

Chapter Four: Results

“I want you to know that what you’re doing is important.
It’s an important story and one that people need to hear.
Get at the truth and let them know.”

James A. Slade
Assistant Principal
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Methodology

The case study method was used as a basis for this study. In conducting this case study of the desegregation of Langston High School and George Washington High School, information was gathered from newspapers, personal correspondence, school board minutes, and through personal interviews.

A total of seventeen interviews were conducted with individuals who were identified as key sources of information from newspaper articles, minutes of meetings, and from preliminary discussions. These interviews were completed using the interview protocol established with my researcher on the committee. Upon completion of these interviews, information was categorized according to themes and analyzed using the constant-comparative method of data analysis espoused by Maykut and Morehouse. Prior to writing, triangulation of data was used to confirm themes identified by the author through the research.

As data was gathered, writing the document began almost immediately while focusing on the research questions. As each section was written, colleagues were given an opportunity to read and to respond with suggestions. This afforded the researcher an

opportunity to respond to these suggestions and to rewrite and revise the document in a timely manner. It also aided in the stimulation of thinking.

When writing, the data was organized using Bronfenbrenner's theory of the nested environment. The macro-system is the outer most layer and is consistent with the laws and policies that governed desegregation. The second layer was the exo-system and is comprised of the school board and city councils. They are the ones who are responsible for establishing the policies for the school division. The third layer is the meso-system. This layer enacts the policies that have been established. It would be consistent with the teachers and the school administrators. The inner most layer is the micro-system. The students represent it from the two high schools that interacted in desegregation. Refer to figure 1 in chapter 1 for a visual of Bronfenbrenner's nested environment.

Every attempt was made to treat all issues fairly and to report the different sides to each issue. Additionally, every attempt was made to make the narrative readable and interesting.

Setting

Prior to 1963, Danville, Virginia, was a small quiet mill town. Dan River, Inc. and the tobacco industry were the main focus of the local economy and provided the main employment opportunities within the community. Downtown Danville was a thriving business entity. Located on the North Carolina line in the "black belt" region of Virginia, Danville also operated as a segregated society. The lunch counter at Woolworth's had separate sections for African-Americans and whites. In the basement at Belk-Legget's, there were water fountains that were marked "For Blacks Only" or "For Whites Only." The main branch of the public library on Main Street was off limits to the African-American citizens of

the community. African-Americans were relegated to riding on the back seats of the Danville Traction and Power Company buses. Danville also operated a dual school system that maintained separate schools for both African-American and white students.

Beginning in 1963, Danville was in the midst of change. The African-American community had grown tired of the segregated lunchrooms, the segregated libraries, and the segregated schools. The protests, marches, and sit-ins that had been part of the national and state news for years, came to Danville. In 1963, Martin Luther King made an appearance in Danville in an attempt to galvanize the black community in its pursuit for equality. Tensions were high between the African-American and white communities. African-Americans marched on Main Street and conducted a sit-in at City Hall as they sought equality in their everyday lives and in their educational setting (Teacher # 2, interview, November 6, 2001).

Research Questions

Based on preliminary discussions, four research questions were identified. The following discussion focuses on the findings as they relate to the research questions: (a) What were the main factors that prompted the desegregation of Langston High School and George Washington High School in Danville in 1970? (b) Who were the key players in the desegregation of Danville City Schools within the community, within the school system, and within local government? (c) What was done with students, faculty, and community to prepare for the desegregation of Langston High School and George Washington High School? and (d) What was the attitude of the students, the staff, and the community about desegregation?

Factors that Led to the Desegregation

Beginning with the 1964-1965 school year, Danville Public Schools began its conversion from a dual educational system to a unitary system (Hunt, 2001). According to Hunt, that fall five African-American students opted to attend George Washington High School rather than Langston High School. Ray Robinson, a former student at George Washington High School noted that, “The first five were not treated well; they were not beaten up in the hall or anything. They just were not treated well. The second year was better. I think it was better until the forced integration” (Hunt, 2001, p.7). Beginning in 1965, Danville began to fully operate their freedom of choice plan (Medley v. the School Board of the City of Danville, 1972). African-American students were given the choice of the school they wanted to attend. Additionally, any African-American student who was entering school for the first time in the first, seventh, and ninth grades was assigned to the school based on where they lived in the city (Medley, 1972). In Danville, color had ceased to be the sole determinant of school assignment.

While it satisfied the requirements of the day, it was not sufficient. Very few African-American students opted to attend George Washington High School and no white students opted to attend all black Langston High School under the freedom of choice plan (Medley, 1972). According to an administrator, there was little or no reason for any of the students to change schools. Both Langston and GW were rich in academic and athletic tradition; both were well cared for; and both had the most recent amenities. Additionally, they both had their own culture and the students felt comfortable in these familiar surroundings (Administrator # 1, interview, August 24, 2001).

Between 1966 and 1969, several things occurred at both a local level and at a national level that sped up Danville's move to desegregated schools. In 1966, at the July 18th School Board meeting O.T. Bonner, then superintendent of schools, announced the integration of the faculties at George Washington High School and Langston High School. He noted that he had arranged for the transfer of an assistant librarian at Langston to GW. He also noted in this meeting that two shop teachers were going to split time at the two high schools. He also announced that there would be an African-American teaching biology at George Washington High School. This would represent the first full-time African-American hired to teach in a formerly all-white school (School Board Minutes, July 18, 1966).

In 1967 on a local level, O.T. Bonner, superintendent of schools, in a letter to Dr. John Hope, Director of the Educational Opportunities of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, outlined the continuing efforts of Danville Public Schools concerning desegregation. He noted four things in this letter: (a) the school system was maximizing its efforts to recruit teachers from within its ranks to work in schools of the opposite race; (b) the school system was having great success in their after school programs for underprivileged children, such as Head Start; (c) the school system was making its best effort to adhere to the freedom of choice plan already established and to make the minority students in integrated schools feel comfortable in their new schools; and (d) the school system was planning construction that would allow for a smoother transition into complete integration (O.T. Bonner, correspondence to Dr. John Hope, August 21, 1967).

In November of 1968, two things occurred locally that changed the face of politics in Danville. First, Charles Harris became the first African-American to be selected to the City Council. His election served to galvanize the African-American community and as a result,

voter registration in the black community soared (Bland, 1999). His election also gave the African-American community the firm belief that desegregation of the schools would occur and that as a councilman he would carry the banner for them with this issue (Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001). Second, on December 18, 1968, Danville Public Schools submitted to the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) its plan for school desegregation. This plan focused on the establishment of geographic attendance zones, on the assignment of students and faculty as it related to desegregating schools, and on how the desegregation plan would be implemented. Nationally, the freedom of choice plans that many school divisions were using were overturned. The Supreme Court found in Green v. New Kent County (1968), that freedom of choice was ineffective in reducing segregation and ordered change in the way school systems approached desegregation.

