

The Making of a Magnet School: A Personal Account of the Journey from Chaos to Quality

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The Martin Luther King, Jr., Middle School in Boston's black community used to be plagued with a familiar litany of problems — violence, vandalism, high teacher turnover, and low expectations. Then a court-ordered busing plan made it into a magnet school, and it was forced to attract a racially mixed student body or go out of business. The King School staff responded by revamping the program and launching a series of aggressive recruiting drives. Three years later, the school is now almost filled to capacity and running smoothly. It exemplifies the kind of approach other city schools must take to meet the challenge of declining middle-class enrollment.

The Road to Desegregation

Between 1960 and 1974, the King School in Dorchester exemplified most of the problems that led the Boston public schools to court-ordered desegregation:

- *Increasing racial isolation* during the early 1960s as Jewish and Irish families moved out of the neighborhood around the school (then Patrick T. Campbell Junior High) and black and some Spanish-speaking families moved in.
- *Informal gerrymandering* as white families who still lived within a few blocks of the school sent their children to predominantly white junior high schools more than a mile away to avoid the Campbell School.
- *Educational deterioration* as traditional teaching styles clashed with the learning styles of the new students; discipline problems multiplied, test scores declined, and teacher absenteeism and turnover increased.
- *Outright gerrymandering* as the school, along with most other predominantly black junior high schools in Boston, was transformed into a middle school (grades six, seven, and eight) by the Boston school committee. The black middle schools sent their students to mostly black high schools beginning in the ninth grade, while mostly white junior high schools (grades seven, eight, and nine) sent their students to predominantly white high schools beginning at the tenth grade.

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bring order and improved education to a school that the school committee expected to remain all black.

For the next five years, the King gradually improved: staff turnover diminished, false fire alarms stopped, classrooms became more productive, and some pockets of innovation flourished with the approval, if not the outright encouragement, of the administration. Although many black parents continued to regard the King as a school to be avoided at all costs, many others came to see it as a reasonably competent, traditional school with a concerned and nonracist staff capable of handling inner-city students in a humane way.

Judge Garrity Steps In

Then, in the summer of 1974, federal district court Judge W. Arthur Garrity, Jr., handed down his long-awaited desegregation order. In response to a suit brought by the NAACP charging the school system with deliberate segregation, Garrity ruled for the plaintiffs and ordered city-wide cross-busing as the remedy. The deliberate gerrymandering of the black middle schools was a large factor in leading Garrity to decide that the school committee was deliberately trying to create two school systems, one for white and the other for nonwhite students, and the informal gerrymandering, segregated staffing patterns, uneven services, and acceptance of all-black schools were also factors in his reasoning.

The King School had been one of the chief victims of the illegal actions of the system over the last decade, and was to become one of the foremost beneficiaries of the desegregation plan. But as the staff prepared to receive its first racially mixed student body in nearly 10 years, it feared conflict between the neighborhood blacks and the very reluctant white "buses" from Dorchester and South Boston. Some felt that the problems of inner-city education were somewhat simplified in an all-black setting and inwardly resisted the change.

But the fear of trouble and the presence of the international press brought out the best in both teachers and administrators. The 1974-1975 school year began with meticulous preparations, and, to everyone's surprise and delight, the King School got off to an exceptionally smooth start while rocks and epithets flew in other parts of the city. The most striking feature of opening day was the presence of many community leaders, priests, and local parents to welcome the new white students as they climbed nervously from their buses. As the year progressed, students seemed to bring little racism and resistance with them and settled down to work, taking racial mixing in stride.

- *Increasing violence*, with vandalism, racial antipathy, fighting, false fire alarms, and assaults on teachers becoming commonplace.
- *Resentment* of this behavior by teachers, administrators, custodians, and school department personnel, often resulting in a "give them as little as you can" attitude and outright neglect of the school's physical and educational needs. The Campbell and other tough ghetto schools came to be regarded as a training ground for young teachers and administrators bound for greener pastures in the outlying parts of the city or in the elite examination schools; they were told that one year's experience in the ghetto schools, if they could survive that year, was worth three years anywhere else.

