

BLACK SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS IN THE DEEP SOUTH

A Report to the Southern Education Foundation, April, 1970

by

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Distributed by

Southern Education Foundation, Inc.
811 Cypress Street, N.E.
Atlanta, Georgia

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Mack H. Jones, Professor of Political Science at Atlanta University, was asked by the Southern Education Foundation to make a survey of Black school board members in the South. The attached report is a summary of his findings and his recommendations to the Foundation. We feel that Dr. Jones has done an interesting piece of work and has made thoughtful and helpful observations about how the new Black school board members may be supported. We are glad to share this report with a number of interested persons.

John A. Griffin
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Southern Education Foundation

To a considerable extent, the public school systems of the South are creations of Black elected officials who served during the Reconstruction era. However, when Reconstruction was aborted the sons of the Confederacy quickly transformed the same school systems into one of the primary vehicles for legitimating and maintaining the subjugation of Blacks in the South. Although schools serving Black communities were staffed almost exclusively by Blacks, whites maintained dominance by monopolizing the positions on policymaking bodies, i.e., school boards and boards of education. Blacks had little or no voice in determining the functions of public schools nor the structures through which these functions would be performed.

After a long hiatus, from the turn of the present century to the 1960's, Black Americans have begun to compete successfully for positions on bodies which make public education policies. At least ninety Black men and women hold positions on such bodies in the eleven states of the old Confederacy. In a sense these persons are expected to pick up where their predecessors of the Reconstruction era left off. They are expected to use their positions to promote changes in both the functions and structures of southern school systems which will facilitate the quest for equal opportunity. In short, newly elected Black school board members are looked upon as change agents, as persons with special responsibilities to question the efficacy of

the present order and to pose novel alternative solutions. This report is meant to be a tentative assessment of Black school board members in the light of such expectations and a recommendatory document suggesting ways in which a foundation may assist them in doing so.

This report attempts to identify the Black school board members and the socio-economic and political characteristics of the communities from which they come, to ascertain the nature of their relations with their white colleagues, and to assess their involvement in, and impact upon, the deliberations and policy outcomes of their respective bodies. A set of recommendations for possible foundation involvement based upon information obtained in pursuing answers to the foregoing is presented at the end of the text. Finally, an appendix lists communities which may be especially auspicious for foundation sponsored pilot projects.

The data for this report were gathered during the fall of 1968 and the first nine months of 1969 through mail-in questionnaires followed up by personal interviews with board members. The author traveled to each of the states covered by the report visiting the officeholders in their communities. In addition to the questionnaires and interviews, official records of a number of school boards were analyzed and Black newspapers serving the communities involved were monitored during the period covered by this study.

A total of seventy-five Black school board members had been identified in the states of the Old Confederacy when the field work was done.¹ For unexplained reasons, cooperation was not forthcoming from Arkansas which had a total of thirty-three Black school board members. Thus, this report covers only the forty-one officeholders in the remaining states.

II

We discuss in this section the socio-economic and political conditions of the communities from which Black board members are chosen, the personal characteristics of Black board members, the nature of the relationships between Black board members and their white counterparts, and participation of Black officials in deliberations of their respective bodies. Any such discussion must be prefaced by the sobering observation that, for the most part, black school board members are often a lonely minority of one or two on an indifferent if not clearly hostile board. For example, when the data were gathered, not a single board had a Black majority. Since that time, however, the school board in Greene County, Alabama, has come under Black control. Moreover, of the twenty-nine boards having Black members, only six had more than one. The racial breakdown on these six was Macon County, Alabama, two of five; Northeast Independent Harris County, Texas, two of seven; Atlanta, Georgia, two of nine; Wilkinson County, Mississippi, two of five; and Beaufort County, South Carolina, two of nine.²

A majority of Black school board members are elected from the predominantly Black areas of the rural South. Twenty-one of the 29 school boards having Black representation are located in the "Black Belt" counties of Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, and the Carolinas. With few exceptions they are elected from voting districts having Black majorities. Only in Texas where urban communities choose school board members in at-large elections is the pattern altered significantly, although both New Orleans, Louisiana, and Durham, North Carolina, have also chosen a Black board member in at-large elections.

