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ITF - MAGNET SCHOOLS - RRELIMINARY REPORT

INTRODUCTION

It is exceedingly difficult to generalize about the so called magnet programs in the S. D. City Schools without running the risk of seriously misleading any unwary reader. Magnet types run the gamut from fundamental schools that stress the three R's, discipline, homework and even dress codes to an alternative school that emphasizes a very open education philosophy. Along the way are stops at individualized instruction programs, university lab schools, bi-lingual programs, intercultural language magnets, career awareness elementary magnet, a career high school, urban studies and a math, science, health computer technology program to mention only some of the varied programs being offered. There are about 14 operating elementary magnets and 7 in secondary schools. Magnets are found in 3 of the secondary schools and 5 of the elementary schools that Judge Welsh found to be minority isolated. The majority of the magnet programs are a school within a school operation but some of them are total school magnets where everyone at the site is a participant in the magnet program. Having passed this caveat to the reader I shall now proceed to make some considered generalizations.

HAVE THEY MET THEIR GOALS?

Speaking of numerical goals some programs have easily reached them and some have fallen appreciably short. Believe that total school magnets have more generally met their goals than school within a school programs and that elementary magnets have more gnerally achieved goals than secondary. I think that of the eight operating magnets in schools that had been found to be racially isolated only two reached their goal. Both of these were elementary and total school

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magnets. One was a fundamental school and one was a University Lab school.

HAVE ANY PROBLEMS DEVELOPED?

Transportation has at some sites and sometimes been a problem, but progress seems to be being made in solving these problems. A larger and more difficult problem is actual or perceived "elitism" in the case of some school within a school programs. This can be especially acute where the magnet program has highly visible physical equipment or surroundings that ~~is~~ are newer and better than similar equipment or surroundings for the regular program. Getting parent involvement is almost always a problem, and it becomes even more difficult in the case of non-resident students in magnet programs. ~~quite minimal and especially so in the case of part school.~~

ARE THERE ANY CHANGES THAT COULD BE MADE THAT WOULD MAKE THE PROGRAMS MORE EFFECTIVE?

Minimize part time part school programs to greatest extent possible and go to full time full school programs which will help to eliminate real or perceived "classess" among students at the same site. Re-study and where possible re-amp eligibility rules for magnet programs so that they don't have counter productive results on the integration program as a whole or on desires of deserving individuals to participate in a certain magnet program. Strive to have all administrators and staff in magnet programs be volunteers and dedicated advocates for that particular tupe of education.

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WHAT ARE THE GOODTHINGS THAT ARE HAPPENING?

"Colorblindness" becoming more common in certain programs at certain sites. Some progress being made at socializing and play between races in free time. Some slight progress being made at drawing majority students into minority isolated schools in the southeas t area.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE THINGS THAT ARE OCCURRING BECAUSE OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE PROGRAMS?

There is some evidence that poorly planned programs may be counter productive and actually heighten tensions between those of different cultural, socail and educational backgrounds. This is an area where, at times, haste has to be made slowly but with strong and firm committment from the top. Part day or part school magnets should be established at mi nority isolated sites only in ver y unusual cases because they tend to lead to, at least, the perception of eliteism. Frustrations and irritations may develop or increase because of eligibility rules for certain magnet programs. As an example minority students resident in the Webster area are compelled t o attend a fundamental school program unless they want to suffer some personal inconvenience and attend a non-neighborhoold school.

SUMMARY

The magnet school concept is, without a doubt, one of the principal tools to make voluntar y integration work. This places a tremendous burden on all of those invloved in such programs from top administrators down to the lowest classified employees. To work they must offer enticing specialized programs that parents and students will really want to attend. The must provide a better general education along wit their specialized programs than does the conventional

neighborhood school and it must be so much better and more desirable that it will be perceived to be so by ###### the community at large. Whatever needs to be #### provided to achieve this must be provided - lower student teacher ratio, betterequipment, nicer physical surroundings and whatever else are essential. But the most important factor is an enthusiastic committment to the program by a dedicated staff. There is some tentative evidence that the relative and apparent success of the fundamental magnets at the elementary level is due largely to the dedication and committment to this type of education by the staffs of the fundamental elementary schools.

Sole responsibility for the very tentative conclusions in this report rests with the writer, W. B. Rohan. Input was received from Magnet Schools Committee members Judy McDonald and Payne Johnson as well as some other members of the ITF and ## O ' Farrell and Rolando Park monitors.