- *Community agitation* around the school's problems, taking the form of demands for more parent power, more black teachers and a black principal, and, in the case of some groups, community control of the school. After Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968, community pressure led the Boston school committee to rename the school after the civil rights leader, although some blacks felt that naming one of the city's worst schools after Dr. King brought dishonor to his name.

- *Low-impact federal funding* of the King and another inner-city school. Nearly \$3 million of Title III ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) money was paid for some physical improvements and a parent advisory council, but the \$7.00-an-hour parent participation evaporated when federal funding ran out in 1970. And in spite of the huge influx of money, the 1968-1969 year was tumultuous at the King School, with widespread rioting and the loss of 60 of the year's 180 school days.

- *Tokenism* as the school committee appointed an aging black administrator as principal in the fall of 1968, and, when he failed to calm the school and quit in utter frustration, then appointed a white principal to succeed him and took an "I told you so" attitude toward those who had asked for black leadership in the school.

Finally, the King School's problems were too costly and embarrassing to be tolerated (and politically exploited) any longer and the school committee appointed a young black principal, Rollins Griffith, in the summer of 1969, giving him broad powers to bring order to the school. Griffith imported a number of new teachers (many of them black), created a library and a guidance area, reinstated a traditional schedule, and, as school opened, put a lid on disruption and violence by his tough, dynamic leadership. It is interesting to note that the new principal's mandate (and that of his successor, Mrs. Will Ella Brown, in 1970) never involved desegregating the King School; their job was to

Teachers got used to the idea of teaching white students again, and administrators found that repairs and supplies arrived more promptly than they had in all-black days. Desegregation actually seemed to improve the school's climate and raise everyone's expectations. In the eyes of many of the staff, the school changed from a dead-end ghetto school to a place they could be proud of, a school that was doing better than most others in the city.

It is clear that there were three factors at work in the school's improvement: (a) the "Hawthorne effect" of being part of something new, being under close scrutiny; (b) the changed expectations of many of the staff as white students entered the school (although the blue-collar whites who came to the King had many of the same problems as their black classmates); and (c) the increased efficiency of services from the downtown bureaucracy under the scrutiny of the federal court and an alert parent body. It is debatable which of these three factors was most important in turning the school around. Whatever the mix, the 1974-1975 year was, at least superficially, the best the school had experienced in many years.

The Magnet School with No Magnetism

In the spring of 1975, Judge Garrity released his Phase II order, part of which created a new district of magnet schools that were to draw students from every corner of Boston on the basis of uniquely attractive programs. The 21 magnet schools would accept students on a purely voluntary basis, but had to be racially balanced within 5 percent of the city-wide racial percentages for that level. Many of the schools designated to be magnets had obvious features that would attract students, such as new buildings with swimming pools, selective educational programs of proven quality, or innovative programs with strong parent support. The major exception was the King School, which, to the shock and dismay of its staff, was also on the list as a magnet school specializing in language arts. The staff were appalled that they had not been consulted, much less involved, in the process of becoming a magnet, and were afraid that they had nothing uniquely magnetic to offer; they were well aware that many parents around the city still remembered the school's history of racial violence in the 1960s and feared the neighborhood around it.

Sure enough, when parents filled out their choice forms later that spring the King School fared very poorly. A favorable description of the school stressing its success during Phase I, which the staff submitted to the school department, did not appear in the handbook sent

to parents, and the King School attracted a total student body of 298. Its capacity was 850. There were plenty of black applicants to fill the school (many of them regarded the King as their neighborhood school rather than a city-wide magnet), but most of them had to be turned away and assigned to other schools because there were so few white applicants.

A student body of 298 meant only one thing to a staff geared to a capacity enrollment: wholesale transfers and layoffs based on seniority, and the possibility that the school would be closed. Some teachers wanted to be transferred out; others wistfully hoped that the King would revert to being a district school after its poor showing in the marketplace, and would once again enjoy the luxury of a guaranteed student body.

