am fully and sympathetically aware of the critical nature and the diversity and complexity of the problems you face in your efforts to eliminate segregation in your particular communities and areas. I am also aware of and commend the courage and tenacity of purpose demonstrated by so many of you which have brought about significant progress in all parts of our country. Action at the Federal level alone cannot effectively eliminate segregation -- the ultimate responsibility must be accepted and acted upon by the educational leaders and the people of each State and of each community.

In the position of national leadership which I occupy, I shall continue to emphasize the educational value of integration, and the educational deprivation of segregation regardless of cause.