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# SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN TEMPE, ARIZONA

A STAFF REPORT OF THE  
U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

September 1977

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## U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is a temporary, independent, bipartisan agency established by Congress in 1957 and directed to:

- Investigate complaints alleging that citizens are being deprived of their right to vote by reason of their race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, or by reason of fraudulent practices;
- Study and collect information concerning legal developments constituting a denial of equal protection of the laws under the Constitution because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, or in the administration of justice;
- Appraise Federal laws and policies with respect to equal protection of the laws because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, or in the administration of justice;
- Serve as a national clearinghouse for information in respect to denials of equal protection of the laws because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin;
- Submit reports, findings, and recommendations to the President and the Congress.

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**SCHOOL DESEGREGATION  
IN TEMPE, ARIZONA**

**A Staff Report of the  
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights**

**September 1977**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The project was carried out under the overall supervision of Dr. Shirley Hill Witt, Director of the Mountain States Regional Office.

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At the appointment of the Staff Director of the Commission, all activities that contributed to this report were under the general supervision and coordination of William T. White, Jr., Assistant Staff Director, Office of National Civil Rights Issues.

## PREFACE

The United States Commission on Civil Rights released on August 24, 1976, its report to the Nation: Fulfilling the Letter and Spirit of the Law: Desegregation of the Nation's Public Schools.

The report's findings and recommendations were based upon information gathered during a 10-month school desegregation project. This included four formal hearings (Boston, Massachusetts; Denver, Colorado; Louisville, Kentucky; and Tampa, Florida); four open meetings held by State Advisory Committees (Berkeley, California; Corpus Christi, Texas; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Stamford, Connecticut); a survey of nearly 1,300 local school districts; and 29 case studies of communities which had difficulties with desegregation, had moderate success with desegregation, or had substantial success with desegregation.

Subsequent to the report's release, considerable interest was generated concerning the specifics of the case study findings, which, owing to space limitations in the national report, were limited to a few brief paragraphs. In an effort to comply with public requests for more detailed information, Commission staff have prepared monographs for each of the case studies. These monographs were written from the extensive field notes already collected and supplemented, if needed, with further interviews in each community. They reflect, in detail, the original case study purpose of finding which local policies, practices, and programs in each community surveyed contributed to peaceful desegregation and which ones did not.

It is hoped that the following monograph will serve to further an understanding of the school desegregation process in this Nation.

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## I. BACKGROUND

Located directly east of and contiguous to Phoenix, Tempe is the home of Arizona State University and the Salt River Project, the State's largest utility company. With a population of 62,907 in 1970, it is one of the most populous cities in the Phoenix Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 14 percent of the population is of ethnic and racial minorities. The Hispanic (Mexican American) community is the largest minority group, comprising 12 percent of Tempe's population. Blacks are 1 percent of the population and other minority groups, including Native Americans (Yaqui), comprise another 1 percent.<sup>2</sup>

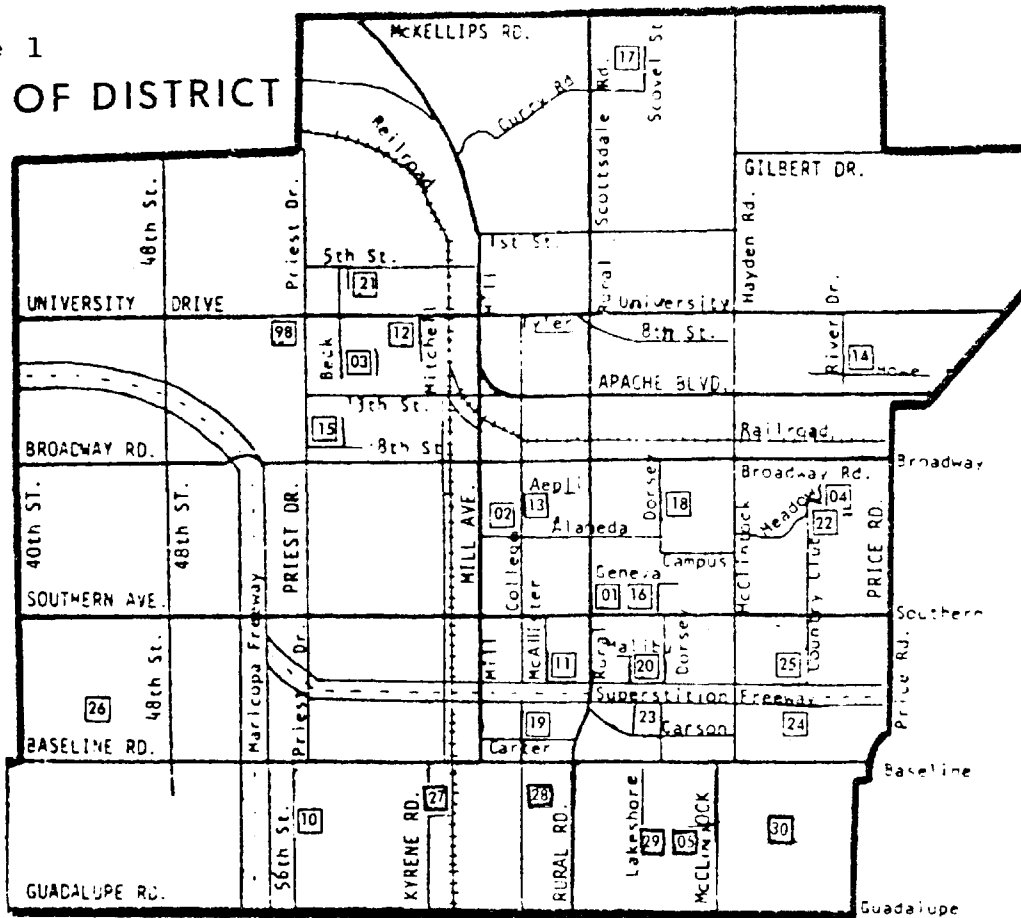
### Tempe Elementary School District No. 3