Judge Garrity said that the magnet schools, purely voluntary and focusing on the educational programs at the end of the bus ride, were the "crux and the magic" of his desegregation plan. They offered an attractive carrot to white middle-class families contemplating flight to parochial or suburban schools or private academies because the alternative was forcible assignment to one of several district schools, without a specific choice. But the King School's staff knew that they would indeed have to pull a rabbit out of a hat to attract more white students to the school: the WPA building and the neighborhood were no great lure, the program was traditional before traditional programs were in vogue, and the school had few museum or zoo field-trip programs to attract students. The challenge to the King School's staff was different from that which other schools around the city faced. While they worried about race relations among their students, the King School's very survival was threatened if it couldn't greatly upgrade its program and attract a racially balanced student body. The judge's order had put the school on the sharp edge of the desegregation process in a way that brought the underlying reason for desegregation — quality education — to the fore.

There was another problem: Unlike most other magnet schools, the King School had not been officially paired with a local university, and it therefore lacked that additional element of attractiveness to parents and had to do without the technical advice that a university might have supplied in applying for the many thousands of State Chapter 636 desegregation dollars available to the Boston schools. Judge Garrity later said that the King School's lack of a university partner had been an oversight on his part, and he felt personally responsible for the school's failure to attract white students — although it is doubtful that any university, no matter how prestigious,

would have increased the number of white families choosing the King School. University or not, the school was simply not magnetic.

So why did the judge designate the King as a magnet school? One theory was that he couldn't find an alternative magnet middle school and chose to ignore the obvious problems of the King School. Another theory, attributed to an inside source, was that Garry was engaging in wishful thinking; he had heard that a number of dedicated teachers were working in the school, and he hoped that they would rise to the challenge and help make the school magnetic. If this second explanation was true, the change-agents-to-be were never given a signal of what was expected of them or any support to help with a seemingly impossible job. The school was certainly not going to get any help from the school department, which had little commitment to the success of the magnet programs. The magnet district was clearly Garry's project, and in a school system that was still actively resisting the judge's desegregation order, enthusiastic compliance with the court's pet project was seen as a threat to future promotions. Thus, the King School's staff was very much on their own.

The August Planning Group Takes a Hand

As the 1974-1975 year closed and the ominous possibilities of the summer loomed ahead, the leadership of one person was decisive. Steve Driscoll, a seventh-grade social studies teacher, went to a planning meeting and learned the procedures for applying for state desegregation grants. He conceived the idea of a summer planning group of teachers and an administrator, wrote a proposal for \$11,000 to pay them, pushed it through a reluctant bureaucracy, hired a consultant from Ohio with expertise in innovative programs, put together a representative group of teachers, and conceptualized the work to be done.

The team, which called itself the August Planning Group, began to meet in the middle of the summer and spent a week planning a series of innovations that would make the school more attractive. A subcommittee began working with the consultant on a tentative schedule to embody these innovations, but it was hard to get very specific since the group had no idea how many students there would be, which teachers would be transferred from the school, or even whether the principal would approve the proposed changes, some of which were bound to be controversial to the staff. In fact, many members of the group were young teachers with little seniority, and they themselves faced

possible transfers to other schools or layoffs. So the group turned its attention to the problem of increasing the school's enrollment.

Two strategies emerged. One was to convince Judge Garry to relax the requirement that the King School be within 5 percent of the city-wide racial percentages and fill the school with the black students who had made it their first choice and been assigned elsewhere. It was argued that the judge should give the school a few years to become magnetic before insisting that it be racially balanced. The second strategy was to use the school's strong points and the group's proposed innovations to recruit white students around the city. The trouble with this was the shortage of time — four weeks until opening day — and the feeling of some in the group that it was an impossible task to persuade white parents to send their children to the King School on the basis of a totally unproven program. The district superintendent, who was sitting in on the meeting in which recruiting was discussed, commented that if the August Planning Group succeeded in attracting sizable numbers of white students it deserved to be written up in an educational journal. Despite his skepticism, the group decided to pursue both strategies.

