

CHAPTER 10

THE MOST RACIST PLAN YET

Prior to the start of the 1971–72 school year MAEC assessed the impact it had had on school officials since its founding and the challenges it faced in the coming year. The organization had exacted certain concessions from the school superintendent and the school board. The former, for instance, had agreed in principle on viewing Mexican Americans as an identifiable minority group. This recognition, in turn, had led to the expansion of bilingual education programs, the development of ethnic studies curricula, and the hiring of more Mexican American administrators, faculty, and staff. Because of MAEC's involvement, local officials had begun to address the special linguistic and cultural needs of the Mexican American population in the schools.

The district's efforts to meet the Mexican American children's special needs were reflected in its proposed budget for the coming school year, in proposals for federal funding developed by school officials, and in the staffing and curricular decisions made by the board. A proposal to the Emergency School Assistance Program (ESAP) for federal funding in 1971–72 asked for \$9.5 million, of which \$4.9 million was to be applied directly to the needs of Mexican Americans. This money would fund four new school programs benefiting Mexican-origin children. A significant amount of monies, approximately \$1.6 million, was used to establish the 3-4-5 Club, a bilingual program for preschool children. The rest of the funds covered operating expenses for a variety of other programs, including a Spanish-language program for teachers (\$70,000), the Mexican-American Student

and Parent Involvement Project (\$291,229), and a credit course in Mexican American history in grades ten through twelve (\$33,000).¹

Because of MAEC's involvement, the district also expanded and strengthened a staff recruitment program and increased the number of Mexican American teachers and administrators. In the year before the boycott the district had four Mexican American principals and assistant principals. This number increased to six in 1970–71 and to thirteen the following year. The number of Mexican American teachers also increased from 1969 to 1971. The district had 181 Mexican American teachers in 1969–70, 260 in 1970–71, and 308 in 1971–72. The number of teachers was still small because of a limited supply of Mexican American teachers and competition between school districts.² Finally, in January, 1971, the superintendent hired Gonzalo Garza as one of six area superintendents. Garza was the first Mexican American in an important administrative position.³

MAEC had less success with the school board. Although some concessions were exacted from the board—e.g., MAEC encouraged the board to appeal the pairing decision to the courts and to include a few Mexican Americans in at least one desegregation committee—the board continued to operate on the basis of traditional black-white race relations. For integration purposes Mexican Americans were still viewed as members of the white race. Board members argued that they were legally bound to ignore Mexican Americans in the development of integration plans because of the court rulings. MAEC was convinced that the district could develop a more comprehensive desegregation plan that included Anglos.

In late June of 1971 MAEC's anxieties and frustrations increased when the HISD school board issued a new pairing plan and initiated busing for minority students but not Anglos. Although busing was needed and desired by Mexican American parents who could not afford to take their children to the new paired schools, many of them viewed it as another example of educational discrimination since the burden of desegregation and of busing was being borne solely by minorities. Failure to act equitably ushered in yet another round of militant activities. This chapter describes MAEC's responses to the new pairing plan issued during the summer of 1971.

HISD'S NEW PAIRING ORDER

On June 25, 1971, the HISD school board issued a desegregation plan that paired Mexican American children with blacks; no Anglos were included.⁴

Table 6. List of Paired Schools by Grades and Student Enrollment, 1971–72 School Year

<i>Schools Paired</i>	<i>Grades Covered</i>	<i>Black Enrollment</i>	<i>White Enrollment</i>
1. Atherton	1–2	304	609
Eliot	3–4	343	722
Scroggins	5–6	302	612
2. Nat Q. Henderson	1–3	273	390
Pugh	4–6	278	323
3. Pleasantville	4–6	400	151
Port Houston	1–3	355	227
4. Bruce	3–6	663	261
Anson Jones	1–2	106	488
5. Crawford	3–6	532	50
Sherman	1–2	370	432
6. Dodson	1–3	763	494
Lantrip	4–6	486	465
7. Ryan	1–2	460	341
Ross	5–6	610	254
Looscan	3–4	333	337
8. Chatham	4–6	940	100
Sanderson	1–3	976	109
9. Burrus	3–6	766	145
Roosevelt	1–2	390	131
10. Frost	4–6	1207	129
Rhoads	1–3	1040	116

Sources: Frank Davis, “HSD [*sic*] Elementary Pairing Plan Revealed,” *Houston Post*, June 25, 1971, n.pag.; “Garver Gives Details for Pairings of 22 Elementary Schools,” *Houston Chronicle*, June 25, 1971, sec. 1, p. 1.