The Tempe Elementary School District No. 3 encompasses 36 square miles, an area much larger than just the city of Tempe, and has approximately 112,000 residents. The district has a total of 20 elementary schools (kindergarten through fifth grade) and 3 intermediate schools (sixth grade through eighth grade) but no junior or senior high schools. (See map of Tempe Elementary School District No. 3, figure 1.)

During the 1975-76 school year 2,710 minority students accounted for 20.2 percent of the school district's 13,406 total enrollment. Of these, 2,058 (15.4 percent) were Hispanic; 381 (2.8 percent) were black; 162 (1.2 percent) were Native American, and 109 (0.8 percent) were Asian.

The faculty for the school district during 1975 numbered 671. Hispanic teachers comprised 9 percent (61) of this total and black teachers accounted for 2 percent (13). The faculty includes only 3 (0.4 percent) Native American teachers and 2 (0.3 percent) Asian Americans.

Figure 1  
MAP OF DISTRICT



**TEMPE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
DISTRICT NO. 3**

Grades		Grades	
01	Bivins Administration Center	22	Curry School
02	McKemy Intermediate School	23	Arredondo School
03	Gililand Intermediate School	24	Bustoz School
04	Connolly Intermediate School	25	Ward School
10	Frank School	26	Nevitt School
11	Carminati School	27	Wood School
12	Mitchell School	28	Aguilar School
13	Broadmor School	29	Rover School
14	Thew School	98	Getz School, Bus Garage and Maintenance Center
15	Holdeman School		
16	Rural School		
17	Laird School		
18	Meyer School		
19	Evans School		
20	Hudson School		
21	Scales School		