In the next few days, the Boston teachers' union lawyer was persuaded to submit a motion at Judge Garry's next hearing asking the judge to relax the racial requirements and sanction a recruiting drive. The group also managed to get an article pleading its case on the op-ed page of the *Boston Globe* on the morning of the hearing ("The Magnet School With No Magnetism," August 8, 1975). Judge Garry read the article and he referred to it in the hearing as he ordered the school department to give full cooperation to the King School's recruitment drive. But he refused to budge from the 5 percent racial limit. Despite the problems in getting a racially balanced student body at the King, the judge thought it would be a poor precedent to allow a magnet school to stray from racial balance at the very beginning of Phase II. Instead, he lavished praise on the "dedicated" staff of the school and put the power of the federal court behind student recruitment.

Within three days, the August Planning Group had begun its recruiting drive. First, the principal approved the proposed magnet features and gave her backing to the venture. Then a group went to the data processing center and hand-copied the names and addresses of 1,200 white families who had chosen the King School as their second or third choice and been assigned elsewhere. Another team wrote, revised, and had printed a three-page, single-spaced letter describing the magnet program and stressing the best points of the school. What

wasn't spelled out in the letter — and what was almost forgotten in the excitement — was that the magnet program that was being promised would not be possible if enough new students weren't recruited and enough committed teachers retained to make it work.

These were the main educational and climatic features stressed in the letter:

- (1) An intensive reading program taught in the stability of the homeroom, with small-group remedial attention for students with serious reading problems;
- (2) A computer-programming course for eighth graders;
- (3) A program of minimum standards for each grade in core subjects;
- (4) A reading lab with individualized materials;
- (5) A cycle of intensive Unified Arts courses in art, science, music, shop, and home economics;
- (6) A weekly minicourse, each student having a choice between 45 high-interest, 7-week courses ranging from chess to street hockey;
- (7) An elective program for seventh and eighth graders with a broad range of choices;
- (8) An abolition of ability tracking — no "smart" and "dumb" groups;
- (9) A special woodworking class called the World of Construction;
- (10) A cluster system with localized groupings of classes taught by teams of teachers with a coordinated strategy;
- (11) Five-minute breaks between classes in the place of one recess;
- (12) A school yearbook, newspaper, and creative-writing magazine run by teachers on their own time;
- (13) An end to boy-girl segregation in gym, shop, and home economics classes and the cafeteria;
- (14) A sound school building and a cafeteria serving hot lunches;
- (15) A school philosophy stressing basic skills, exposure to a wide variety of subject matter, and a caring group of adults.

Enclosed with the lengthy recruiting letter was something that made a crucial difference: a stamped postcard addressed to the school, with several options on the back that parents could check before they dropped it in the mail — Definitely Interested, Need More Information, and Not Interested (there were also spaces to write in name, address, phone number, and times available). Within a few days, aided

by two pieces of favorable coverage on local TV stations, postcards began to come back in large numbers. Most parents had checked the Not Interested box, some writing hostile and sarcastic antibusing messages in the margins; but almost 200 of the postcards had one of the other two boxes checked. A few members of the August Planning Group and several other teachers who cut their summer vacations short began to visit or telephone these interested parents, carrying officially approved transfer forms. The families that were contacted were impressed by the innovations the King School planned, by the solid-sounding program, and most of all by the obvious dedication and interest in education evidenced by the teachers who came to their houses. In some neighborhoods, word spread to families who had not received the recruiting letter, and recruiters found themselves talking to kitchens full of people and bringing back more filled-in forms than they had dared to hope. In a desperate race against time at the end of August, the recruiters signed up about 150 new white students.