In a letter dated March 24, 1969, Mr. Harold Fischer, hearing examiner for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, acknowledged that Danville's desegregation plan had formally been accepted (Harold H. Fischer, correspondence to O.T. Bonner, March 24, 1969). For the remainder of 1969 and the spring of 1970, the School Board, the administration, and the staffs of GW and Langston worked out the final details as it related to desegregation. Education was the final bastion of segregation in Danville (Bland, 1999) and in August of 1970, it would fall as 2237 students, 681 of them African-Americans, would enter the halls of George Washington High School (Hunt, 2001).

Refer to figure 2 on the next page. This timeline traces the significant events from 1954 until 1970 that impacted the desegregation of George Washington High School and Langston High School in Danville, Virginia.

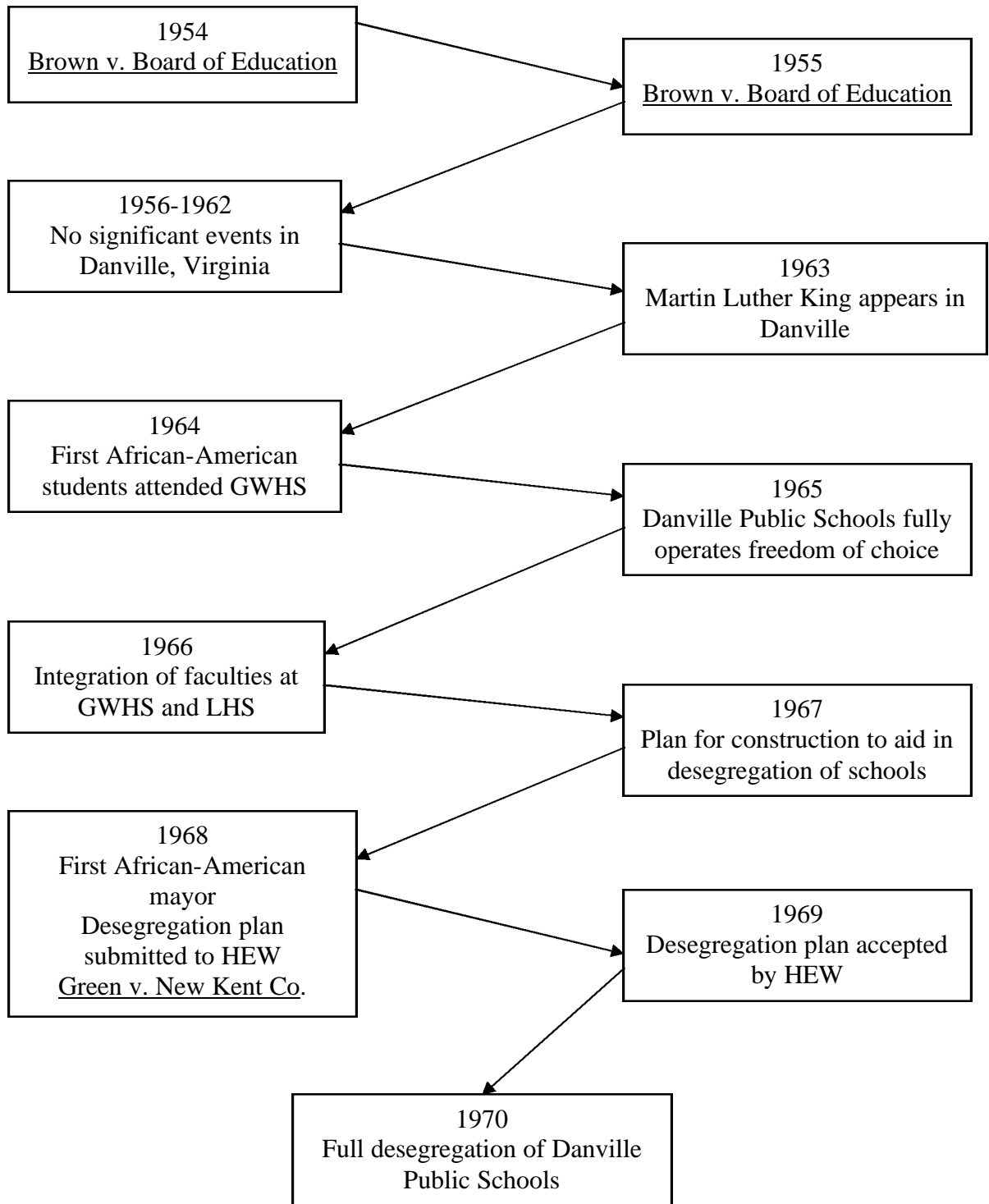


Figure 2: Timeline of Incidents that Impacted Desegregation in Danville, Virginia in 1970

Key Players in the Desegregation of Danville Public Schools

This section focuses on the key people and groups of people in Danville that were important to the desegregation of schools in 1970. The primary focus of this section is on individual people and groups of people that were positive proponents of school desegregation.

Civic and Community Leaders

In 1970, Ronald Williams was a relatively young member of Danville's City Council, in a political compromise, had been selected as the new mayor. As an attorney and councilman, Ronald Williams was aware of the impending desegregation of schools. Among all of the members of the city council, he may have been the strongest advocate of desegregation. Williams was described by one of his colleagues on City Council as a gentle, decent man that wanted the best for the citizens of Danville.

It did not matter whether you were black or white. He judged people by their character and not by the color of their skin. He was concerned that there would be problems with desegregation and he constantly questioned the School Board and the administration about their preparations. He felt that it was important to prepare for every contingency that one could imagine. He also felt that it was important for everyone to cooperate and to work together. He felt that ultimately, preparation and communication would be the keys to a successful melding of the two schools. (City Official # 2, interview, June 21, 2001)

On Monday, September 14, 1970, Williams was faced with the greatest challenge of his young mayoral tenure as George Washington High School was rocked with racial tension and uprising due to a conflict at a football game on September 11, 1970. In a special meeting

of Danville's City Council, Williams described the situation as grave and compared the incident to the local demonstrations of 1963 ("Football Incident," 1970). In his statement released on September 16, 1970, Williams urged all the citizens of Danville to act in the spirit of cooperation.