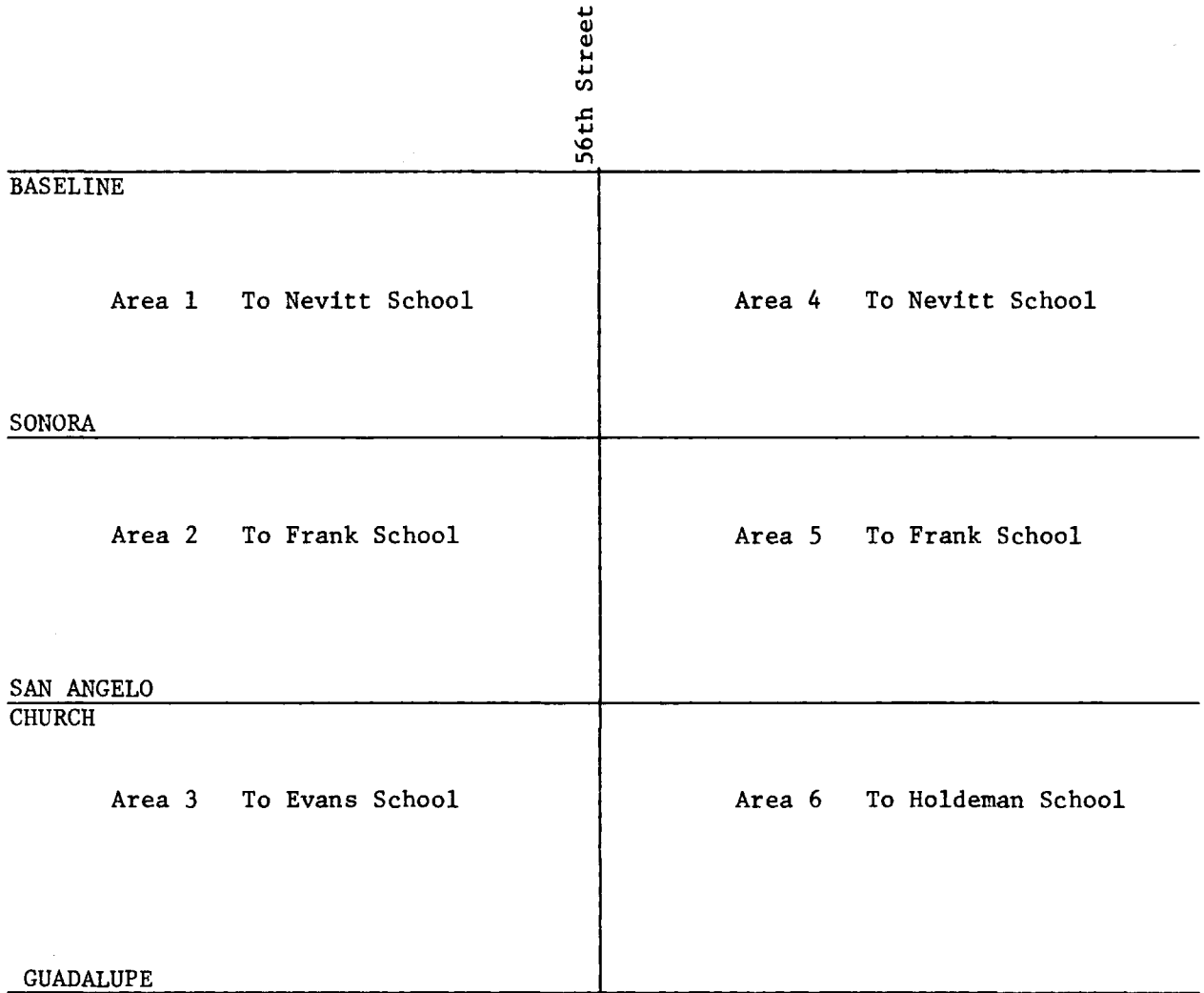
**FUTURE SCHOOL SITES**

- 30 Elementary, now under construction
- 05 Intermediate, now under construction



Figure 2

GUADALUPE AREA MAP



## II. HISTORY OF THE DISTRICT'S DESEGREGATION

### Background

The southwest corner of the Tempe Elementary School District No. 3 is called Guadalupe. Although it is not part of the city of Tempe, this area was annexed into the school district in 1953. The 2,100 residents of the Guadalupe community are predominately Mexican Americans (about 60 percent) and Yaqui Indians (about 40 percent).<sup>3</sup> The Veda B. Frank Elementary School, serving kindergarten through the fifth grade students, is the only school located in the community. Consequently, the student body of Frank school became an ethnically identifiable or segregated pocket of minority students. Sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students also attended Frank school until the late 1960s when they were reassigned to the centrally located Gilliland Intermediate School.

In 1972-73 Veda B. Frank elementary school had a minority student enrollment of 92 percent. Of the total student population, 90 percent were Mexican American. Two other schools in the district also had high percentages of Mexican American students. At Thew Elementary on the west side Mexican Americans comprise 42 percent of the total student enrollment and at Gilliland Intermediate School near the university they accounted for 33 percent of the students.

### Impetus for Desegregation

In January 1971, the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office for Civil Rights (OCR), wrote the Tempe school district concerning an onsite review in accordance with Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. (The act prohibits race and national origin discrimination by Federal Government contractors.) OCR began its investigation of the Tempe school district on February 22, 1971. Nearly 2 years

later, in December 1972, the Tempe Elementary School District No. 3 was found to be in noncompliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. The Office for Civil Rights notified district school administrators in January 1973 that Frank Elementary School must be desegregated by fall 1973. After reviewing the facts, the Tempe School Board voted at its May 2, 1973 meeting to comply with OCR's findings and desegregate Frank Elementary School. Responding in a positive manner, the board established the following guidelines for formulating a desegregation plan that would comply with the 1964 Civil Rights Act:

