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DHEW Memo Regarding Language Minority Children

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

WASHINGTON, D.C.

May 25, 1970

MEMORANDUM

TO: School Districts With More Than Five Percent National Origin-Minority Group Children

FROM: J. Stanley Pottinger, Director, Office for Civil Rights

SUBJECT: Identification of Discrimination and Denial of Services on the Basis of National Origin

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Departmental Regulation (45 CFR Part 80) promulgated thereunder require that there be no discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin in the operation of any federally assisted programs.

Title VI compliance reviews conducted in school districts with large Spanish-surnamed student populations by the Office for Civil Rights have revealed a number of common practices which have the effect of denying equality of educational opportunity to Spanish-surnamed pupils. Similar practices which have the effect of discrimination on the basis of national origin exist in other locations with respect to disadvantaged pupils from other national origin-minority groups, for example, Chinese or Portuguese.

The purpose of this memorandum is to clarify D/HEW policy on issues concerning the responsibility of school districts to provide equal educational opportunity to national origin minority group children deficient in English language skills. The following are some of the major areas of concern that relate to compliance with Title VI:

1. Where inability to speak and understand the English language excludes national origin-minority group children from effective participation in the educational program offered by a school district, the district must take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency in order to open its instructional program to these students.
2. School districts must not assign national origin-minority group students to classes for the mentally retarded on the basis of criteria which essentially measure or evaluate English language skills; nor may school districts deny national origin-minority group children access to college preparatory courses on a basis directly related to the failure of the school system to inculcate English language skills.
3. Any ability grouping or tracking system employed by the school system to deal with the special language skill needs of national origin-minority group children must be designed to meet such language skill needs as soon as possible and must not operate as an educational dead-end or permanent track.
4. School districts have the responsibility to adequately notify national origin-minority group parents of school activities which are called to the attention of other parents. Such notice in order to be adequate may have to be provided in a language other than English.

School districts should examine current practices which exist in their districts in order to assess compliance with the matters set forth in this memorandum. A school district which determines that compliance problems currently

exist in that district should immediately communicate in writing with the Office for Civil Rights and indicate what steps are being taken to remedy the situation. Where compliance questions arise as to the sufficiency of programs designed to meet the language skill needs of national origin-minority group children already operating in a particular area, full information regarding such programs should be provided. In the area of special language assistance, the scope of the program and the process for identifying need and the extent to which the need is fulfilled should be set forth.

School districts which receive this memorandum will be contacted shortly regarding the availability of technical assistance and will be provided with any additional information that may be needed to assist districts in achieving compliance with the law and equal educational opportunity for all children. Effective as of this date the aforementioned areas of concern will be regarded by regional Office for Civil Rights personnel as a part of their compliance responsibilities.

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