

Major problem in Kansas--negro teachers hit by desegregation

This article describes how the desegregation of schools in the wake of the Brown v. Board of Education case would affect black schoolteachers across Kansas. The author gives the example of Topeka where, when the school board began desegregating schools prior to the final decision in the Brown case, black teachers lost their jobs. Although the school board wanted to "avoid any disruption of the professional life of career teachers," many schools were hesitant to place black teachers in classrooms containing both white and black students. Members of the black community who had opposed the Brown v. Board case at the local level had feared that integration would apply only to students, not to teachers, and it appeared to some that this would in fact be the case.

Creator: Murphy, Anna Mary

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Major Problem in Kansas--

NEGRO TEACHERS HIT BY DESEGREGATION

BY ANNA MARY MURPHY
Of The Daily Capital Staff

In Kansas, one major problem accompanying school desegregation was that posed by Negro teachers.

The question to be resolved was: If it is psychologically damaging for Negro pupils to be segregated, as the Supreme Court ruled, is it equally damaging to have them taught by a segregated faculty.

As school boards finally faced the pupil integration problem, they could not avoid some kind of a decision on teachers.

Not many announced formal policies in public meetings, but teacher policies obviously had to exist.

A Daily Capital survey in April 1953 showed a definite trend in Kansas toward an attrition purge of its Negro teachers. This apparently was in anticipation of what school officials thought was an inevitable Supreme Court decision.

Many Negro teachers left the state for professional security reasons. Few were replaced by members of their race. The process was quiet. Only those directly concerned seemed to notice it.

Thirty-three months passed. Then, on January 15, the Topeka Board of Education made a policy decision: to hire and assign teachers on their qualifications, not considering race or religion.

This again put the spotlight on the fate of Kansas' Negro career teachers.

The light showed the intervening months have brought a slow reversal of the trend toward all-white faculties.

John L. Eberhardt, research assistant for the Governmental Research Center at the University of Kansas, has released a current study of "The Effects of Desegregation on Negro Teachers."

"Of the 11 cities which have taken steps to desegregate students, four have employed Negro teachers for schools other than those with a predomi-

nantly Negro enrollment," Eberhardt found.

If the Topeka board follows through with its new policy, Topeka will be the fifth.

The other four are Atchison, Lawrence, Salina, and Wichita. Kansas City's desegregation policy included a statement that the board planned to "avoid any disruption of the professional life of career teachers."

But Kansas City officials say no plans have been made to place Negro teachers in mixed classes.

Despite the scattered instances of teacher integration, only Atchison has as many Negro teachers today as in 1953, though enrollments continue to rise in a teacher-shortage era.

Topeka probably has done the most dramatic about-face. Even the present board apparently does not realize the magnitude of the change. Not one of the six members remains who battled to so many no-decision bouts on the segregation issue.

Here is how Eberhardt covered the Topeka situation only a few weeks ago:

"Anticipating a Supreme Court decision on segregation in the spring of 1953, the Topeka Board of Education failed to re-employ six Negro teachers. It gave as its reason the belief that the community would not want Negro teachers for white children.

"The six teachers were reinstated when the court postponed its decision. Since then, the Board has announced no public policy, and school authorities prefer to make no statement on the issue at this time."

When the Topeka board authorized its new teacher policy 10 days ago, several members said they considered the action

reaffirmation in writing of an understood policy.

But the policy apparently was not understood by the public or school administrators.

Before the Supreme Court acted, Topeka had 779 Negro students and 27 Negro teachers.

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They were in four segregated schools.

When school started this fall, Negro pupils totaled 898. Negro teachers numbered only 21½. The "half" teacher is one assigned only for a half-day.

All the Negro teachers now are assigned to the three remaining all-Negro schools. Though half the Negroes now attend mixed classes, no Negro teachers are assigned to such classes.

Strangely, a former center of pro-slavery sentiment — Atchison—has gone farthest in integrating its teachers.

After segregation was ended in Atchison, the system's six Negro teachers were reassigned to non-segregated schools—two to the high school and one each to four elementary buildings.

Lawrence closed its one Negro school, then employed one Negro as classroom teacher in the junior high school, and one as physical education supervisor for the elementary schools.

Salina has two Negro teachers—one in the high school and the other teaching an integrated first grade.

Like Topeka, Wichita has three schools with all-Negro enrollment because of district lines and optional attendance. But its board is experimenting in one elementary school where the enrollment is about 80-20 Negro. This school is staffed by teachers of both races. Further action along this line, particularly in schools with racially mixed enrollments, is planned by Wichita.

Fort Scott had four Negro teachers before 1953, now it has two. No decision has been reached on integration of the two.

Parsons had 11 Negro teachers before a Negro junior high was closed and segregation ended in three of the four elementary districts. Now Parsons has six Negro teachers.

Coffeyville and Leavenworth report they will continue using Negro teachers only in schools with predominantly Negro enrollment.

Leavenworth officials believe it impossible in the near future to assign Negro teachers to non-segregated schools. That city still has two Negro schools staffed by 14 Negro teachers.

Kansas City Times,
March 27, 1956

A VETERAN KANSAS LAWYER.

W. L. Sayers, 84, Dies After Long Career at Hill City.

Hill City, Kas., March 26. — W. L. Sayers, 84, a Negro lawyer long widely known in legal circles, died today at Graham County hospital here.

He served three terms as Graham County attorney, being elected in 1900, 1912 and 1914 and previously had served as district court clerk.

It was during his days as court clerk that he read law in the office of the county attorney and other lawyers. He was admitted to the bar in 1893 and became almost a legendary figure in court circles because of his extensive and successful career as a trial lawyer not only here but in other sections of the state.

Sayers was reared at Nicodemus, well known Negro community near here where his parents, who were born in slavery, were among the pioneers of that community. He overcame many hardships to win an education, but became a leader in various affairs. He taught school for several years in this area and also helped a number of children, opening his home to several whom he provided for.

Although in ill health the last few years he had continued to maintain his office here.