1. The concept of neighborhood schools should be maintained to the extent possible...
2. The plan should be in keeping with the philosophy of the school district...
3. The plan should be appropriate to the needs of all the children in this school district.
4. The plan for desegregation should be long range and adaptable to population trends.
5. The shortest traveling distances to effect integration should be used when possible.
6. Optimum use should be made of existing facilities and resources.
7. The economic potential of the school district must be given definite consideration and the plan should be financially practicable.
8. The plan must be acceptable to HEW. Any acceptable plan to HEW may represent a compromise to various elements of these Guidelines.\*

### **Desegregation Plan Established**

The superintendent and some of his staff drafted two desegregation plans and the school board held a public hearing on June 27, 1973, to discuss the alternatives. School district officials used the media effectively to keep the public informed regarding the

OCR findings and the desegregation plans being considered. Several meetings with the community representatives and OCR officials were held.

Both plans considered by the school board called for the division of the Guadalupe community into six attendance areas. One plan paired two schools; kindergarten through third grade would attend Frank Elementary School and grades four through six would attend Nevitt school. Nevitt was a new school, then under construction, about 3 miles from Frank. A second plan, which was ultimately approved by the school board and submitted to the San Francisco Regional Office of OCR on July 7, 1973, called for a broader cross-distribution of students. One-third of the students in Guadalupe would remain at Frank school, one-third would attend Nevitt, and the remainder would attend two other elementary schools also located about 3-1/2 miles from the Guadalupe community. The plan also anticipated the construction of another new school in the area in time for the 1974-75 school year. This school, however, has not yet been built.

#### Atmosphere in Which Desegregation Occurred

According to interviewees, the desegregation plan, on the whole, was implemented in an atmosphere of cooperation and positive support. There were positive efforts, especially through the use of the media, to convince parents, teachers and political leaders that desegregation must proceed immediately. The school board, the superintendent, and his staff kept the community informed of progress and an atmosphere of openness and honesty was established. The general attitude became one of acceptance--"it is the law of the land" and "we can't fight Washington (HEW)."

The Mexican American and Yaqui Indian students attending Frank Elementary School in Guadalupe, however, were most directly affected by the plan. A large majority of students from the Guadalupe area would be bused to schools outside the community. In addition, drastic changes were to be expected to the school, which until the desegregation effort had been their "own school," their one and only neighborhood school. Parents feared their children would no longer have school teachers and a school environment that

would encourage the retention of their Native language and culture. Guadalupe residents also protested that they were not consulted or involved in the desegregation planning process.

Parents in Guadalupe organized to oppose the desegregation plan. They enlisted the support of their Congressman, John J. Rhodes, Minority Leader of the U.S. House of Representatives, in obtaining a postponement of the plan. Their efforts resulted in OCR granting a 1-year postponement of the desegregation order. Nonetheless, Tempe school district officials decided to proceed with desegregation efforts with the beginning of the 1973-74 school year.

Mexican American and Yaqui parents, who did not wish their children to be bused, strongly demonstrated their protest by organizing an alternative school called Itom Escuela, meaning "Our School." Itom Escuela, a trilingual-tricultural private school is still operating with an enrollment of 55 students.

To minimize resistance to desegregation, some white parents who were concerned about their children being bused to Frank School in Guadalupe were hired to work as aides in the school. Their jobs enabled them to gain first-hand knowledge of their children's school environment. Likewise, bilingual minority parents and teachers rode the buses with Mexican American and Yaqui children and some were hired to work at other schools.

### III. THE DESEGREGATION PLAN

The desegregation plan focused on the Guadalupe community (Veda B. Frank Elementary School) which was divided into six attendance areas. Other schools surrounding the Gaudalupe area also affected by the plan were Nevitt, Evans, Holdeman, Ritter, and a new school to be constructed. The reassignment of students required by the plan affected Mexican American and Yaqui children previously assigned to Frank school and white children assigned to Evans, Ritter, and Holdeman schools. Approximately 68 percent of the children who had been attending Frank school were bused to other schools and approximately 40 percent of the white students originally enrolled at other schools were bused to Frank. This reassignment of students at the beginning of the 1974-75 school year reduced the minority student population at Frank from 92 percent to 36 percent.

The greatest distance involved in the student transportation plan was 3-1/2 miles. Accordingly, the length of the bus ride and the time involved did not become a serious issues. Some parents expressed concern, however, about the possibility of children missing buses or having to wait for buses. Many more parents were unhappy about the elimination of the neighborhood school concept.