This plan was in response to the district court’s May 24, 1971, ruling ordering HISD to implement desegregation based on school pairing. Under this plan twenty-two elementary schools would be paired. Approximately 19,448 out of an anticipated elementary school enrollment of 142,481 for the entire district would be involved in the pairing plans. The schools paired, the grades covered in each school, and the number of black and white (mostly Mexican American) students are listed in table 6.

The school district also called for busing of minority children to achieve integration. In July the superintendent presented several transportation plans to the board. According to him, no federal funds were provided for

transportation, and the U.S. court order was also silent on the issue. He estimated that between sixty thousand and ninety thousand dollars was needed for busing. His office, he noted, was in the process of developing proposals to fund the expanded desegregation program.

One of the proposals was to be sent to the Emergency School Assistance Program (ESAP) under the Office of Education.⁵ ESAP funds were available to school districts moving ahead with plans for court-ordered integration. Most of the funds would go to the twenty-two paired schools. Ironically, in order to receive federal monies the school district had to meet the federal government's requirements. One of these was that the district name a triethnic advisory committee to provide advice on the distribution of funds. Consequently, on August 6, HISD named a fifteen-member triethnic committee.⁶ The district called this group the Multi-Racial Advisory Committee (MRAC). An equal number of Anglo, black, and Mexican American individuals were appointed to the MRAC.⁷

MRAC reviewed over forty-one applications for federal grants totaling over \$9.4 million.⁸ The applications included a \$325,000 request for busing. All of the applications were approved and sent to the respective federal agencies for further action.⁹

The superintendent was not optimistic about receiving these funds. President Richard M. Nixon's plan to prohibit the use of federal monies for desegregation purposes in the latter part of July strengthened Superintendent Garver's argument.¹⁰ Busing funds thus would have to come from the school district. Board members asked the superintendent to draft a list of alternatives to cover these transportation costs, and he presented this list to them on July 13 at the board's regular meeting.¹¹ Opposition to the plans emerged, and no decision was made.¹² On August 7 the board voted to support the plan that bused students in paired schools if they resided more than one mile from school.¹³

MAEC RESPONDS

The school board's pairing and busing decisions upset many MAEC members and supporters. An activist member of the organization noted that the new pairing plan "is obviously the most racist yet, and totally destroys the 'neighborhood schools' concept, and will absolutely ruin the few existing bilingual programs." This person added, "Its effect on the Chicano communities will be drastic."¹⁴

A *Papel Chicano* writer noted the plan's failure to recognize Mexican

Americans as a distinct minority group and to include Anglos. The writer stated, “There is not even one predominantly Anglo school included in the pairing plan,” and further charged that the only “all white” school included in the original pairing plan—Poe Elementary—had been removed from the new list. Even the children of the black elite attending “all-black” MacGregor Elementary would not be involved in the pairing of the schools. The writer argued, “Only the Blacks and Chicanos in the poverty neighborhoods are the victims of the racist plans,” and concluded with a plea for just integration: “The entire community, not just one segment of it, must bear the burden of integration.”¹⁵

Abel Álvarez, an active MAEC member, called it the “worst blunder that the Administration of the HISD has to date made.” He argued that the cumulative impact of the varied rulings by the court and the new pairing plan by HISD could be the main cause of turmoil in Houston. “It is never too late to correct a wrong,” he further added. Álvarez also noted that while the “people of the Barrios” would have their day in court, Chicanos would resist the pairing plan. “We, the Mexican Americans, will no longer tolerate this double standard form of educational guide as set by a few individuals who care not one iota about the ethnic minorities, other than to throw them together and isolate them from the mainstream of life.”¹⁶

One of the more vociferous voices was Tomás García, a staff member of *Papel Chicano*. He argued that Connally’s ruling was “the Great Insult to the dignity of both minority cultures in Houston.” He asked, “Are we supposed to ignore the ignorance of bigotry and intolerance simply because the ‘great sage’ and ‘racist fool’ like Connally tells us that we don’t exist?” He explained that it was the Chicano community’s moral responsibility to resist and added: “If we fail our moral responsibilities, we are the fools. History will call us fools; our own children will call us that, and more.”¹⁷