For the most part the rural constituencies represented by Black officials have been among the most racially oppressive areas in the country. As the voter registration figures on Table 1 indicate, prior to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 Black political participation in these areas was practically nil. Thus Black school board members often find themselves trying to function as change agents in the communities where local traditions denied the legitimacy of Black participation and where the communities relented only after being forced to do so by federal statute.

Turning to personal characteristics, one of the most significant factors is the relatively high level of formal education acquired by Black board members.³ Two-thirds have some college training and almost one-half have earned at least two degrees. The doctorate is held by twenty percent. Chronologically, the board members may be appropriately described as mature, with 42 percent being fifty years of age or above

Table 1

SELECTED STATISTICS ON BLACK BELT COUNTIES HAVING
BLACK REPRESENTATION ON SCHOOL BOARDS

County	Percent Black	Percent Rural	PVABR pre '65 ¹	PVABR '67 ²	Blacks on School Board
<u>Alabama</u>					
Macon	83.4	86.7	29.3	45.3	2
Sumpter	76.3	85.4	5.5	50.5	1
Greene	81.3	79.5	5.5	79.0	3
<u>Georgia</u>					
Hancock	74.7	100.0	24.0	64.3	1
<u>Louisiana</u>					
E. Carroll	61.0	60.0	3.0	38.9	1
St. James	49.3	82.2	64.0	85.4	1
Iberville	48.8	74.3	42.1	89.4	1
W. Feliciana	66.1	100.0	1.9	98.2	3
Madison	64.8	42.8	5.7	74.5	2
<u>Mississippi</u>					
Benton	46.7	100.0	3.9	83.8	1
Wilkinson	71.2	100.0	(3)	80.1	2
Jefferson	75.4	100.0	(3)	58.2	1
Claiborne	76.0	73.6	0.7	77.9	1
Holmes	71.9	79.9	0.2	72.2	1
<u>South Carolina</u>					
Beaufort	38.4	85.7	48.3	42.2	2

¹Percent of voting age Blacks registered prior to 1965 Voting Rights Act

²Percent of voting age Blacks registered as of 1967

³No pre-Act figures are available for these counties. However, Black participation in Wilkinson and Jefferson Counties, Mississippi, prior to 1965 was extremely limited.

Sources of data: The figures were either taken or computed from data found in Political Participation, A Report of U. S. Civil Rights Commission; County and City Data Book, 1967; Voter Registration in the South, Summer 1968, VEP, Southern Regional Council.

while 23 percent are thirty-five and under. Males outnumber females by almost three to one, although female members seem to be decidedly more aggressive. With these brief comments about personal characteristics behind us we may turn our attention to the involvement of our subjects in the deliberations of their bodies. Such involvement may be analyzed on two levels, in terms of formal contacts and procedures on the one hand, and informal ones on the other.

Official records of school board meetings are usually quite general containing, at best, a cursory record of the proceedings and at worst a misleading summary. Nevertheless by supplementing official sources with content analyses of newspapers and personal interviews of officeholders and their constituents, it is possible to discuss the role of Black board members in the formal processes. On the whole, Black school board members appear to be quite active in formal deliberations speaking out and arguing for their constituents constituents when they feel it is necessary to do so; and in the process dispelling any notions that they would accept subservient roles consistent with the southern political cultural and reminiscent of roles played by Blacks on the bi-racial committees of the '50's. Perhaps surprisingly, their white counterparts seem to accept their presence as a fact of life and extend to them the usual courtesy, deference, and respect which one expects among elected officials. However, there is evidence that a few Black board members in Louisiana and Mississippi are not extended minimum courtesies.