Having recruited that many whites, the school was entitled to a balancing number of nonwhites; the judge's earlier order helped speed the process of transferring around 300 students into the school. The enrollment soared from 298 to almost 600. Even that number, however, couldn't justify the previous year's staff by the Boston middle-school ratio of 18 students to each teacher. But Judge Garrity was persuaded by union and state lawyers that the school needed a more favorable ratio in its first year as a magnet. In a hearing two days before the beginning of school, he ordered that the faculty be left intact, which was fortunate — the schedule that had taken three weeks to complete was geared to that configuration. The King School began the year with small classes, an innovative schedule, several new magnet features, and a wave of optimism. With the support of the judge, the August Planning Group had done the impossible.

The First Magnet Year

There were only two problems. First, the majority of the staff had not been involved in the summer's work and what they saw at the opening staff meeting was just what they had seen for the last few years: familiar faces. The mass transfers of staff that had been avoided seemed unreal, the summer's heroics unremarkable for having maintained the status quo. The second problem was that parts of the schedule were unpopular with some staff members. Complaining about the schedule was a common pastime at the beginning of every school

year, but the shop teachers were particularly irate that their double periods instead of the normal five out of seven), imposed additional Unified Arts cycle with art, music, science, and home economics. The new schedule also required all teachers to work harder (five out of six periods instead of the normal five out of seven, imposed additional creative responsibilities on homeroom teachers by assigning them reading classes, and required every staff member to teach a minicourse once a week — an attractive idea, but an additional burden in the eyes of some teachers. Almost everyone was willing to give the new schedule a try, but a gap had opened between the naive enthusiasm of the August Planning Group's members and some of their colleagues. It took two years of intensive debate and gradual compromise before that gap was closed.

At the end of the summer there was another development. The school was paired with the Institute of Open Education, a local branch of Antioch College. Judge Garrity's concern about the King School's lack of a partner helped push this late-blooming relationship through the bureaucracy, and the institute's staff began to work on the details of a \$95,000, State 636 proposal to help develop the school's magnet theme of language arts and attract even more students in the future.

From the beginning, the pairing of the King School and the institute was problematic. There was a philosophical gap between the innovative thinking of the institute's staff and the largely traditional teaching styles of the King School's teachers. There was some defensiveness about the idea that the King teachers needed staff development, an idea implicit in some of the institute's activities. There was a feeling of suspicion among many King teachers toward outsiders who had not been through the wars with them. There was the problem that the institute, being an in-service training program working with full-time teachers, could not post student teachers in the King School, something many teachers would have appreciated. And finally, there was some suspicion that the institute had its own financial and political motives for being involved with the King School.

The institute did make significant contributions — a course for teachers on reading instruction, various forms of technical assistance, and financial support for the minicourse program, the parent group, and the future recruiting process among them — but the significant innovations that turned the King into a magnet school and attracted new students had been and continued to be initiated within the school.

Ironically, the institute never did for King School teachers what it was renowned for doing for its own students, something that the King School's staff needed more than anything else after years of struggling

with the challenges of teaching inner-city, middle-school students: direct classroom assistance and support from very sensitive, non-judgmental observers. While few King School teachers admitted it directly and while most were somewhat defensive about their teaching even when it was superb, most secretly wished for more support and counseling on what they did minute-by-minute with their students, and felt very isolated and ignored in their classrooms. These services are not supplied by Boston administrators or supervisors, who find themselves buried in paperwork, meetings, and incessant demands from district and downtown bureaucrats, the more so since desegregation. As the King School emerged from being a ghetto school, where simply keeping students quiet and happy was often a major accomplishment, and became an integrated magnet school expected to produce an up-to-date, quality educational program that could compete on the open market, staff development was a key requirement. Somehow the school's staff never articulated this need, and the institute never offered its best services to the pairing (although at this writing there is some talk of including services of this kind in future proposals).

