

C O P Y

June 24, 1954

Mr. Kelly M. Alexander, President
N. C. State Conference of N.A.A.C.P. Branches
323 South Brevard Street
Charlotte, North Carolina

Dear Mr. Alexander:

I acknowledge the receipt of your letter of June 14 with reference to the decision of the Supreme Court regarding segregation in public schools, which I have carefully read.

I am not a member of the State Board of Education; however, I wish to make it quite clear that I am in thorough agreement with the announcement made by the State Board of Education some time ago that the schools in North Carolina will open in September on the same basis upon which they have been operating.

I cannot agree that the questions and problems arising from the decision of the Supreme Court are as simple or as easy to solve as you indicated in your letter. I do not think the State Board of Education should or will reconsider its announcement with reference to the opening of the schools next fall.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours,

William B. Umstead

WBU:blc

cc: Members of the State Board of Education

C O P Y

Dear Mr. Umstead:

On June 4, 1954, the Charlotte Observer carried a news item reporting the Board of Education has unanimously agreed to operate the North Carolina schools just as they have been operated in the past.

May I take this opportunity to remind you that the May 17 decision of the United States Supreme Court announced a principle of constitutional law in clear and unmistakable terms that segregated public schools are violative of the Constitution of the United States. It seems to us that this places upon our highest State officials a solemn duty of making immediate plans to conform the school system of North Carolina to the principle enunciated by the Supreme Court.

There are, of course, a few problems involved in the adoption and implementation of a statewide plan of desegregation of the public schools as is now required by the Supreme Court's decision. The administrative problems involved in this are relatively easy of solution. This would merely mean that some system would be adopted for the division of the school system among the children of public school age in the state on a fair and equitable basis and without regard to race and color.

The more complex problem which the Supreme Court decision raises is the question of the adaption of the people of the State to a new way of life since we have all been reared in a segregated system. Now we are called upon to change that system into an integrated one, insofar as one of our largest and most important public institutions are concerned--our public schools.

We do not feel that this presents any overwhelming difficulties but it is merely a question of adjustment of the individual to a new outlook. We are certain that the people of our state can make this necessary adjustment without undue friction. It should be pointed out that in every instance where schools have adopted a policy of desegregation, the difficulty which had been anticipated has not taken place.

May I refer you and the members of the Board to a most exhaustive study of this problem which supports this point of view: Clark, Desegregation: An Appraisal of the Evidence, Vol. IX, No. 4, The Journal of Social Issues, 1953.-

Even if our confidence in the people of our state is somewhat misplaced with respect to this question, you must agree that you do not deal with the question by delaying it. Race relations in our state have been somewhat better than in most other states of our region, and we are convinced that the citizens of goodwill will be willing to aid and assist state and local officials in adopting and implementing a plan for desegregation of the public schools.

There is no reason why we should wait for the Supreme Court to give some indication whether it will require immediate desegregation or permit gradual desegregation of the public schools. It would be to North Carolina's advantage, if at this time, independent of the United States Supreme Court, it would adopt a plan of desegregation and undertake to insure the public acceptance of its program.

May I remind you that the State of West Virginia; Baltimore, Maryland; Washington, D. C.; Greensboro, North Carolina; Topeka, Kansas, and a few other communities have adopted, or, are adopting programs for desegregation without awaiting decision by the United States Supreme Court.

I hope that the Board will reconsider this matter, and will call for the help of citizens of goodwill of both races in the adoption of a program which would implement the principles announced by the Court.

As President of the State Conference of Branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, I am authorized to offer the services of the NAACP to assist you in whatever way it can in devising an effective program for desegregation of the public schools.

Very truly yours,

(signed) Kelly M. Alexander

Kelly M. Alexander, President
North Carolina State Conference
of NAACP Branches

KMA/or

cc: Members of the North Carolina State Board of Education.

(Copied--August 10, 1954--Governor's Office--Blc)