MAEC’s official response reflected the sentiments of its members. The new chair, Romualdo M. Castillo, noted that the pairing plan was unjust because it only paired minority groups and did not include Anglos.¹⁸ He stated that MAEC would oppose the pairing decision “to the bitter end.”¹⁹

MAEC’s determination to fight the pairing plan was supplemented by the efforts of two relatively new youth-based organizations that had joined the group, the Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans (AAMA) and the Chicano Youth Council (CYC). MAEC continued to be comprised primarily of neighborhood representatives and a few barrio organizations. By the summer of 1971, however, Barrio-MAYO and UH-MAYO had both become relatively inactive. Barrio-MAYO had disbanded

in March, 1971, and UH-MAYO's activism declined because its membership, comprised primarily of university students, was on summer vacation.²⁰ AAMA and CYC replaced these two groups and continued the tradition of youth-based activism within MAEC. Both groups organized rallies, spoke before the board, and actively participated in additional MAEC activities.

The CYC was initially founded in the fall of 1970 during the boycott but had not been active since then. It resurfaced as a viable organization in January, 1971. Its purpose was to inform students of their rights in school and to promote curricular changes in education. "We need to know what kinds of courses . . . should be offered in the Mexican American high schools, what are offered and what are not offered and why," one of its members wrote. CYC was also engaged in organizing and recruitment activities as well as in writing a student rights manual.²¹

AAMA was founded in September, 1970, by a group of fifteen young, educated individuals who felt that few organizations were doing anything about community services and especially about the problems encountered by youths. These individuals decided to "do something." They bought an old, run-down house in the east side of town to use as a neighborhood center. They then repaired and renovated the house with funds collected through dances and the traditional *tamaladas* (tamale sales).²² In September, 1970, during the height of the boycott, AAMA opened the neighborhood center and developed a variety of recreational and cultural awareness activities for young people. The group was legally incorporated on November 23, 1970.²³

These organizations, then, had been involved in different types of community issues prior to the announcement of the pairing plan in late June. CYC, for the most part, focused its efforts on organizing in the secondary grades and on recruitment of new members. During its first year of existence AAMA provided community services. Both, however, increased their involvement in protest activity during the summer of 1971. On July 11, for instance, AAMA organized a unity rally at Settegast Park to expose the hypocrisy of the local school district. About three hundred Chicanos attended the Sunday rally as two of its spokespersons—Luis Cano and Ed López—spoke on racism and HISD. Two short plays were presented, and music was provided by a group called Santa Fe.²⁴

On July 15 AAMA and CYC made presentations before the school board. Carmen Medina, AAMA spokesperson, exposed the continued abuses of Mexican Americans in the present school system. Over thirty

Chicanos and Chicanas applauded her presentation, but board members failed to comment because, as one activist noted, they were “stunned.” Raymond Valdez, speaking on behalf of the CYC, accused HISD of “stagnancy” in failing to recognize Chicanos as a separate ethnic group with regard to the “racist pairing issue.” The board was suffering from a case of “extreme naiveté or convenient oversight,” he said. The school board ignored their concerns.²⁵

Although these new activist groups at times took action on their own, they were active members of MAEC. This organization, still comprised of various groups and individuals with different ideological orientations, continued to be the most important group directing protest activities against the local school district. In the summer of 1971 MAEC proposed a twofold strategy to deal with the discriminatory pairing and busing decisions: plan for another boycott and expand the base of support.