The first year of the magnet program (1975-1976) saw a significant increase in the number of middle-class students, resulting in a more pronounced class mix that crisscrossed racial lines. This meant that there was an unusually wide range of ability and motivation in the student body, and because of the abolition of ability tracking, this mix was present in every classroom. There is perhaps no teaching challenge greater than dealing with a class containing a wide range of backgrounds and abilities, and after years of dealing with tracked, more homogeneous classes the King School's staff were somewhat unprepared. The curriculum and teaching methods in the school remained traditional; for the most part, teachers instructed the whole class at once. The innovative magnet features had little direct impact on what happened in most classrooms, except insofar as the minicourses and electives allowed teachers to cover topics that wouldn't have fitted into more traditional programs. Thus, the need for staff training in more individualized methods and materials was even more urgent.

While many other Boston schools were having serious racial problems among students, the King School had virtually none. Perhaps the best test for the level of integration in a school is the seating pattern in its cafeteria (assuming that students are allowed to sit with their friends). The King School's cafeteria is for the most part spontaneously integrated, although sexual self-segregation remains almost universal. The school's positive racial climate is probably explained by the self-selected nature of the student body as much as by the skill of the staff.

Students are at the school because their parents freely chose to send them. In so doing, they expressed some belief in the quality of the school and made a commitment to desegregated education, and that is generally reflected in their children's attitudes. This positive attitude meshed with the lack of prejudice and general fairness of the staff. Without using fancy human-relations curricula, most teachers and administrators handled the mixed student body well.

During the 1975-1976 year the staff got a good deal of positive feedback from parents, and hundreds of parents helped protest a threatened staff cut in the winter, limiting its impact to the removal of only one teacher instead of eight. There was talk of a growing word-of-mouth campaign in some white neighborhoods that would bring in more than enough recruits for the next school year, and some teachers even worried that the school might attract too many students and become overcrowded. Because of this confidence, the staff did not plan a recruiting drive in the spring before the school-department choice forms were mailed to parents around the city. Teachers relied on the official handbook to get the message about the King School across. But the handbook turned out to be complex, jargon-filled, and poorly written, and the King School's program did not stand out. When the returns spewed out of a computer on the last day of school, the school had only attracted 587 students. Once again, it was the reluctance of white families to send their children there that was responsible for the low enrollment. Once again, teacher transfers and layoffs were imminent, and this time it seemed unlikely that Judge Garrity would help keep the staff.

More Recruiting — The Second Magnet Year

Several teachers were in fact transferred to other schools (including two key members of the August Planning Group), and it seemed that a downward spiral might begin: decreasing enrollment, loss of key teachers, deterioration of the educational program, poor morale, loss of magnet features, further declines in enrollment and teaching staff, and finally the closing of the school. After spending a week contemplating this grim scenario and pursuing a paranoid theory that the school department had deliberately excluded a number of white students whose parents had chosen the King School (this was prompted by calls from several parents who claimed to have made the school their first choice and whose children had not been assigned there), a small group of teachers and administrators once again began the tedious process of

recruiting. They hand-copied the names of white families who had made the King School their second or third choice, rewrote the previous summer's recruiting letter and postcard, and did another mass mailing in a desperate bid to boost the school's enrollment and win back some of the transferred teachers.

The second summer of last-minute recruiting was more difficult than the first. Many families had seen their children moved twice in the first two years of busing and weren't about to be talked into a third move. There was also a finite number of parents receptive to the King School's programmatic emphasis and location in a black neighborhood. Nonetheless, around 30 white students were recruited and the way seemed clear for increasing the enrollment by at least sixty with the balancing nonwhites.

But the school department balked at making the transfers because of the supposed effect on the racial balance of the sending schools. The King School's recruiters pointed out that for every white coming to the King a balancing nonwhite student could be sent from the same school, thus leaving the sending school with virtually the same racial composition. But in vain; most of the transfers were turned down. At the end of the summer with the recruiting in jeopardy, the school's recruiters once again appealed to Judge Garrity, this time through the offices of the NAACP lawyer. In the course of writing his motion, the lawyer discovered that the school department had not allowed the King School to swing to the outer nonwhite limit of 5 percent from the ideal racial percentages, and the school was entitled to two nonwhite students for each recruited white student. Judge Garrity went along with the motion and ordered the school department to admit the recruits and transfer nonwhite students into the King School until it reached the outer limit.