Another result of the desegregation plan was the reassignment of approximately 22 percent of the Frank faculty to one of the other target schools. In addition, psychologists, reading specialists, and teacher aides were added to the district's staff. On June 20, 1973, the Tempe school board unanimously passed a resolution to implement an affirmative action program to increase the number of minorities and women on the faculty.

From 1974 to 1975, 112 new members were added to the faculty. The number of Hispanic teachers increased by 14 (from 47 to 61); four blacks, two Asian Americans and one Native American were added bringing the totals, respectively, to 13, 2, and 3. White teachers accounted for the 91 other newly hired faculty members.

## **Analysis**

The Tempe school district desegregation plan was implemented within a very short time. The superintendent's leadership was an important element in the smooth implementation of the plan. His position, as well as that of the school board, was that desegregation is the "law of the land" and the district must comply. He consistently supported this official position in the face of opposition. In an interview with Commission staff, he noted that the short time allowed for implementation did not permit serious polarization of the community.

District personnel involved in implementating the plan perceived it to be workable and simple. Several interviewees, however, stated that very few staff members had been involved with the superintendent in the development of the plan. Despite some initial apprehensions among some regarding student disciplinary problems, teachers were generally cooperative and supportive of the plan.

#### IV. IMPLEMENTATION OF DESEGREGATION

In preparation for implementation of the plan, school district personnel conducted a series of public meetings with parents, community representatives, media representatives, religious leaders, and teachers. At each meeting, they outlined the plan and explained how each segment of the community would be affected. Parents, however, were not given a choice of schools they wished their children to attend and they did not participate directly in the development of the desegregation plan. The school district administration neither appointed an advisory committee nor sought assistance from the community during the implementation of the plan. An effort was made, however, to keep all sections of the community well informed during the planning and implementation process by means of take-home material and objective coverage by the press and media.

A human relations workshop was conducted for personnel within the school district. Teachers were also encouraged to enroll at Arizona State University in courses dealing with minority issues. Approximately 20 percent of the district's teachers attended inservice training programs focusing on the problems of minority children. Special emphasis was placed on cultural differences between Anglo students on the one hand and Mexican American and Yaqui students on the other.

The school district publicized its efforts to implement desegregation through the local media, its own newsletter, and by direct mailing to parents of children attending target schools. Persons interviewed stated that they felt parental support, the superintendent's leadership, and human relations training were the factors most responsible for facilitating desegregation.



Aside from opposition, mainly from Mexican American and Yaqui parents in the Guadalupe community, implementation was relatively smooth and uneventful. According to most of the persons interviewed, the press relayed a factual, objective report to the public. The editor of the Tempe Daily News commented in an interview that the school board and administration disliked the order to desegregate but complied anyway. He attributes the success of the plan to the prevalent attitude that "you do not fight city hall."

Tempe's business, religious, and political leaders for the most part were neutral. They neither supported nor opposed the plan. Segments of the religious leadership within the community did oppose portions of the plan: busing of young children and the lack of provision for bilingual-bicultural education. These religious leaders had assisted the Guadalupe parents in efforts to stop implementation.

Members of the Guadalupe community commented that they would prefer to have quality bilingual-bicultural education for Mexican American and Yaqui children rather than the desegregation of their school. They also expressed apprehension that the educational needs of Mexican American and Yaqui children would be overlooked in a desegregated setting.

### **The First Two Years**

After the initial hostile reaction by Guadalupe residents, resistance to the desegregation plan gradually dissipated. Implementation proceeded without violence, white flight, or open interracial violence.

The school board and administration sought additional funds under the Emergency School Assistance Act (ESAA) and Title I of Public Law 89-10 to facilitate the desegregation process.

Most of the school district and community representatives interviewed agreed that there was marked improvement in the quality of education received by the district's children. They cited improved standardized reading scores as evidence of improved quality education. The problem most frequently mentioned facing the school district was teacher

attitudes which reflected some insensitivity to the needs of minority children. School administrators and faculty stressed the need for more intensive human relations training for district teachers.

### Effects of Desegregation

Most persons interviewed reported that desegregation had a positive effect on the education that their children were receiving. School administrators and teachers interviewed expressed the belief that desegregation resulted in the introduction of innovative teaching methods to the Frank School, and encouraged teachers in other schools to experiment with similar methods.