We are faced with the realization that the future of our City's school system is at stake. If we do not rise to the occasion with a spirit of cooperation . . . then certainly the school doors will have to be closed and no one wants that. ("Officials Urge," 1970, p. 3A)

Williams went on to emphasize that there was a proper way to air one's grievances and that violence and disruptive behavior was not the best recourse to solving the problem or in the best interest of the community. He insisted that everything possible would be done by City Council to see that grievances were addressed and that solutions were sought ("Officials Urge," 1970).

Within the community, the African-American ministers and lawyers were leading proponents of school desegregation. According to one school administrator, the major focus of the African-American ministers and lawyers was on equality of opportunity that had not been available to the African-American students at Langston High School and the other all-black schools in Danville. It was their belief that the freedom of choice plan that had been adopted by the Danville School Board in 1965 had never achieved its intended goal of effectively desegregating the school system. Therefore, the African-American children of Danville had been denied an opportunity at an equal education due to the segregated schools in Danville, Virginia (Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001).

Leading the charge for school integration was the Reverend Lawrence Campbell. Reverend Campbell was a noted Civil Rights leader who had led marches on City Hall and had arranged sit-ins to protest the inequality that African-Americans were suffering in Danville in the mid 1960s (Teacher #1, interview, August 24, 2001). According to this teacher, Reverend Campbell was a fiery orator who commanded the respect of the African-American community and commanded the attention of the white community and the civic leaders of Danville. Confirming this assessment, one administrator said,

Reverend Campbell tended to be caustic and confrontational. He agitated the civic leaders and some of the community with his rhetoric. But one thing was certain; he cared about the children of Danville and he cared about what he perceived as the lack of educational opportunity that the black children were facing within the school system and he sought to remedy that inequality. (Administrator # 1, interview, August 24, 2001)

According to a former student, Reverend Campbell was proactive in his pursuit of equality for African-American students. He and other Civil Rights leaders knew that integration was on the horizon and they wanted the African-American students prepared.

He knew that this situation would be new to us and he attempted to calm us and assure us that we would be successful. We were encouraged to be on our best behavior when school started because he knew that everyone would be looking for us to fail, both in school and in our behavior. (Student # 1, interview, October 25, 2001)

This student went on to state that this encouragement from the Reverend Campbell and other African-American leaders served as inspiration for her and others to attend college, helped to create a sense of self-confidence among the students that were going from Langston to GW,

and helped to establish a belief in oneself that fostered success for her and other students at GW, and afterward (Student # 1, interview, October 25, 2001).

Ruth Harvey and Jerry Williams were noted civil rights attorneys in Danville. They wanted integration to be a positive experience and encouraged the African-American community to be proactive in their pursuit of equality. They encouraged African-Americans to be outspoken, honest, peaceful, and vigilant in this endeavor (Teacher # 1, interview, October 25, 2001). According to one member of City Council, Ruth Harvey and Jerry Williams were easy to work with because it was always known where they stood on an issue. They were described as aggressive and unyielding in matters that were related to civil rights and what was in the best interests of the African-American children of Danville. A city official goes on to state that they “were always pleasant, friendly, but you could be assured that they were not going to bend when it came to that. They were unwavering and very persuasive” (City Official # 1, interview, June 18, 2001).

This was demonstrated in a December 3, 1969, letter to O.T. Bonner in which they were emphatic that the plan for desegregation needed to be publicly released to avoid a lawsuit that was proposed by one of their clients (Ruth Harvey & Jerry Williams, correspondence to O.T. Bonner, December 3, 1969). In a School Board meeting on December 5, 1969, citing the need to maintain a good relationship with the attorneys, Bonner convinced the school board that they should establish a date to release this information (School Board Minutes, December 5, 1969).

School Leaders

Within the school system, O.T. Bonner, the superintendent of schools, was faced with the task of making desegregation happen and making it work with the least amount of

problems and with the greatest efficiency. According to one administrator, Bonner was the main advocate for the desegregation of the schools. Not only did he realize that it was inevitable and that desegregation was going to occur, he also believed that it was the right thing to do for Danville and the African-American community. With this realization, he attempted to be proactive in his approach by purchasing the land and by starting the construction of a new junior high school on the north side of town.

Earlier in his tenure as superintendent, he had orchestrated Danville's move from total segregation to freedom of choice. He was the type of man that did not want to be caught off guard by anyone or anything. He believed in planning. Like a lot of people, he would have preferred to have kept things the way they were, but that was not going to be, so he prepared for what was coming (Administrator # 1, interview, August 24, 2001).

According to a former administrator, Mr. Bonner helped to author the best plan possible for Danville Public Schools and its students. While he did not anticipate all of the problems that would arise, he was insightful and thorough as he worked his way through potential pitfalls that would face the school division (Administrator # 2, interview, November 6, 2001). His planning acumen, specifically as it related to facility needs, was never more evident than in a letter that he submitted to Dr. John Hope of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) on August 21, 1967. In this letter he stated,

We are planning and expect to have within the next two to three years a new junior high school on the north side of our City where approximately one-half of the population resides. . . . When completed this probably will be the only junior high school for this section of the City and will also relieve congestion that we have in the elementary schools by converting the present junior high schools into elementary

schools. Large enrollments on the south side of the City will be reduced by this school, making possible similar changes for this area. . . . This building program will go a long way in solving problems we face in connection with desegregation. (O.T. Bonner, correspondence to Dr. John Hope, August 21, 1967)

O. T. Bonner was especially concerned about the plight of the students in Danville's schools and how they would assimilate into their new culture. In this letter to Dr. Hope, Mr. Bonner noted that while facilities were an important component of school desegregation, it was nevertheless a single component. To Mr. Bonner, the facilities represented only bricks and mortar. At the very heart of desegregation were the students and how they would be affected during this process. In his plan to HEW, Mr. Bonner emphasized that the best interests of students needed to be of prime consideration.

All attendance areas have been defined on the basis of the location of the schools, the capacity of the buildings, and the most satisfactory organization of the schools for instruction. Good teacher-pupil relationships will be stressed at all levels. No child will be preferred or rejected because of cultural background, race, or creed. . . .

Classroom procedures will continue to be selected on the basis of the needs and interests of the individual pupil. (O.T. Bonner, correspondence to Dr. John Hope, December 18, 1968)

To further exemplify this point, Bonner states in a letter to Dr. John Hope, Region III director for HEW, that "In our schools we have paid special attention to making pupils of the minority group feel at home in their new quarters" (O.T. Bonner, correspondence to Dr. John Hope, August 21, 1967).