Committee assignments are one indicator of involvement in formal deliberations. The majority of respondents feel that committee assignments were made in a fair and equitable manner, although members on at least two boards report deliberate slights. On these boards Blacks are deliberately not given committee assignments and are kept in the dark on board policy. One member had never seen any budget documents and had no idea of such elementary things as salary scales, total expenditures and receipts. On another board the white chairman resorted to ad hoc committee assignments and Blacks were given only trivial ones.

In the majority of cases where committee assignments seem to be dispensed in an equitable fashion, assignments run the gamut with no indication that Black members are deliberately steered toward or away from particular committees.⁴ A total of sixteen committees are listed with building being the only one to appear with any frequency, five times. Finance/budget appears thrice.

As students of government have long observed, contacts and procedures outside formal political structures are as important as formal ones. Indeed, in dealing with relatively small deliberative bodies formal meetings are often merely pro forma ratification of decisions reached beforehand. (This problem had reached such alarming proportions that some states outlawed such informal meetings.) For that reason it may be especially enlightening to look at the informal involvement of Black board members. Their level of involvement in informal procedures

appears to be the converse of their participation in formal deliberations. Only five Black board members consider themselves to be part of an informal group within their respective bodies. Only in a few urban districts in Texas did board members report running for office as a part of an interracial ticket. Thus, for the most part they assume office without any alliances, and except in those instances where Black members find themselves cast in the role of swing man between competing white factions, they are isolated figures. More than half of the board members interviewed report that they have reasons to believe that white members meet in their absence and decide policy matters before coming to formal meetings. This suggests that the deference given Black officials during formal proceedings should not be taken to mean that they are accepted by their white colleagues as co-equal decision-makers.

III

While Black school board members have participated on an equal basis in formal deliberations, they have not been especially aggressive in introducing new programs. As a matter of fact reticent seems to be the best description. Moreover, no innovation which could be classified even remotely as radical can be attributed to them. All efforts seem to be devoted more toward fulfilling the promise of the extant creed of secondary education than toward developing an alternate philosophy. Established policies are given little or no critical attention. Primary consideration is given to insuring that Blacks receive the same

payoffs as whites while the more profound question of the quality of the payoffs goes begging.

For example, when asked what were the most important decisions they had to make, fifty percent of those interviewed cited decisions relating either to integrating the schools or achieving parity between Black and white schools. Among the other fifty percent, 77 percent cited financial issues and 33 percent referred to personnel policy matters. Absolutely no one mentioned innovations in basic philosophy or curricula. Except for the oft-repeated theme of Black studies there was no discussion of a special role for educational institutions in the development of Black communities.

The uncritical acceptance of present educational philosophy is demonstrated further by the policy initiatives of our respondents. Table 2 lists the initiatives as reported by the officeholders themselves. As a quick glance reveals, none of them is at all radical and only three, those calling for free kindergarten and lunch for needy children and the one which established free transportation for students in one Louisiana parish to commute daily to the nearby Black state university, suggest even a mild departure from the usual.

Similarly, the respondents response to the question "What do you consider your most important accomplishment to date as a school board member?" demonstrates their attachment to the present system of education. These responses, listed in Table 3, show very little which is novel. It should be kept in mind, of course, that most of the Black board members have

Table 2

MEASURES INTRODUCED BY BLACK BOARD MEMBERS INTERVIEWED

1. Honors program in Black schools
 2. New schools in inner city
 3. Resolution to participate in Title V programs
 4. Free transportation for students attending nearby state college
 5. To hire particular person as principal in Black school
 6. Build home for janitor on campus of Black high school
 7. Suggested special meeting to discuss teacher assignments during hassle over integration of faculty
 8. Integration plan for school district
 9. Raise salary scale for nonprofessionals
 10. Free lunch for all children of needy families
 11. Consolidation of schools in the county
 12. Punishment regulations for Black incorrigibles be the same as those for white incorrigibles
 13. Free kindergarten for needy families
 14. That Black high school be brought up to accreditation standards
 15. Equalization of curriculum at Black and white school
 16. Football team at Black school
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served only a short period of time and also that the paucity of their accomplishments is just as much a function of white intransigence as it is the provincial outlook of Black officeholders.