PLANNING THE BOYCOTT

During most of July, MAEC conducted a campaign to inform the Mexican American community about the unfair pairing plan. MAEC utilized the media—especially *Papel Chicano*—small meetings, rallies, dances, and fiestas to explain to residents of the barrios what HISD “was doing to them.” HISD, MAEC argued, continued to provide Chicanos with an unfair education. The federal district judge continued to rule that Mexican Americans were “non-existent.” An MAEC leader stated, “We must stand up and show these bigots that their comfort and convenience comes second to our children’s welfare.” This person continued: “If we sit and do nothing, as before, there is no chance of changing the infamous pairing plan before August 26. The due process of Judge Connally’s and the school board’s law has not given us justice in Houston as in the nation. The only solution now is to show solidarity in our case, to band together and to demand that we be given our rights under our federal Constitution.”²⁶

On July 30 MAEC called a general meeting to make final plans for the coming school year. The meeting was held at the Juan Marcos Presbyterian Church in the Northside barrio and was attended by representatives of ten barrios. At this meeting the general assembly voted to ask for yet another boycott. Unlike the previous year, the group elected to extend the boycott to all grades, not merely those schools that were being paired. The editor of *El Papel Chicano* supported the need to boycott the schools since they were being “ruled by men who sought their own gains.”²⁷ The deci-

sion to boycott the schools, however, was not unanimous; seven barrios favored the action, and three abstained. It is unclear who actually abstained or why, but it is possible that some questioned a boycott's usefulness.

Despite this vote, Romualdo Castillo, the chair, said that sentiments against the "black-brown" pairing were running high in the Mexican American neighborhoods. "We've met with the school board, with [Superintendent] Garver, with the biracial committee [appointed by Judge Connally to report on the progress of integration here]," he said. "People have taken more than they can take, and some have even reached the point of violence."²⁸

Castillo reported that boycott leaders were aiming at keeping six thousand students out of school. Abel Álvarez said that the boycott would continue all year if Anglos were not added to the pairing plan. He added that MAEC was planning huelga schools similar to those established in September. A rally to build support for the boycott was called for Sunday, August 15, at 2:30 P.M. at Moody Park.²⁹

Although the membership was ready and willing to boycott, Castillo stated that the action could be stopped if the district included Anglos with Mexican Americans and blacks in a triethnic pairing plan.³⁰ Inclusion of Anglos in the plan would send a message to Mexican Americans in the barrios that they were not being "used" when they were classified as whites in the pairing plan. Superintendent Garver responded later that there was no chance of adding Anglos to the pairing formula, although he acknowledged that the school board had the power under the court-ordered plan to add them "if it wants to." "All school board members have opposed all pairing and have fought it all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court to no avail," Garver said. "They can't very well enlarge the pairing [at the twenty-two schools to include whites] and be consistent with their opposition to pairing," he added, further noting that "the fact of the matter is, in this city and state, Mexican-Americans are white."³¹

In the latter statement the superintendent erred. U.S. district judge Jack Roberts of Austin, for instance, ruled in late June that Mexican Americans constituted a separate ethnic group and appointed a triethnic advisory committee to replace the previously biracial committee of Anglos and blacks in the Austin school district. This ruling followed a similar decision made in June, 1970, by U.S. district judge Woodrow Seals recognizing Mexican Americans as an "identifiable ethnic minority" in Corpus Christi and ordering triethnic integration. These as well as other federal decisions in the area of jury discrimination proved that in Texas, Mexican Americans

had been recognized as an identifiable group for some time. Only in Houston did the judge refuse to acknowledge the special status of Mexican Americans.³²

During the first two weeks of August, MAEC focused on establishing huelga schools and on preparing parents for the boycott. Efforts to organize huelga schools were initiated by a special MAEC Huelga School Committee (HSC) headed by Froilan Hernández. He explained that committee members were soliciting sites, teachers, and community help for the schools. He obtained commitments from Mexican American teachers in the district and from students at several universities. "We already have commitments from the MAYO chapters at the University of Texas who will send students to help teach at the beginning of the boycott and from students in San Antonio who have agreed to teach the first three weeks of the boycott to get things started," he reported in early August. He further stated that the committee had obtained three sites and was working on five more for the huelga schools. In addition committee members were planning on approaching the Catholic schools for use of their facilities for evening classes. "We can't anticipate how many students will walk out and want to enroll in the schools, so we will just come up with as many sites as we can," he explained.³³