Mr. Bonner knew that the attitude of teachers would make or break desegregation and he was concerned about how teachers would react to teaching in integrated schools. He stated in his letter to Dr. Hope of HEW that many teachers of both races had been approached about teaching in schools where they would be in the minority. He went on to say that younger teachers offered this opportunity, both African-American and white, felt that they lacked the experience needed to perform in that particular assignment; therefore, they were not tendered offers of employment. One teacher, new to the system in 1970, noted that he was excited about the prospects of teaching in an integrated system while many of his colleagues were not.

I had lived all over the country and had never really noticed race relations to that point, but I was excited about the new possibility that awaited me in my first job. Many of my new colleagues did not express the same excitement that I did. They were worried about classes and what they might encounter. (Teacher # 5, interview, October 25, 2001)

Additionally, he noted that veteran teachers, of both races, who were offered the opportunity to teach in schools in which they would be in the minority, were reluctant to accept a similar assignment. He also stated that he was hesitant to force them to work in these settings because there had been a positive relationship between the administration and the teachers and he did not want to jeopardize the future of this relationship (O.T. Bonner, correspondence to Dr. John Hope, August 21, 1967).

While there were some teachers in the minority already working in schools, Mr. Bonner knew that to achieve optimal integration of staff with optimal results, in-service

opportunities would have to be expanded to address the new needs of these teachers. In a letter he stated,

Leadership will be exerted in the in-service education program to prepare all teachers for teaching in desegregated schools. Opportunities for interaction between teachers of both races will be emphasized through cooperatively planned work experiences. The development of rapport through greater professional insight and personal understanding will be sought at all levels. (O.T. Bonner, correspondence to HEW, December 18, 1968)

While Mr. Bonner had a positive impact on school desegregation, it should be noted that not everyone in the school system had a positive impression of the role that he played in the total process. The two things that were specifically mentioned were that he did not fully communicate the goals and objectives of desegregation to either the faculty or the community and that “at a time when everything seemed to be falling apart at GW, he seemingly had little to say” (Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001).

That former administrator went on to state that Mr. Bonner’s reputation as a leader did not suffer substantially in the eyes of the African-American and white teachers when he was not at the forefront of dealing with the student protests at GW in early September. It was assumed that he was in direct contact with Mr. Motley, principal of George Washington High School, and was being apprised of every situation and every development. However, expressing a different opinion, another teacher intimated that not only did this impact his reputation with the teachers; it also adversely impacted his reputation with the African-American community (Teacher # 4, interview, November 6, 2001).

On December 17, 1968, it was announced that J.T. Christopher would be retiring as the principal at George Washington High School on June 30, 1969. At the same school board meeting, O.T. Bonner, superintendent of schools, brought the name of E.L. Motley to the Board as a possible successor to Mr. Christopher. After a period of discussion by Danville's School Board, Mr. Motley was appointed as the principal of George Washington High School (School Board Minutes, December 17, 1968). According to one teacher, with this appointment, Mr. Motley entered into the most difficult tenure in his professional career, as George Washington High School and Danville were about to convert from a freedom of choice educational system to a desegregated system.

In Mr. Motley's first year, 1969-1970, GW had about 100 African-American students among the 2000 that attended school under the freedom of choice plan. In the fall, with desegregation, we were expecting an increase of about 400-500 African-American students. This was going to dramatically change the school's demographics and culture. Mr. Motley had the unenviable and seemingly impossible task of not only trying to meld the two student bodies but also the faculties. He handled himself as a gentleman at all times and had the best interests of all students at heart with any decisions that he made. (Teacher # 3, interview, October 25, 2001)

According to a former administrator, Mr. Motley was selected for this position for three reasons: first, he was in line for the position. He had been an effective and faithful administrator in the school system for several years as the principal of Robert E. Lee Junior High School. Because of this dedicated service to the school division and since he had long desired to be the principal at GW, it was perceived that O. T. Bonner, the superintendent, was

rewarding him (Administrator # 1, interview, August 24, 2001). Secondly, he was chosen because of his congenial disposition and his ability to unite people toward a common goal.

Mr. Motley had an open door policy. He encouraged us, as staff members, to come into his office and to talk about the concerns that we had. He was a Christian gentleman and a man of his word. He was very perceptive and very much aware of the problems that we were going to face with desegregation and he knew that he did not have all the answers. He sought the answers and he did not care where the answers came from. He was only interested in running a good school for both the students and the faculty. (Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001)

Thirdly, Mr. Motley was selected because he was entering the latter stages of his career and he was close to retirement.

Everyone knew that the principal at GW would be under heavy pressure and scrutiny from the School Board and from the community. It was going to be a no-win situation for that person. The person who took this job was going to have to deal with tough, unpopular issues and would eventually be consumed by the job. Mr. Motley was a seasoned administrator that possessed the skills to deal with the issues of desegregation and he was on the verge of retirement. It was no surprise to anyone that he was selected. (Administrator # 1, interview, August 24, 2001)

Mr. Motley was roundly criticized by some teachers and within the community because of the appearance of a hands-off approach in dealing with matters that occurred within the school. According to one administrator, Mr. Motley realized that he did not have all the answers to the problems that he would face with desegregation and used the resources that he had at his disposal, his assistant principals and teachers.

Mr. Motley took a lot of criticism from the community for his apparent hands-off approach. But in reality Mr. Motley was a very calculating person. He knew what was going on and did a great job of delegating responsibility to each of the assistants. I never had as much autonomy as I did with Mr. Motley. He trusted us and he allowed us to do the job that that we were hired to do all the while providing us with the resources that we needed to meet the goals of the school and the school division. He was a master at planning and plotting the course of the school. He worked extremely hard with the people at GW and Langston to receive their input and to plan a smooth transition for the 1970-1971 school year. I believe the criticisms that he received were unfounded and were leveled by people who did not know him; who did not understand him; or did not understand the inner workings of the school.

(Administrator # 2, interview, November 6, 2001)

Another administrator emphasized that Mr. Motley sought the counsel of others before he embarked on any major decision. He wanted to know all the angles associated with all the problems and took great care in soliciting the opinion and ideas of others before making an important decision (Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001).