IV

So far we have discussed the personal qualities of Black school board members, the political configurations of communities from whence they come, their involvement in and impact upon the decision-making process of their respective boards, and their self-perceptions regarding their accomplishments. It remains for us to relate these and other concerns to certain basic sys-

Table 3

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF BLACK BOARD MEMBERS*

1. Cracking 21-year-old power structure by becoming first 'outsider' elected to the school board
2. Having the board apply for Title V funds
3. Guarantees that personnel would not be lost because of integration
4. Preventing building of new high school in ghetto area
5. Speeding integration
6. Successful in getting some teachers back to work who had been dismissed for political reasons
7. School busses to take students to university
8. Projecting balanced point of view in meetings
9. Winning approval of introduction of units dealing with the Black experience in high school curriculum
10. Helping pass sales tax to fund teachers' pay raise
11. Having resolution on pregnancy apply to all students, Black and white
12. Being the swing man in electing president of the board
13. Being an effective agent⁴¹ between professionals and the board
14. Teachers' pay raise
15. Gaining respect for Black teachers
16. Equalizing pay scales for Black and white teachers
17. Progress on staff and pupil desegregation
18. Possessing Black face and articulating needs of Black community
19. Getting board to recognize and listen to a group of Black citizens
20. Creating better understanding between the races
21. Getting whites to recognize that there are Blacks who think and are interested in the total welfare
22. Getting kindergarten for needy children
23. Having board place an account with Black bank
24. Having Memorial Day established as an official holiday
25. Having Negro history included in the curriculum
26. More Blacks in principalships and administrative positions

*These are the accomplishments listed by the members themselves. Some members listed more than one while others said they had no major accomplishments to report.

temic factors of the southern political process, for these factors are of considerable importance in structuring the role

of Black school board members. It has already been noted that Black board members tend to be elected from predominantly Black districts in the rural south. These areas are among the most provincial ones in the country. Consequently, there is little support for innovation in general, let alone matters involving race. Neither white officeholders nor other white power figures have shown an inclination to support fundamental changes designed to make the schools more responsive to the needs of Black communities.

Similarly, perhaps partially due to the vulnerability of the Black community to white power, Black community leaders have also exhibited a lack of interest in innovative educational policies. Moreover, one of the common complaints of Black board members is the lack of support and involvement of the Black community in issues involving public education. (This, of course, is by no means limited to the Black community.) Criticism is especially acerbic regarding the lack of involvement of Black professionals, particularly principals and teachers. A number of board members categorically denounce the latter two with derisive epithets and classify them more as liabilities and not as assets. And as stated earlier, board members themselves have been distinguished neither by their aggressiveness nor innovative tendencies. All of this suggests, however, that even if Black school board members were more imaginative there is little reason to believe that their impact on policy outcomes would be measurably different.

There are signs which suggest that the estrangement of Black professionals, particularly principals and teachers, from the politics of education may be diminishing. Some board members as well as other laymen suggested to the author that efforts to eliminate dual school systems, carrying with them implied threats to teachers and principals, may be incentive enough to persuade them to seek alliances with board members and other political activists whom the professionals have studiously avoided in the past. If such alliances should in fact develop, the situational context in which Black board members are obliged to function would be changed significantly.

One final system variable worth noting is the process through which Black nominees for the school board are recruited. The common procedure in the rural South is for some community-wide organization, a voters' league or some similar body, to serve as a clearing house for would-be nominees. Such organizations are usually controlled by older and more cautious community leaders. They are more inclined to support solid community types with broad public appeal. Persons with radical tendencies seldom get on the ballot and when they do they are not likely to be successful.⁵ In short, the recruiting process works against radical, innovative persons.

Recommendations

When board members were interviewed they were asked what, if anything, a foundation such as the Southern Education Foundation

could do to help them fulfill their mission, however they saw it, as Black school board members. A raw summation of their responses appears in Table 4.