The Tempe school district adopted a 24-point plan to aid minority students. The school district added bilingual-bicultural education and a remedial curriculum designed to enhance the reading and language skills of low-achieving minority youngsters. Other innovative academic programs included a preschool program concentrating on concept and vocabulary development of Yaqui Indian children, a remedial reading instruction program for target schools, and a special oral language and bilingual program. The school district instituted a bilingual-bicultural program in cooperation with a national television program.

Some members of the Guadalupe community also commented that the physical facilities at Frank School had improved. They believed this improvement resulted from white students being bused to this school.

Other positive effects reported were a decrease in absenteeism among Mexican American students and increased motivation of all students. Teachers frequently cited the increased competition between students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds as contributing to the improvement of motivation. Some teachers, however, expressed feelings that competition among students resulting from desegregation would be detrimental to the self-image of some minority children.

A few teachers stated that they felt the present curriculum, in spite of additions since the implementation of desegregation, was not sufficiently comprehensive to meet the needs of students from all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Teachers and district administrators agreed that exposure to children with different cultural backgrounds and the necessity to study together was beneficial to all students. Parents generally felt also that learning from teachers of different ethnic backgrounds was a good experience for their children. Most persons interviewed reported increased understanding between different racial and ethnic groups in the community and believed that school desegregation facilitated this understanding.

## CONCLUSION

In its national study, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reached one conclusion which stood out above all others: desegregation works. Although Tempe Elementary School District No. 3 is not without its problems, the Commission's major conclusion regarding the national picture applies to the specific situation in Tempe, Arizona.

In Tempe, there was a notable lack of violence and a minimum of community disharmony during implementation of the desegregation plan. In fact, dissenting factions focused primarily on school boundaries, the distance that children would have to be bused to school, and the lack of bilingual-bicultural education rather than dissatisfaction with the principle of desegregated schooling.

The superintendent and members of the school board were far-sighted enough to seize the opportunity to desegregate the schools. Such a decision deterred further sanctions, such as possible withdrawing of Federal funds by HEW and the Justice Department. The involvement of community groups and political leaders also did much to keep a potentially disruptive situation from developing.

Problems which covertly could jeopardize the goal of desegregation still remain in the Tempe school district. These problems include social isolation within the classroom, discipline problems, different ability ranges which must be dealt with by teachers, lack of sensitivity on the part of some faculty members, and an underrepresentation of minorities on administrative and teaching staffs.

In Tempe these problems do not appear to be severe because school officials have acted affirmatively to promote the success of their program. The fact that

problems do exist, however, underscores a major point in the Commission's national report on desegregation: "Successful desegregation requires continual monitoring, evaluation, periodic review, and perhaps updating of the original plan."

## NOTES

1. U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, General Population Characteristics, 1970 Census of Population, PC (1)-D4, table 23.

2. U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, 1970 Census of Population, PC (1)-C4, tables 112 and 123.

3. Yaqui refers to a Native American tribe.

4. Tempe School District No. 3, newspaper, June 21, 1973.

## APPENDIX

Listed below are persons interviewed for the survey of Tempe Elementary School District No. 3.

Paul G. Chevarria, Ombudsman and Administrative Assistant - Tempe School District

Frank Connolly, Editor and Publisher- Tempe Daily News

Robert Covarrubias, Administrative Assistant to Superintendent - Tempe School District

Robert P. Curry, Superintendent - Tempe School District

Rev. Guy A. Davidson, Pastor - Grace Community Church

Eleanor Earl, Elementary School Counselor - Nevitt and Broodmor Schools

Elias Esquer, Bilingual Education Instructor - Arizona State University

Sam Fees, Assistant to the Superintendent - Tempe School District

Myra France, Fourth-grade Teacher - Frank School

Father Elias Galvez, Paster - Guadalupe Church

Lauro Garcia, Guadalupe Organization

Doris Gorham, Mother

Carl Hunter, President - Tempe Elementary School Association

Al Jauregui, Principal - Frank School

John R. Laidlaw, Principal - Nevitt School

William LoPiano, Mayor - Tempe

Jacqueline Manndt, Fourth-grade Teacher - Frank School

Angelita J. Mannheimer, Reading Teacher - Nevitt School

John Patterson, Counselor - Frank School

Dora Quesada, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth grade Teacher -  
Tempe School District

Marcella Roig, President - Frank School PTO

Carol Ann Sammans, President - PTO

George Sanchez, President - Tempe School Board

Arsenia Vacasequa, Area Coordinator - Guadalupe  
Community Action Agency

Mildred Winemiller, ESSA Project Director - Tempe  
School District

Dr. Lawrence D. Woodford, Member - Tempe School Board

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