Because of his extreme care in soliciting the opinions of others in the planning process and his desire for a smooth transition in the fall, Mr. Motley expressed his hurt and anger in a letter to Ms. Vera Murphy, the principal of Langston High School. In the spring of 1970, the faculties and the students were working together to plan for desegregation in the fall. They were discussing such topics as school colors, school mascots, clubs, and extracurricular activities. When information was released prematurely to the press, he felt that this was an attempt on Ms. Murphy's part to circumvent the planning process and to

undermine the great strides that had been made up to that point (Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001). In his letter to Ms. Murphy he stated,

No credit is given for the concessions on cheerleaders, bands, choirs, Student Council, etc. We at GW are extremely disappointed with the situation as we feel that Langston has broken our agreement. From the beginning of our sessions, we have agreed to release no news stories until there could be a simultaneous release for the city dailies. (School Board Minutes, June 11, 1970)

A meeting that Mr. Motley held on September 15, 1970, in his office with six students, three parents, Ruth Harvey, an attorney, and Douglas Wilson, a minister, served as evidence of the interest he had for the ideas and concerns of others and served to dispute the hands-off accusations leveled against him. This meeting followed a week of turmoil at George Washington High School after the arrest of an African-American youth at the football game on September 11, 1970. Motley went on to describe this meeting as “real successful. . . . We met for two hours and I think we bridged a communication gap” (“All Danville Schools,” 1970, p. 3A). The focus of the meeting was on the club programs at GW. “The principal said the group was interested in student processes and procedures such as the dress code, student rules and regulations, and the methods of selection of cheerleaders and members of student council” (“All Danville Schools,” 1970, p. 3A). Elated by the success of this meeting, Mr. Motley stated that he would be willing to sit down with any group of students or their parents to discuss any concerns that they might have in the future (“All Danville Schools,” 1970).

According to one teacher at GW, Mr. Motley was a key in making desegregation work in Danville. This teacher cited three important components of Mr. Motley's personality that made desegregation work.

First, he was a great listener. He made himself available to the faculty, the community, and most importantly the students. He wanted to know our concerns and how we felt about certain things. While it may have been a problem that he couldn't remedy, he at least listened. Secondly, he constantly reminded the faculty that we needed to be seen by the students engaging in conversation and acting professionally toward one another. He knew that the students would be taking their clues from us and that for desegregation to work and to have harmony within the school, it was important that we be seen together in a cordial and a collegial manner. Third, he was simply a good man that cared about children and their well being. (Teacher # 1, interview, October 25, 2001)

Table 4 in the appendix summarizes the key players in school desegregation in Danville, Virginia and how they were identified.

Preparation for Desegregation

Preparation for the desegregation that occurred in 1970-1971 began during the 1964 school year when freedom of choice was introduced to Danville Public Schools. While freedom of choice was not a rousing success in terms of the number of students that availed themselves of this opportunity, it did afford the school district the opportunity to identify and to address some of the issues that needed to be rectified as prescribed by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (Administrator # 1, interview, August 24, 2001).

In his letter dated December 18, 1968, Mr. Bonner identified three areas that were specifically being addressed. They included establishing geographic attendance zones that promoted the greatest amount of desegregation required for a unified school district; assuring that faculties were desegregated and that they received the training necessary for working in multi-cultural schools; and completing the facilities needed to assure an orderly transfer to a unified school district (O.T. Bonner, correspondence to HEW, December 18, 1968).

The spring of 1970 arrived and the focus would now be on preparing the faculty and staff, the students, and the community for desegregation. This section of the paper chronicles the efforts of the school division to get ready for school desegregation in the fall of 1970 and reports on the preparation of the community, the faculty and staff, and the students in this process.

Communication

Evidence from interviews indicated that the community, neither African-American nor white was prepared for desegregation. The community was stratified. Some wanted the schools to be integrated and others wanted the system to maintain the status quo. However, all wanted knowledge about desegregation and the preparation and planning that the school system was undergoing.

According to a central office administrator, the school system failed in its attempts to adequately prepare the community for desegregation. In his opinion, this failure occurred in three areas. First, they failed to involve people from the community. In not seeking out their ideas and their opinions, they failed to create a feeling of ownership and cooperation within the community. Secondly, this administrator felt that the school system could have done a better job of publishing their desegregation plans in the newspapers along with the legal

requirements that they were under for desegregation. Most of the communication was haphazard and was by word of mouth. As a result, the communication between the school system and the community lacked the detail that was needed for a smooth transition and missed out on the opportunity to effectively reach all sides within the community (Administrator # 4, interview, August 24, 2001).

A member of Danville's City Council confirmed the above assessment in noting that the city and the school system did not go far enough in its planning. He stated,

We planned, but we forgot some essential items and didn't go far enough in the planning process. We needed to involve more people in this process and get more information into the public's hands. While we were thorough, we needed to take a closer look at the smaller issues like school colors and mascots. They weren't major concerns at first, but they ultimately became critical issues and they were at the center of the disruptions that disrupted the school system in September of 1970. (City Official # 1, interview, June 19, 2001)

Within the school system in the spring of 1970, department chairs and administrators were brought together to begin planning for the transition in the fall to a unitary school district. The purpose of these meetings was to communicate about concerns and potential problems that might arise during the desegregation of schools and what needed to be done to make the process a success. The department chairs and administrators were given the charge to return to their schools with this news and to share it with other members of the faculty within their departments. The faculties would then share pertinent information with the students at appropriate times (Teacher # 1, interview, October 25, 2001; Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001).

There were three problems that surfaced during the course of these discussions. The first involved preparation.

How do you prepare for the unknown? Problems could only be anticipated. We had no idea what the real issues might be. In hindsight, the meetings were a good place to start, but we didn't go far enough. We needed to involve the total faculties. They needed to be involved and could have provided us with more opinions and insight.

(Administrator # 1, interview, August 24, 2001)

Secondly, there was an overwhelming feeling of distrust that permeated these meetings. During the spring and summer of 1970, teachers and staff were assigned to small groups for discussion. The goal was to open the lines of communication and to begin formulating plans for desegregation that fall. According to a former administrator from GW,

We were assigned to small groups for discussion. I always had the feeling that these small groups had potential for open dialogue. However, I never got the impression that my colleagues from Langston trusted what we were saying or the course we wanted to pursue (Administrator # 1, interview, August 24, 2001).

In confirming the above one former teacher noted, "Years later, this [feeling of distrust] was confirmed when an African-American friend disclosed that it took him years of reminding himself that we, the teachers at GW, had never done anything to him" (Teacher # 2, interview, November 6, 2001).

Thirdly, there was a lack of communication between the department chairs and the rest of the faculty. Therefore, the teachers were not fully cognizant of the discussions taking place and they were unable to keep their students fully apprised of developments associated

with desegregation. This lack of communication appeared to be more of a problem at GW than at Langston (Teacher # 5, interview, November 6, 2001).