Table 4

BOARD MEMBERS' SUGGESTIONS FOR FOUNDATION INVOLVEMENT

1. Promote program to educate white members on the realities of life and their responsibilities as board members
2. Promoting the idea of community schools with adequate facilities including day care centers to operate between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m.
3. Get parents involved in school affairs
4. My school board is interested in including the Black perspective, but we need help in getting the necessary information.
5. Developing a free lunch program for the poor
6. Obtaining equal facilities and curriculum in Black school
7. Obtaining more literature on duties and functions of school boards
8. Providing assistance in attending professional meetings
9. I haven't learned enough to know what I need. A research arm would be helpful.
10. Problem is integration. We need research in attitudes regarding things like teacher crossover.
11. If board complies with HEW nothing else is needed.
12. Help in politicizing the community
13. Any assistance should go to more depressed areas (respondent comes from an urban district)
14. Help in getting more Black professionals involved

Based upon our findings and the recommendations of board members themselves we now proceed to offer our recommendations for possible foundation involvement. Any such recommendations must flow from a particular frame of reference, or perhaps more precisely, a particular normative interpretation of (1) the efficacy of present educational functions and the structures through which they are performed relative to Black people;

(2) the need to change these structures and/or functions; the extent to which within the southern cultural context special structures are needed to meet the needs of Black children; (3) the role of school board members in general and Black board members in particular in developing alternative functions and structures; and (4) the extent to which foundations should become involved in actively pushing social change at the local level. One might believe the Black board members should be primarily concerned with achieving equal access for Blacks to present structures; or that their primary responsibility should be developing new structures for dealing with the special problems of Black children; or still further one might subscribe to the view that Black school board members should use their position while it is still novel and not identified with the status quo to stimulate basic changes in the entire educational process. After considerable reflection, the author has concluded that the Black school board member must strive to do all three: work to achieve parity within present structures; develop new structures to carry out new functions relating particularly to Black children; and work to overhaul the present educational system. The following recommendations flow from that perspective.

Politicization of Black community regarding the school board and its functions

In visiting the various communities one is struck by the lack of importance attached to the school board and its members. Town people are much more likely to be able to identify

and discuss the role of other local officials, such as city councilmen or county commissioners. In the same vein, office-holders themselves show a similar feeling regarding the office. A number of board members report that they decided to run for the school board only after their aspirations for other positions have been thwarted. Given the fact that most school boards without regard to ethnic composition seem to be little more than appendages of the superintendent such attitudes are understandable. However, if there are to be significant changes in the education process, the situation must be reversed. To do so it will be necessary to politicize the whole issue of education and the school board. Community people, parents and other taxpayers, must be sensitized so that they understand that, first of all, educational policies of their particular communities are to be made by their school boards as the people's representatives and that these policies are to be judged by how well they prepare their children to lead useful lives.

Such politicization would involve a number of related efforts. The Foundation should try to serve as a catalyst rather than assume responsibility for direct implementation. A politicization program would involve the following:

1. Organizing community groups for discussion of the functions and responsibilities of school board members.
2. Recruitment of potential candidates from persons showing an understanding of the community problems and who show an inclination to pursue problems in non-traditional ways.
3. Establishing systematic monitoring programs for observing and reporting school board developments to the community. Some communities

already have some variant of this, but the monitoring and reporting to the community are usually done by board members themselves. Politicization would be better served by a more objective monitor.

Obviously the particulars for such a politicization program would have to be worked out according to the idiosyncratic features of the community in question. The important thing is to rivet the attention of the community people as participants on the school board. In communities where there are Black colleges the entire program may be worked out in conjunction with activist students and faculty. In other areas, particularly in rural areas where other community programs are being carried out by other agencies (Southern Co-ops, SEDFRE, VEP Service Centers, etc.) joint programs may be established. In other cases the Foundation may wish simply to contact local people and assist them in developing a politicization.