All this happened less than a week before the beginning of classes. It was another exhilarating victory for the school, increasing the enrollment to the high 600s and bringing back several transferred teachers as well as some new blood, but there was a problem: the school didn't have a class schedule, and the process of making one normally takes three weeks. The uncertainties about student and staff numbers had made that job impossible until two days before opening day, and as school began it was barely started. Students were held in their homerooms and a former King School teacher volunteered to help bail out the school's floundering scheduler with two 24-hour days of work. It wasn't until the fourth day of school that things were functioning smoothly. Some staff members resented the inconvenience.

although most understood why it had happened. (Everyone had a real appreciation of the importance of having a schedule in a middle school after doing without one for three days.)

As it turned out, the hastily drawn-up schedule did not solve all the deficiencies of the previous year's effort and raised some new problems. Classes were much larger, over 30 in some cases; there still weren't enough breaks for planning, meetings, and relaxation; and the elective program began to fall apart because it was simply too unstructured for the school. Staff morale drooped as the year progressed, and moderately serious discipline problems reappeared in the cafeteria and corridors. Some of the magnet goals — notably the minimum standards for each grade level and the coordination of different content areas into a school-wide curriculum — were not followed up, and some teachers saw a decline in enrollment coming for the next school year as students chose other, more organized schools. The pairing with the Institute of Open Education continued to yield only slight benefits for small numbers of teachers and students and reap an increasing harvest of cynical comments, and in the case of some members of the parent group, outright hostility. But the institute was responsible for the establishment of a curriculum center and the purchase of several thousand dollars' worth of new materials and equipment, as well as a high-speed offset printing press for the school's yearbook, newspaper, and creative-writing magazines.

Then, during the spring of 1977, several teachers decided to prevent the ordeal of the last two summers by getting the school's strong points to parents around the city before the school department's choice process began. They rallied their energy and wrote and designed a brochure advertising the program; persuaded the data processing center to print address labels for all 15,000 parents in the city with children in the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades; and with money from the 636 grant had the brochure printed and mailed to the families shortly before they received their choice forms. The King School's parent group organized a lobster buffet and attracted about 350 people from around the city on a sunny May afternoon to look over the school and talk to parents, teachers, and administrators. The large direct-mail campaign and the buffet were successful; when the enrollment for the 1977-1978 year was announced, it showed the King School with 815 students, close to capacity. This figure eroded somewhat by the beginning of school, but the King had finally earned its name as a magnet school.

September 1977 saw an augmented staff, a vastly improved

schedule (which had benefited from a full summer's work), and the addition of a new position to the staff: an education coordinator (funded under a special 636 grant separate from the continuing pairing with the Institute of Open Education) to coordinate curricula, facilitate cluster and department meetings, and provide support to teachers from a base in the new curriculum center. At this writing, the 1977-1978 year shows every sign of being the best in many years, with improved staff morale, greatly increased professional interaction and curriculum planning, steady use of many of the new materials, and a calmer, more positive school climate. There are also some unhappy and disappointed parents and students and some teachers who feel unsupported and frustrated in the school, and fulfilling their expectations remains an ongoing challenge, as does the continuing ability to attract students.

In what sense is the King a magnet school? It is clearly not the language arts theme that attracts students, although that aspect of the program is strong and staffed by some of the best teachers. The fact is that very little progress has been made in developing that theme, and the staff decided to omit any mention of it from the recruiting brochure mailed in the spring of 1977 because it seemed dishonest to advertise something that didn't exist. However, there is some question as to whether a very highly developed educational theme would have attracted any more parents, and whether such a theme is even appropriate at the middle-school level. Parent concerns center on safety and the general quality of the school and its staff; what attracted students to the King was a general perception of a school that was trying new things but was solid in the basics, whose teachers cared about kids, and whose "feel" was somehow right for them. Many of these factors exist to one degree or another in middle schools throughout the city, as do many of the King School's magnet programs. But because the school was faced with a dangerously low enrollment and the threat of being closed, it launched an aggressive public relations drive to put its strong points in the minds of as many parents as possible. It simply out-hustled other schools.