Mexican American parents prepared themselves for the boycott in various ways. The experiences of Justine Villaseñor and Mrs. Antonio González, both PTA leaders in their schools, represented those who heeded MAEC's call for militant action. Villaseñor had three children enrolled in Scroggins Elementary.³⁴ She served on the Scroggins PTA executive board but had plans to resign to support the strike. She believed that the pairing plan was unfair to the poor since it left most schools in the more affluent areas unaffected and because it failed to include Anglos. "We feel that we are being used to 'integrate' Houston schools since they classify us as whites instead of as the ethnic minority which we are," she said. Despite the unjust nature of the desegregation plan, she was confident that the court order would be overruled. If not, then she thought it would be "only fair to have a triethnic pairing plan where each school would have a percentage of Anglos, Negroes and Mexican-Americans."³⁵ Mrs. González also served on the executive board of the PTA at Pugh School. She supported the strike plans because of the unfairness of pairing. "I am sure there are black parents who will join us on this. Many live in my neighborhood and they don't want their children bused away either," she stated.³⁶

The planning for the boycott occurred in the midst of rumors about an

empty treasury and dissension among MAEC members. Unlike the previous year, this time differences over strategy and goals emerged. These differences were apparent at a meeting held on August 13.

Two key positions were expressed at this meeting: those who supported integration and those who favored community control of schools. Gregory Salazar, former MAYO chair, at earlier community meetings had opposed the boycott and proposed community control as the solution to the problem of underachievement and as a road to empowerment. Most of MAEC's leaders now were receptive to the ideas of community control. Romualdo Castillo, MAEC chair, wanted further discussion of the issue of community control. He told the members that the subject of community control "hadn't been adequately discussed and wasn't understood by the membership." Otto Landron, first vice chair, agreed that as an alternative to integration community control was "a very good idea." He said, "I don't see where integration is going to help our children."³⁷

In addition to questioning the goal of integration, Landron was skeptical of the boycott. He was not alone in expressing this sentiment. Leonel Castillo, for instance, had publicly stated on August 6 that while supportive of the council's decision against HISD, he preferred to "avoid the boycott because of the tremendous costs involved." "I am very concerned with getting negotiations started with HISD," he added.³⁸

Romualdo Castillo, MAEC's chair, was opposed to the boycott but felt that "if it's the only way to bring some justice to our students and our people—it's what we have to do." Castillo, although expressing support for another boycott, hoped to avert the action.³⁹ In early August he met with school board president Dr. George Oser and area superintendent Gonzalo Garza, the highest-ranking Mexican American administrator in the district. The meeting failed to produce an agreement because of the district's failure to negotiate with MAEC.⁴⁰ The position of the district was firm that no changes would be made to the pairing plan. Superintendent Garver reported that he was not worried about a "massive" boycott by Mexican Americans, since even if all the Chicano students walked out, they would still be only a fraction of the total school-age population. More specifically, he said: "At the height of the boycott last year there were only 2,000 to 3,000 students out. Percentage-wise, the boycott was just a fraction. If the total Mexican American population stayed out, that would be only about 36,000 students." According to Garver, a boycott would merely be a minor inconvenience. However, he discouraged parents, whether Mexican Americans, blacks, or Anglos, from using their children

as “pawns,” stating, “We don’t like pairing either, but we recommend that people who don’t like it should go to court and test it—not use their children.”⁴¹

In some respects the consideration of community control as an alternative to integration was based on the community’s increasing disillusionment with the idea that schools would improve if Anglo students enrolled in them. Many people did not want Anglos in the Chicano schools, and many, especially former MAYO members and those in AAMA and CYC, felt that Chicanos and Chicanas should take control of those institutions that affected them the most. Community control of the schools, not integration, was the road to empowerment.⁴²

Most MAEC members rejected the community control arguments and supported the council’s original stand in favor of triethnic integration. A few of them even criticized the leadership for being receptive to the issue of community control. Abel Álvarez, in particular, charged that failure to dismiss the notion of community control of schools outright implied opposition to integration. Álvarez then added that he would leave the council and form a rival group to conduct the boycott if MAEC leaders canceled it. Chairman Castillo replied that only the membership, not the leaders, could call off the boycott. He also said that any member who wanted to had the right to leave the organization.⁴³

Differences of opinion over finances also emerged. This is especially true with respect to the huelga schools. Romualdo Castillo estimated that it would cost approximately two thousand dollars per week to maintain the eight to ten huelga schools. When he raised the issue of costs, some MAEC members argued that he was making a case against the boycott. “I’m not against it [the boycott]. “I’m just looking at both sides of the coin,” he explained.⁴⁴

