



“whatever is right and proper”

School Integration in West Virginia

A lesson from West Virginia Archives and History (www.wvculture.org/history)

Name _____ Date _____ Class Period _____

Instructions: The day following the historic 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling West Virginia Governor William C. Marland made clear his plans for integration in West Virginia. Read the newspaper article below and answer the following questions.

School Integration in West Virginia

W. Va. Compliance Pledged By Marland

Charleston Daily Mail
May 18, 1954

Gov. William C. Marland, state school officials and Negro leaders generally agreed today that West Virginia is not likely to experience any great difficulty in carrying out the Supreme Court's order outlawing segregation in public schools.

Their reactions to the high court ruling Monday, which voided a section of the West Virginia constitution requiring separate school systems for white and Negro pupils, indicated that the most concern was for problems "on the administrative level."

In a regular weekly press conference, Marland pledged the state to do "whatever is right and proper under the Supreme Court's decree."

"There are always problems any time you make such a broad change in policy as this decision represents," Marland said. "But I rather think the people of West Virginia will accept the decision and carry on the best they can."

Both the governor and state School Superintendent W. W. Trent, who attended the conference at Marland's invitation, said the adjustment in West Virginia will be largely an administrative problem, which might require the attention of the Legislature. "It seems to me that no special legislation will be needed except to take care of special problems that may arise at the administrative level," the governor said.

Marland said it will require a study of the court's ruling to determine when public schools will be opened to Negroes. The change from a divided to an integrated school system in the state will involve some 420,000 white pupils and about 26,000 Negro students.

Urge Good Will

State Board of Education President Charles A. Williamson of Charleston said that "since the West Virginia Board of Education was created by law and is guided by law, it is obvious that any new law or court decision directing its activities must be followed." He urged good will and understanding to make the change less disconcerting.

"Whatever adjustments lie ahead can best be made through good will and understanding with faith in the integrity of one another," Williamson said.

Dr. H. T. Elliott, Negro member of the state House of Delegates expressed similar sentiments. Elliott said that if persons act as sincere Christians, "we will have no difficulties in living together in the United States as one people." He said the court ruling was in line with a gradual relaxing of racial segregation and restraints that began "15 to 18 years" ago.

The Rev. Daniel M. Kirwin, superintendent of Roman Catholic parochial schools in the Wheeling Diocese, which covers all of West Virginia, said he is "very glad" the question has been settled. "Although the decision will give rise to many problems, particularly in the deep South, I do not see how a Christian nation could adopt any other policy," he said.

Better Education

J. W. Robinson, state supervisor of Negro Schools, said he feels that "Negro pupils in general will benefit with a better education" as a result of the historic decision. Robinson expressed "hearty agreement" with the ruling, and said he doesn't foresee "any trouble."

Beckley Attorney James H. Rowland Sr., Negro member of the state Board of Education, said he thinks "West Virginia will take the decision in stride and act in accordance with the mandate of the Supreme Court." Rowland added that he would have been "surprised" if the high court had not ruled against segregation.

Trent said he believed the decree to be "in keeping with the general principles of democracy as existing in this country where all people are politically free and equal."

No Force

The superintendent, into whose lap many of the administrative problems arising from the decision may fall, said he could for[e]see no "insurmountable obstacle" in changing the state school system.

Trent, who has headed West Virginia's public schools since 1932, said he did not "anticipate any condition that calls for force or legal action."

Trent was asked if well-qualified Negro teachers might be moved to white schools to replace instructors now holding low-grade emergency certificates.

The school superintendent replied that such transfers would be within the province of individual county boards of education. He added the boards probably would be guided by public sentiment in their areas.

Trent also could see little prospect of abandoning school buildings with elimination of the dual system even though in some sparsely settled areas fewer classrooms might be needed.

Eye Institute

School transportation costs might come down, the superintendent explained, but "other than that, I see little likelihood of change in the cost of school facilities."

Of 446,710 boys and girls enrolled in the state's schools in the 1952-53 school year, some 26,133 - or slightly less than 6 per cent - were Negroes.

The Supreme Court decision led to considerable speculation as to both immediate and long-range effects on the state level. One educator suggested it might mean a new era of service and development at West Virginia State College, Negro institution at Institute, Kanawha County.

"The location and physical facilities of West Virginia State are such that it might be difficult to assess the potential growth and development of this institution," he said.

Dr. Stephen J. Wright, president of Bluefield State College - the state's other Negro institution of higher learning - said he thought the court ruling "will make a great difference in the fight against Communism throughout the world."

He observed that "so many darker people tend not to believe our democratic preachments in the face of some of our practices."

Meanwhile, it was disclosed that the delegate assembly of the West Virginia Education Assn. has recommended that the WVEA merge with its Negro counterpart, the West Virginia State Teachers Assn.

Executive Secretary Phares Reeder of the WVEA said the action was passed without debate, and by an overwhelming majority, at the delegate assembly's May 8 meeting here in anticipation of the Supreme Court ruling.

Questions:

1. What did Governor William Marland and other state officials believe about integration in West Virginia schools?

2. What did Governor Marland pledge the State of West Virginia to do?

3. What did the following people say about integration?

J. W. Robinson, State Superintendent of Negro Schools

Beckley Attorney James H. Rowland, Sr.

W. W. Trent, State Superintendent of Schools

4. How many students were there in West Virginia in 1954? How many were African Americans?