The process of competing in the marketplace did bring about changes and improvements in the school, but these were very much linked to the staff members who happened to be available and willing to do the recruiting. It is arguable that the school could have attracted just as many students if the same recruiting methods had been used without these particular changes or with a different set of reforms, as long as the educational program sounded plausible and the same concern and dedication showed on the faces of the recruiters.

Implications

Over the last eight years, the King-School has come from being an educational basket case to succeeding in the remarkable feat of attracting and holding a city-wide population of students. If we think of schools as being at different developmental stages, the King School has rapidly gone through stage one — dealing with the physical safety of students and teachers, stage two — establishing an identity and a positive school climate and building up a willing student body, and is now at stage three — looking at what it is teaching. The school has a long way to go to become a really first-rate school. It must move through higher stages and deal with the quality of instruction, the development of an effective curriculum and a multicultural program, and the matching of students' learning styles with the staff's individual teaching styles, but the process of development is off to a good start.

Judge Garrity's purpose in setting up the magnet schools was to sweeten the pill of forced busing with an element of voluntarism, to give parents something to look forward to at the end of the bus ride. The judge did not have the legal power to force the magnet schools to improve their educational programs, but that was the indirect effect of his order in the case of the King School and several other magnet schools. No single force could have brought about such a dramatic improvement in the quality of the school and the attitude of its staff as the requirement to attract a racially mixed student body in competition with other schools across the city.

As the white middle class continues to flee the city's schools (Boston has lost around 20,000 students in the last few years, many of them white), and as the magnet schools draw a disproportionately large number of the middle-class students that remain, the city's schools face a crisis. While the trauma of desegregation is virtually over and while there have been great improvements in the last four years, ominous possibilities lie ahead. For beneath the past gerrymandering and discrimination that Judge Garrity's plan attacked lay a deeper problem that had very little to do with race: the poor quality of most Boston schools. Years of patronage, politicizing education, poor administration, and a tenure system linked to inadequate supervision all produced schools that were driving away the white middle class and many black students in large numbers, before the busing crisis accelerated the process. It used to be possible for many middle-class parents to send their children to sheltered enclaves that, while not the best schools in the world, were at least in their neighborhood. Under

Garrity's order, they were faced with sending their children to schools further from home, and when many parents looked at those schools' programs and physical plants they decided to opt out of the school system. Thus the court order has had the effect of heightening parents' consciousness to the city-wide quality of schools.

The King School faced the job of attracting reluctant parents to an unfamiliar school in a strange, somewhat forbidding neighborhood. This is exactly the challenge that most of the city's schools face as they compete with the suburban and parochial schools and the private academies. And given the fact that parents in Boston are becoming increasingly shrewd consumers of education, this must go beyond public relations and take the form of a real improvement in the schools' programs and attitudes. What the King School has done for race — attracting enough white students to balance the black students — the city's schools must do for class — attracting back enough of the middle class to balance lower economic groups. In parts of the city, notably in magnet schools, this process is beginning.

The problem is that most Boston teachers, as tenured employees and residents of the very suburbs that are bleeding the city of its middle class, don't see the decline of the school system in the life-and-death terms that galvanized the King School's staff into action. As the federal court withdraws from the case and desegregation becomes less and less of an issue, the job of dealing with the serious educational deficiencies of the city's schools lies heavily on the new school committee and the superintendent. If they don't move decisively to make all the city's schools magnetic, there is the very real danger that the magnet schools may become middle-class enclaves in the midst of a shrinking, deteriorating, dying school system.