The students at both George Washington High School and Langston High School were going to encounter radical changes in the fall of 1970. The students at Langston were going to be taken from their building. As a result, they were leaving behind their traditions, their culture, and a good portion of their history. At GW, the students were not being displaced, but the changes were nevertheless going to be significant. Because of the increased number of African-American students, the culture at GW would be vastly altered. The students played a pivotal role in the desegregation of George Washington High School and Langston High School. According to a former administrator, it was the students who helped to make desegregation work. "The students were placed in an awkward position. They were being asked to come together as one without all of the planning that was needed. I think they did a fantastic job under the circumstances" (Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001).

At Langston High School, desegregation was a pivotal topic in the spring of 1970. All of the teachers participated in working with the students for desegregation in the fall of 1970. They were keenly aware that these students would be closely watched and that every move would be closely scrutinized at GW and within the community. As a result, they attempted to prepare them for these changes.

That spring, they reminded us that we were as good as anyone at GW, that our behavior would be closely monitored and that people were waiting for us to mess up. They continually encouraged us to do our best and reminded us of what would be acceptable and unacceptable behavior. They wanted us to be successful when we

went to GW. Everyone knew that we would contribute to the athletic programs, but they wanted us to show everyone that we had a vital contribution to make to the academics at GW as well. (Student # 1, interview, October 25, 2001)

According to a former teacher, many of the teachers at Langston took it upon themselves to work with the students that spring. To them, it was important that the students were prepared for the changes in climate and culture.

We knew that our students were going into a situation that had the potential of being volatile. They were feeling ill at ease about the transition to GW. They were not sure that they were wanted and as a result many of them did not want to attend school there. Many of my colleagues at Langston took it upon themselves to prepare their students for this change. We talked with them about expectations, both positive and negative, and how they should react to certain situations. We also tried to give them a sense of pride about themselves. We thought that this would help them deal with any of the situations that they might encounter associated with desegregation (Teacher # 1, interview, October 25, 2001).

According to a former student at GW, while the teachers at GW wanted the students to be prepared for the changes that were coming, the talk about desegregation was neither open nor prevalent in the classrooms.

We, the students, knew that desegregation was imminent because of talk in the community and at home, but there was little discussion in my classes. While at GW, we had classes with African-American students because of freedom of choice. It is very possible that the teachers at GW didn't feel that we needed the preparation because of this. (Student # 3, interview, November 22, 2001)

Teachers at GW in the spring also attempted to prepare students for the changes that would be coming in the fall of 1970. According to a former teacher, their effort to educate the students at GW about these changes was not as detailed or as widespread as their colleagues at Langston.

We wanted our students to be aware of desegregation and the changes that would be forthcoming. However, in all honesty, our students would not be facing the same changes that the students from Langston would be facing. I emphasized to all my classes that they needed to practice patience because all of us, both blacks and whites, were going to be entering into a situation that we were not familiar with. I also told my classes that they would be hearing a lot of talk from outside sources, some would be positive and some would be negative. I encouraged them to formulate their own opinions based on the interactions that they had with the students from Langston.
(Teacher # 3, interview, October 25, 2001)

A former student went on to mention that the majority of the discussions related to desegregation occurred among the ranks of the coaches. They were excited about the impact that the African-American athletes would have on the athletic programs at George Washington High School.

Langston was especially noted for its basketball program. There was a great deal of excitement among the students in anticipation of basketball season. They had won a couple of state championships and many of their athletes were returning. The football coaches were also excited about the increased athleticism that the team would have. They emphasized to the football players that we would function as a team and that there would be no incidents. That spring they brought some of the African-American

players over for our out of season workouts. But, in my classes there was not a great deal of discussion. (Student # 3, interview, November 22, 2001)

Teacher Preparation

O.T. Bonner, school superintendent, realized that teachers would play a critical role in the success of desegregation and knew that it was important for teachers to learn how to deal with students of the opposite race (Administrator # 1, interview, August 24, 2001). In an attempt to ensure that this goal was realized, he arranged for in-service education that would incorporate both paid consultants with an expertise in this area and an opportunity for teachers and administrators to meet and to communicate with their colleagues from the other school.

The consultants came to Danville from the University of Virginia and from Old Dominion University. Their focus was on group dynamics and on sensitivity training for teachers. The consultants shared with the teachers and administrators eight guidelines for effectively dealing with all students. They included the following: (a) be sincere and genuine in your dealings with all students; (b) foster friendly relationships; (c) be color blind when dealing with students; (d) get to know the child; (e) be fair and firm in dealing with students; (f) create a friendly climate; (g) be positive; and (h) give everyone a chance (“Teacher’s Role,” 1970).

The seminars proved to be successful. According to a teacher, “They taught us how to deal with minor disturbances and how to talk to students without seeming like we were being critical or condescending” (Teacher # 3, interview, October 25, 2001). Another teacher mentioned that these techniques were used in the classroom to quell minor disturbances and to head off potential problems between students or between the teacher and a student

(Teacher # 1, interview, October 25, 2001). An administrator confirmed the benefits of the consultants.

They brought with them techniques that had been tried in other areas and had proven successful. They were also able to share experiences from these other localities and offer solutions to problems that they had encountered. It gave us a head start on our school year and provided us with ideas that we could possibly incorporate into our class procedures and into class management. (Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001)

Some employees believed that the consultants were limited in their effectiveness. One teacher remembers the seminars, “They were very generic in the information they provided us and, in my opinion, I never considered them to be particularly useful” (Teacher # 2, interview, November 6, 2001). A former administrator noted that the consultants used for the in-services for teachers in Danville espoused an “ivory tower” philosophy that he found objectionable for two reasons:

First, the truth is they were coming to us from areas that had their schools closed, Charlottesville and Norfolk, and they were speaking to us about how we needed to handle things. These areas had not been successful in their attempts to desegregate, but they approached us along the lines that if we do things a certain way then any problems that we would encounter would be limited. I would have preferred an approach in which they identified some of the pitfalls that these areas had encountered and how these issues were resolved. What did they encounter that we needed to be concerned about? Second, these people were theorists and not practitioners. They did not have any direct experience in the operation of these

schools. They served as consultants or had studied what took place. Therefore, they talked to us in terms of theory and not in terms of practical experience. They were useful to a very limited degree. (Administrator # 1, interview, August 24, 2001)

Student Preparation

Selected students from both Langston High School and George Washington High School were made a part of the transition. These were generally recognized student leaders from both schools such as class officers and members of the student government. They met with each other and members of the administration to formulate plans and share ideas about the transition. According to some administrators, the idea of involving students and getting their ideas was essential to the success of desegregation. The best and the brightest from the student bodies of both schools were chosen to work on these committees. These administrators noted that they were easy to work with and that they provided the administration with great ideas and a number of concerns that needed to be addressed (Administrator # 1, interview, August 24, 2001; Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001). However, according to a former administrator, a greater variety of students should have been involved.