Despite these differences, the council voted unanimously to call for a “total Chicano boycott” of the public schools. All fourteen barrio delegations attending the meeting voted in favor of the boycott. Many parents said that they would keep their children out of school even if there were no huelga schools, though Castillo stated that he expected to raise the necessary funds to operate the huelga schools. Although it was a unanimous vote, the organization was internally divided since a good portion of them questioned the goals or eventual success of the boycott.⁴⁵

On Sunday, August 15, MAEC held a rally at Moody Park; over two thousand individuals attended. Those at the afternoon event listened to speakers and were entertained by a play and a variety of singers. The key

speakers included Romualdo Castillo, chair of MAEC, and the Reverend C. Anderson Davis, chair of the local NAACP.⁴⁶ Davis was invited to the rally as part of MAEC's plan to broaden its support among African Americans, an issue that will be discussed further in the next section.

Castillo discussed the boycott's purpose. First, Chicanos were being considered "white" by the court and federal district judge Ben Connally had refused to recognize that Chicanos "exist except for the purpose that HISD has in mind." Second, HISD was pairing two "disadvantaged" minority groups. He criticized the idea that the pairing of blacks with Mexican Americans was called integration and reported that the district was prepared to spend \$325,000 to bus Chicanos and blacks into each other's schools. MAEC, he further argued, was not against integration if it included Anglos; HISD, however, "is using the Chicano and Black to keep from adding any gavacho [Anglo] schools to the pairing plan." He felt that the Chicano community must not allow school officials to get away with the "plot against la Raza." MAEC was willing to do anything, including calling for the firing of the superintendent, that would lead to fair integration. MAEC, however, had not been successful in getting justice. "We have met, we have bent over backwards with the school board, and its been to no avail," lamented Castillo. Although MAEC's stand from the start had been to avoid a boycott, there was no other choice now. The only option left was a full-scale boycott on the opening day of school.⁴⁷

Reverend Davis was extremely supportive of the boycott. He accused board members of using "brown people" to suit their case. He also proposed the formation of a coalition, stating, "To make sure this white man doesn't keep you divided there should be a black-brown coalition that should get rid of Garver if necessary and get rid of the school board if necessary." He hinted that if no accord could be reached between MAEC and the school board, blacks, if asked, might join the boycott.⁴⁸ The exuberant crowd enthusiastically received his comments.

EXPANDING BASE OF SUPPORT

In addition to informing and uniting the Mexican American community, MAEC sought to expand its base of support by cultivating the interest of federal officials, LULAC, and African Americans. MAEC leaders contacted and sought the support of federal officials, especially Martin G. Castillo and Armando Rodríguez. Castillo was chair of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunity for the Spanish-speaking, whereas Rodríguez was chief of the

Office for Spanish-speaking Affairs in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. MAEC requested financial and technical assistance in the preparation of a triethnic desegregation plan from the former and suggestions on school reforms from the latter. MAEC leaders occasionally met with other federal officials to explain and garner support for the boycott and the local community's struggle for legal recognition. Sometime in the summer of 1971 MAEC got a promise of support from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.⁴⁹

MAEC also sought LULAC's support. Several of MAEC's leaders, including Abraham Ramírez, Jr., and William Gutiérrez, were members of local LULAC chapter 60. During the previous year Gutiérrez had requested the support of the national LULAC for MAEC's struggle. The governing board of the national office agreed to support the organization's efforts to gain legal recognition as a minority and representation on the court-appointed biracial advisory committee but did not take a formal stand on the boycott.⁵⁰ Most state and local chapters, similar to the national office, did not take a formal stand on the boycott. In many ways LULAC was still committed to the ideology and tactics of the Mexican American Generation and shied away from direct action and mass mobilization. The only exception to this general practice was LULAC Council 60, one of Houston's strongest chapters, which grudgingly supported MAEC but only because Abraham Ramírez, Jr., was the organization's president.⁵¹ In early August, MAEC also got a pledge of support from Tony Bonilla, state president of LULAC, but did not obtain the official support of the statewide LULAC organization.⁵²

