

THE SIXTH GRADE PLAN: AN EFFORT TO
END RACIAL IMBALANCE IN THE PUBLIC
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS OF PLAINFIELD,
NEW JERSEY

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recent years been "rezoned out".¹

On September 28, 1962, a group of Negro citizens initiated an appeal to the Commissioner of Education of New Jersey. They charged that the Plainfield Board of Education had ignored valid proposals to end segregation in its schools and had installed a wholly unsatisfactory substitute.

The Case of Charles B. Booker, et al., Appellants v. The Board of Education of the City of Plainfield, Union County, Respondent, was argued before the New Jersey Commissioner of Education in the spring of 1963. The decision of the commissioner was rendered on June 26, 1963. The Board of Education was instructed by the commissioner to implement either plan of the "Wolff Report" or the plan which the board itself had proposed during the course of debate.²

¹Board of Education, Plainfield, New Jersey, Resume of Events Leading to Adoption of the Sixth Grade Plan, July 16, 1963, p. 3. (Mimeographed.)

²Decision of the N. J. Commissioner of Education to Petition of Appeal, Charles B. Booker, et al, Appellants v. Board of Education, City of Plainfield, Union County, Respondent. June 26, 1963.

This plan prepared by the Board of Education was known as the Sixth Grade Plan (See Definitions, page 13.) which treated the problem in terms of the Washington School, the most severely segregated school and the object of the suit. The Sixth Grade Plan provided for the transfer of all students from the Washington School zone in grades kindergarten through five. They were to be transported by buses to the six Plainfield public elementary schools with the highest percentage of white students--namely, the Barlow, Cook, Cedarbrook, Evergreen, Jefferson, and Woodland Schools. Washington School became the Sixth Grade School for the entire city of Plainfield, and bus transportation was provided for all sixth grade children who lived outside of the Washington School zone.

The Sixth Grade Plan, as introduced above, is the subject of this study. The means by which it will be examined are as follows:

Statement of the Problem

The attempt to correct racial imbalance in elementary schools of Plainfield, New Jersey, is known as the Sixth Grade Plan. The problem of this study is to

investigate and describe the Sixth Grade Plan in terms of the following:

1. The racial pattern of the Plainfield elementary schools before and after implementation of the Sixth Grade Plan.
2. Academic achievement of the elementary school children of Plainfield before and after the implementation of the Sixth Grade Plan.
3. The organizational and instructional patterns of the schools directly involved in the Sixth Grade Plan before and after its implementation.
4. Reaction to the Sixth Grade Plan as reflected by the expressed attitudes of Negro and white citizens and citizens groups. Opinions expressed before, during and following implementation of the Sixth Grade Plan are recorded.
5. The cost to the City of Plainfield of the implementation and continuation of the Sixth Grade Plan.

Methods and Procedures

This study investigates and describes the Sixth Grade Plan in the following manner. First, the background of the problem is reported in terms of events and conditions leading toward the establishment of the Sixth Grade Plan. Second, the Sixth Grade Plan is described as an effort to end racial imbalance in the elementary schools of Plainfield. Third, the Sixth Grade Plan is examined after two years of implementation in terms of the Statement of the Problem (page 5). Finally, such findings, implications, and recommendations as can be drawn from this study are presented.

Procedures to investigate and evaluate the Sixth Grade Plan can best be explained in terms of the five divisions of the Statement of the Problem.

1. Racial patterns in the elementary schools are tabulated to show the distribution of Negro and white students before and after implementation of the Sixth Grade Plan. Data to show racial patterns in the elementary schools from 1962 through 1964 were gathered from

groups. These opinions are drawn from direct communications to the Board of Education, statements of appeal to the New Jersey Commissioner of Education and State Board of Education, positions stated in the public press, and opinions made known through public meetings and civic organizations.

5. The cost of the Sixth Grade Plan to the City of Plainfield is tabulated in terms of transportation expense, teacher and plant utilization, and materials of instruction. Sources of data for the cost of the Sixth Grade Plan are drawn from records of the Plainfield Board of Education and interviews with school administrative personnel.

In addition to the sources of data named above, the following general sources of data are also employed:

1. Minutes, reports, and records of municipal and state agencies of government and courts of law.
2. New Jersey Law.
3. Federal law, court rulings, and reports.

4. Newspapers, books, journals, and magazines.

Importance of the Study

The New Jersey Commissioner of Education said in his ruling on the Washington School of Plainfield that no intention or deliberate segregation of pupils had been claimed. However, ". . . such an extreme concentration of Negro students in a school, enforced by compulsory assignment, engenders feelings and attitudes which tend to interfere with successful learning."¹ The precedent set by this ruling can affect other school districts in New Jersey and elsewhere in the United States.

The attempt to meet the problem of racial imbalance in the public schools of Plainfield has never been fully chronicled, nor is it commonly understood as a means to end racial imbalance in public schools. This study records the problem, the method of attempting to solve it, and the resultant findings.

¹Decision of the N. J. Commissioner of Education to Petition of Appeal, Charles B. Booker, et al., Appellant v. Board of Education, City of Plainfield, Union County, Respondent, June 26, 1963.