Greater cooperation among principals, faculty, and community

A necessary companion to any attempt to politicize local school communities is an effort to bring together principals, teachers, and community people as a common force for change. Essentially, the lack of involvement of Black principals and teachers appears to be a function of their fear of losing the favor of white structures. This is, of course, a common feature of Black-white relations. The Foundation might take the lead in calling the three groups together, perhaps on a regional basis, for a discussion of their problems. Given the present

concern of Black principals and teachers over the possibility of losing their jobs as a result of integration, administrators and teachers may be more favorably disposed toward such joint efforts than they have been in the past.

Interpreting the educational needs of black community to white board members and other white community leaders

One of the more impressive board members covered by this survey listed "educating white board members" as the item of top priority. No matter what is done in terms of politicizing the Black community, except in those areas where Blacks have majority control of the school board, no substantial changes can be effected without the cooperation of the white community. Thus, it is imperative that steps be taken to identify and interpret educational needs of Black children in a fashion understandable to whites. There is a need to move away from the global universal statements of educational needs of Black children and to begin to make particular statements for particular communities. Assuming seriousness of purpose on the part of at least some elements in the white community such localized statements might induce cooperation.

The Foundation may wish to select one or two communities for pilot projects and commission studies designed to delineate the educational problems of the Black scholastics in the area. Recommendations based upon the study could then be presented to the school board.

Community control

During my travels in the South, I found no full-fledged community control movement. However, given the rather dismal state of the education of Black children, every rational alternative ought to be explored. The Foundation may wish to make a pilot grant should an indigenous group wish to experiment with such a program.

The foregoing recommendations do not call so much for assisting Black school board members as they do building a fire under all incumbents by broadening the scope of conflict. Black board members are part of an ongoing political process whose internal dynamics are such that basic changes are not likely unless the scope of the conflict is changed by bringing new forces into the contest. Once the conflict is broadened, board members, especially Black ones, may not feel so tightly bound to existing functions and structures. Persons elected from more highly politicized communities would likely assume office with a new and different sense of priorities based upon a differently perceived clientele.

Although politicization is by far the most pressing need, school board members could also profit from more personal assistance. In that vein we offer the following recommendations.

Interpretation of Federal programs in local language

Many school board members do not have a working understanding of the various Federal statutes dealing with aid to

education. The Foundation might wish to have the various programs interpreted in language readily understood in local communities. Efforts should be made to suggest which programs might be especially useful in given communities.

Description and evaluation of present use of funds

In many communities where school boards are receiving Federal monies for special programs lay people and board members have only a limited understanding of what is being done with the money. (For example, I was told that one school district had purchased a bulldozer with money earmarked for landscaping.) The Foundation may wish to assist community organizations in establishing procedures for evaluating the use of such funds.

Staff assistance for board members

Although most Black board members are sufficiently informed, a small number do not have sufficient basic information to allow them to perform effectively within the status quo, let alone as radical change agents. We have already mentioned that in a few areas board members know absolutely nothing about financial matters including ordinary things like pay scales. Such board members could use staff assistance in devising ways to overcome such obstacles.

Also some board members are not conversant with the nuances of the statutes and regulations within which their boards operate. The Foundation might wish to establish a program to provide

staff assistance to board members who express interest in understanding these processes more fully. Staff assistance may be organized in a number of ways. I recommend a roving consultant who would visit board members in their individual communities on a personal basis to discuss their problem and suggest solutions on an individualized basis. Area conferences and workshops are not recommended. Elected officials have been saturated with them.

A Concluding Note

Over the last decade or so the educational problems of Black children in the South have been discussed almost exclusively within the constraints of the integrationism-segregation argument. In the process, the real problems of Black scholastics have been obfuscated by the heat generated by this controversy while we waited in vain for that heat to be converted into illumination. To many, including professional educators, integrationism has become something of an ideology, a world view, which is seen as a credo invested with sufficient substance to solve the educational problems of Black children in the South. However, even the most cursory examination of schools in areas where integration has been accepted reveals information which questions whether integrationism is a necessary, not to mention sufficient, condition for dealing with the problems of Black children. Thus, it is imperative that something be done to precipitate a discussion of these problems in a fashion

which transcends the integrationism-segregation debate. What is needed is a serious attempt to identify the several dimensions of the problem and pose alternative solutions in terms unencumbered by ideological presuppositions. Such a development might prove to be an important turning point in Black education in the South. The Foundation could perform a valuable service by commissioning such a study.