They would have provided us with different insights and different concerns that they, the students and the community had. As a result, our preparations would have been more complete, more thorough, and they would have covered a greater array of situations. (Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001)

Both Langston High School and George Washington High School had steering committees comprised of students that met on a regular basis in the spring of 1970. They proffered recommendations to the school administrators on a variety of topics associated with

desegregation. Some of the issues that emerged from these meetings related to school colors, the school mascot, how students would be selected for the various squads and teams, and how the SCA and class officers would be selected. Resolutions from both schools emerged from these meetings.

The steering committee from George Washington High School offered resolutions in several key areas. Their proposals included the following: (a) the students proposed that there be a racial relations week “to promote a better understanding between the students of both races” (“Cheerleaders, Kiltie Corps Integrated,” May 19, 1970, p. 1B); (b) the students proposed that the publications at GW maintain their names because of the numerous awards and recognitions that they had won; (c) the students proposed that the school mascot, colors, and fight song remain the same until there could be a referendum by the entire student body; and (d) the students proposed that the student council constitution should be rewritten and that any other problems should be worked out in a compromise between the two groups (“Cheerleaders, Kiltie Corps Integrated,” May 19, 1970).

The steering committee from Langston High School also offered several recommendations. Their resolutions focused on the following areas: (a) the students proposed changes in the names of the high school, the mascot, the literary organizations, and the school colors be changed to promote the concept of consolidation versus the concept of annexation; (b) the students proposed that the school be staffed with qualified African-American administrators, counselors, teachers, and coaches; (c) the students proposed that there be meaningful participation of African-American students in a variety of activities such as cheerleading, student government, and dramatic productions like the senior play; and (d) the students proposed that a Black Studies program be incorporated into the curriculum to

emphasize the contributions by black Americans (“Cheerleaders, Kiltie Corps Integrated,” May 19, 1970).

As a result of the meetings between student steering committees, the teachers and administrators, and other meetings that occurred several compromises were reached as they pertained to extra-curricular activities and clubs. In order to assure balanced representation of the races at GW in extra-curricular activities the following items were agreed upon: (a) there would be co-chairs for the Student Council; (b) there would be a Homecoming Court selected rather than the selection of a Homecoming King and Queen; (c) certain extracurricular activities would be guaranteed a minimum participation of either black or white students; (d) there would be no class officers for the 1970-1971 school year; and (e) the election of class officers would be held in the spring of 1971 for the 1971-1972 school year (Student # 1, interview, October 25, 2001; Administrator # 2, interview, November 6, 2001).

While the entire community was impacted by desegregation, the students of George Washington High School and Langston High School faced the greatest challenges. According to a former administrator, O.T. Bonner, school superintendent, wanted to ease into desegregation by beginning in the lower grades and working up to the high school.

He felt that the younger students didn’t have the same biases that the older students had. While they, too, were products of their communities and parents teaching, they had not yet cultivated these prejudices. They would be easier to work with and the problems would be minor in comparison. (Administrator # 4, interview, August 24, 2001)

The students’ resentment of each other was the first problem that needed to be addressed and resolved. According to a former teacher, neither group of students wanted the

other and neither did they want to give up what they had at their school: (a) their own traditions; (b) their own identities; and (c) their own cultures.

When we left Langston, we left a lot behind. We had won two basketball championships; we had a great tradition in our own right; and we had a feeling of family and community. None of that came with us. We were outcasts. We weren't readily accepted and we didn't feel that we had the same opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. There was a lot of animosity on our part and this, along with the aforementioned problems of acceptance, contributed to the tensions at school. (Student # 1, interview, October 25, 2001)

Another former student acknowledged that there was change, but that change was present for both African-American and white students.

We already had outstanding athletics, clubs, and academics and we were faced with losing some of our status and positions. I know that things changed for the African-American students. They were not involved in as many activities as they had been and they left a lot behind when they left Langston, but things changed for us as well. (Student # 3, interview, November 22, 2001)

A former administrator noted that the administration and faculty were aware of race when decisions were made about teams and activities. Some of the changes that were put into place included the cancellation of clubs associated with one specific race and changes in selection procedures to ensure racial balance. In acknowledging the above, this administrator believed that they should have had more faith in the student body.

We assumed that the students would vote along racial lines. The irony of that was in 1968, we had an African-American senior class president, James Bethel. I am not sure

that the students would not have done the right thing if we had given them the opportunity. (Administrator # 2, interview, November 6, 2001)

Refer to table 5 in the appendix for a summary of the preparation that the students, the staff, and the community underwent prior to the desegregation of George Washington High School and Langston High School in 1970.

Attitudes and Concerns about Desegregation

When it came to the topic of desegregation, the Danville community, both African-American and white, was fragmented. There were people of both races that favored desegregation, and there were people of both races that were against desegregation. This section of the study focuses on the community's attitude about desegregation and on the concerns of the community as they related to desegregation. Particular attention will be paid to the week of September 14, 1970, and the events that transpired that disrupted the opening of school.

Educational Opportunity and Parity

According to one source, there were two motives for desegregation, within the African-American community. The first was the chance for increased educational opportunities for the African-American students. It was their belief that these students from Langston High School, and the other African-American students within the school system, would benefit from the more modern facilities. Desegregation, within the black community, was viewed as a way to place their children on a level playing field. They were happy with the quality of teaching that their children were receiving, but they wanted the same quality as it related to facilities. According to a former administrator, the facilities for African-American students were adequate, but the money that was spent at and on the white schools

was greater than the money that was spent on the black schools. The equipment was better and the facilities were more modern. According to this administrator, the African-American community simply wanted the same advantages for their children that the white students had at their schools (Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001).

In confirming the above assessment, a former student from Langston High School stated that her family considered desegregation to be a great opportunity. She stated that when her parents were in school, educational facilities and equipment for African-Americans were substandard. "They received seconds in terms of books and band instruments. Items that had been formerly used by white students" (Student # 1, interview, October 25, 2001). This student goes on to point out,

When I started my classes, I was actually grateful because I remembered the lack of facilities that we had in my biology class at Langston. We only had two microscopes for the entire class. We had to line up to see specimens in science class. At GW, we had more equipment. Almost every student had their own microscope. I could not believe it. My parents were anxious to hear about the changes. (Student # 1, interview, October 25, 2001)

The second motive for desegregation within the African-American community was an issue of fairness. In addressing this issue, a former member of the City Council acknowledged that the educational needs of the black community had been poorly served by dual educational system.