MAEC leaders likewise sought support from the African American community. Although blacks had initiated the integration lawsuit and opposed the district's actions, including the pairing plan, most of them were unaware of the Mexican American community's plight and its civil rights struggle. In mid-July, MAEC met with black educators to discuss common concerns. The meeting was sponsored by Texas Southern University's teacher training program. Dr. J. B. Jones, program director, and Mrs. Bobbie Rose, assistant director, acted as cochairs and discussed the purpose for calling the meeting: to gain an understanding of each other and to work together to improve the schools.⁵³

MAEC members Eduardo López, Leonel Castillo, Tomás García, Sister Gloria Gallardo, Mario Quiñones, and others explained the importance of the pairing plan to the African American educators. They pointed out that blacks had never included Chicanos and Chicanas in the integration plans

and that they had raised few objections to the school board. African American educators responded that they knew “little about them [Mexican Americans].” Most contended that they had never heard of Mexican Americans or Chicanos until the previous year. They also charged that blacks had started the movement for civil rights and that Chicanos were “Johnny or Poncho come lately.” Because of poor history books, blacks had not learned that for the past one hundred years Chicanos had been fighting for their rights.⁵⁴

In their assessment of the meeting MAEC leaders noted that understanding between both groups would take a lot of effort. At this meeting, one activist noted, blacks did not even admit that the pairing plan was unjust, though the plan was “just as unjust to the concept of integration that they [blacks] have fought so long and so hard for.” MAEC also reached another conclusion about the meeting: “The Chicanos were there ready to talk seriously but one must wonder whether these educators were or not actually serious in their attempts to communicate or whether they are just fulfilling federal regulations because they have been told they must.” Most felt that it was not a fruitful meeting and that “the teachers, principals, and administrators in schools . . . are far too ‘brainwashed’ into supporting the past methods of education to change much.”⁵⁵

MAEC was more successful with civil rights leaders. In that same month MAEC leaders met with Rev. C. Anderson Davis, the chairperson of the local NAACP chapter, and state representative Curtis Graves. Both of these individuals pledged their support for the boycott and promised to work more closely together on this issue.⁵⁶

During the month of August, Davis took a more active role in MAEC’s activities. In early August, MAEC asked Davis to attend a meeting with Houston school district officials several days before school began to discuss ways of resolving the controversy over the school pairing of two minority groups. In the meantime MAEC made final plans to boycott the schools.⁵⁷ In mid-August, MAEC invited Davis to be a speaker at its August 15 rally; after the rally and as a follow-up to his comments, MAEC leaders asked Davis to work with them on the boycott.⁵⁸ Davis agreed to a closed-door meeting to discuss the nature of his support. At this meeting, held on Saturday, August 21, 1971, Davis and Castillo agreed to issue a statement to the press seeking a joint meeting with school officials “to see if some kind of agreement can be worked out to avoid a boycott.”⁵⁹ MAEC repeated its support for a boycott when school began on Thursday, and the NAACP threatened to join. Their joint statement accused local officials of

“sticking with the pairing minimum handed down by the federal court.” Davis said, “The school district has not gone as far as it can go. The court only said they couldn’t go below this pairing in its ruling but you can go above it.” Davis also reported that the two groups had decided “to cooperate not only in the boycott, should it come off, but also in other endeavors.” He did not elaborate on what the other endeavors might be.⁶⁰

The statements of support from the NAACP, however, were only rhetorical. Once the boycott began, neither the NAACP nor any other black group provided material or financial assistance. The political crisis over the firing of Superintendent Garver by the board probably contributed to the lack of support.⁶¹

CONCLUSION

During the summer of 1971 local officials continued to view Mexican Americans as white. This was reflected in the new integration plan they developed in June of that year. Under this plan predominantly Mexican American schools would be paired with predominantly African American schools. MAEC committed itself to opposing this latest pairing plan and to increasing its base of support. Of particular importance was the support of African American political leaders, especially Reverend Davis, the chair of the local NAACP. Davis threatened to join the boycott if no progress was made in developing a just integration plan that included Anglos. The talk of a possible and massive boycott of the schools by two minority groups, however, had no significant impact on HISD. During the two weeks prior to the opening of school in late August, the board made plans to conduct an orderly and efficient desegregation of the schools based on the pairing of schools. When the schools opened on August 26, MAEC once again took to the streets and boycotted them, the third time in a span of two years.