NOTES

¹Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Georgia, South Carolina, Texas, North Carolina, Virginia, Florida.

²Since the survey was made the Atlanta School Board now has 3 out of 9 Black school board members.

³It may be appropriate to note here that the level of formal training does not necessarily relate to board members' effectiveness as a change agent. Indeed, in the author's estimation, one of the most impressive board members is a high school dropout who supplements the family income by working as a cook.

4

Committee assignments reported were Buildings, Athletics, Consolidation, Policy, Personnel, Cafeteria, Finance, Scholarship, Superintendent Selection, Transportation, Purchase Land, Public Relations, Executive, Professional Negotiations, and Budget.

⁵The 1969 elections in Atlanta, Georgia, were the only ones I have been able to identify in which Black candidates campaigned on what might be called a radical platform. Both "radical" candidates lost while three more moderate Black candidates were successful.

⁶Since this survey was completed Macon County has appointed a Black Superintendent.

Appendix A

Promising Communities

In deciding which communities are more auspicious for foundation involvement a number of factors must be taken into account. The level of politicization, quality and commitment of local Black leadership, attitudes of whites, and the economic base of the community are just a few of the many variables to be considered. Below are some communities which appear to be promising places for efforts such as those recommended.

Madison Parish, Louisiana

Due to the high degree of politicization already obtained in the Black community, this parish is especially suited for pilot involvement. Historically, a hotbed of Klan activity, this area which is located across the Mississippi River from Vicksburg has had a strong locally directed Black liberation movement for a number of years. There are two Black citizens on the school board, and the Town Marshall of Tallulah, the parish seat, is a strong-willed Black man who was the leader of Black protest activity in the parish. Plans are underway to win control of a majority of the county offices by 1972.

Tallulah is one of the few small urban communities in the "Black Belt" where Blacks have open access to practically all public facilities and where ordinary Black citizens feel free to use them, and in fact do so.

Black citizens in Madison Parish have been supplementing traditional civil rights activities with efforts geared toward economic development. A viable credit union and a consumer co-op are now operating and plans for other community owned facilities are being studied.

West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana

Like Madison, this parish has a Black majority, although the population majority has not been converted into a political majority. There is a high degree of politicization in West Feliciana Parish especially in the rural wards. Somewhat uncharacteristically, the rural areas are more politicized than the parish seat, St. Francisville.

The Parish is only 35 miles from Southern University in Baton Rouge presenting the ideal setting for some joint foundation-Black college involvement.

Claiborne and Jefferson County, Mississippi

Blacks in these two adjacent counties are highly organized, although mass politicization seems to be less intense than in the two Louisiana parishes. Led by Charles Evers they have moved to share power with the whites in the area. Blacks have representation on both school boards and county boards of supervisors. Black control of these bodies within four years is a distinct possibility.

Northeast Independent School District Harris County, Texas

Of all the urban school districts with Black board members, this one seems to be the most promising. Located in the northeastern tip of Houston, it includes a sprawling rural appearing,

poorly serviced Black community called Settegast which was politicized around the issue of public schools by a student-led boycott of schools in 1967. The presence of Blacks on the school board is directly attributable to the student movement. Indeed, one of the Black board members was recruited by the student organization. This is also one of the few instances where Blacks and whites ran on a coalition ticket.

Macon County, Alabama

The fact that Macon is more than 80 percent Black and has one of the most highly educated Black communities in the country recommend it as a promising community for pilot involvement even though the disposition of its Black school board members has left something to be desired.