They had adequate facilities, adequate supplies, but they didn't have all of the amenities and equipment that the white schools had. We should have done it before we were mandated to desegregate. It was the right thing and it gave them an

opportunity to compete with the best possible facilities and equipment. (City Official # 1, interview, June 19, 2001)

A school administrator in concurring with the above statement acknowledged that the time for desegregation had come and that any failure to desegregate would be doing a disservice to the African-American students.

They deserved every opportunity to be successful and to reach their utmost potential. I had worked in Prince Edward prior to the closing of their schools, and I saw the problems that segregation created. Segregation was unfair and unjust. I was for desegregation and what it stood for. (Administrator # 1, interview, August 24, 2001)

While the African-American community felt that desegregation offered their children increased opportunities, there was a segment of the white community in Danville who believed that desegregation would have a deleterious effect on their children. The biggest voice of opposition came from the residents of the Southwycke Farms and Grove Park subdivisions. According to a former administrator, these residents represented some of the more powerful and forceful figures in the Danville community. He stated, “They often flexed their political muscles on issues that impacted them or their children. They attempted to use their status within the community to intimidate and agitate city officials” (Administrator # 4, interview, August 24, 2001).

At the February 5, 1970, school board meeting, they offered a petition citing their requests. Dr. Stoneburner, the spokesman for the group, made several key points in his presentation to the school board:

1. Integration should be achieved as extensively and as equitably as possible.

2. If the school system were to fail in the endeavor to desegregate, it would have a deleterious effect on the local economy.
3. Bussing should be used to ensure a black-white ratio was consistent in all schools.
4. If the school system failed to address the issues cited by this group, it stood to have white families educate their children in private schools (School Board Minutes, February 5, 1970).

A former administrator who lived in this subdivision confirmed that his neighbors and friends were concerned about the impact that integration would have on their children.

They were more worried about the impact of desegregation on the younger children than on the high school students. According to the school board's plan to pair schools, Grove Park would be paired with Gibson Elementary School. Most of the students from Gibson were from a housing project off of Industrial Avenue, and they were anxious that their children's progress would be hindered by the lack of academic preparation of these students. (Administrator # 2, interview, November 6, 2001)

This administrator went on to note that this group of parents went as far as to recommend an ungraded approach to educating the students who would attend the Grove Park-Gibson pairing. They proposed that these children be allowed to move from grade to grade based on their standardized test scores and the progress that they made during the school year (Administrator # 2, interview, November 6, 2001).

Their other argument focused on the black-white ratio of their children's school. According to the February 5, 1970, School Board Minutes, the black-white ratio for the school division was 70% white and 30% black. They were upset that their children would be attending a school that would be 70% black and only 30% white. They felt that they were

bearing the brunt of the school system's desegregation plan. They also believed that every school in the division should adequately represent the black-white ratio of the total division and that to do otherwise would create a system of de facto desegregation (School Board Minutes, February 5, 1970).

It must be realized that the courts will not accept de facto integration any more than freedom of choice. Other areas in the South that have the same problem do not have the cooperation from white people. Our area [Southwycke Farms and Grove Park] will be reluctant to cooperate if the Board proceeds with the proposed plan. De facto integration will result in a decrease in whites to blacks as the people will resort to other means. The white children who can afford it will go to private schools and the public schools will become predominantly black, therefore the black people will be refused integration to increase their education. (School Board Minutes, February 5, 1970)

Teacher Selection and Academics

The faculty and staffs from George Washington High School and Langston High School shared many concerns about desegregation. Foremost among their concerns were academics. There are two issues that emanated from this concern: (a) How would the teachers be selected for GW? and (b) Would desegregation impact the academic program at GW?

As early as 1967, O.T. Bonner indicated in a letter to Dr. John Hope that finding teachers to work in schools of the opposite race was going to be difficult. They found that teachers freshly out of college felt that the more experienced teachers should be placed in these schools because of their experience and their ability to adapt. While the veteran

teachers when confronted with this possibility, simply chose to leave the school division (O.T. Bonner, correspondence with Dr. John Hope, August 21, 1967).

According to a former central office administrator, when selecting teachers to work at GW in the fall of 1970, they had to be cognizant of race to ensure that the staff was racially balanced. He also indicated that the staff looked for teachers who were flexible and open-minded.

We wanted teachers to go into this situation void of any preconceived ideas about students of the opposite race. We knew that there were going to be some situations that would arise and we wanted people in place who wouldn't exacerbate the situation and wouldn't provoke a reaction from the students. We were entering a new era and they couldn't rigidly adhere to their old ways. (Administrator # 4, interview, August 24, 2001)

This former administrator went on to indicate that he expected more adjustment problems from the white faculty than from the African-American faculty because they tended to be more set in their ways and resistant to change. He acknowledged that the school system had a lot of work to do with their faculties and that they needed to provide them with additional in-service opportunities that would enable them to better deal with desegregation (Administrator # 4, interview, August 24, 2001).

A former administrator at the high school indicated that they recruited teachers for the GW that fit their specific needs.

We wanted strong teachers, whether black or white, who would command the respect of the students in their classes. They needed to have some standing within the community and to be flexible. We were fortunate that we were able to attract a good

group. We had a good mix of young teachers and veterans. They worked hard under some trying circumstances and most of them grew professionally, socially, and personally. (Administrator # 1, interview, August 24, 2001)

A second worry for the faculty and staff would be the impact of desegregation on the curriculum. A former administrator indicated that the curriculum at GW had always been rigorous and challenging and that it was important for the curriculum remain strong and challenging for the students. While classes at GW had always been heterogeneously grouped with no designation of level, new classes were being introduced to accommodate the variety of academic levels for students. For example, there were three different levels of English offered at each grade level and a number of specialty classes, like Humanities and mythology that were created (Administrator # 2, interview, November 6, 2001).

A former teacher stated that he believed that the different levels of classes were created to accommodate the changes in the student population due to desegregation. He also indicated that it had an adverse effect on teaching and learning.

I had always considered teaching to be a pursuit of scholarship. It was important for me to maintain that ideal. I was disappointed that we began to create classes that were aimed solely at the lower levels of students. I felt that we were offering watered down versions of our academic classes and that not all of these specialty classes had the same academic integrity. We were not challenging our middle and lower level students to improve or to get better. (Teacher # 2, interview, November 6, 2001)

In support of the above assessment, a former administrator pointed out that the upper level classes remained rigorous and the students who took these classes remained challenged by the quality and difficulty of the work.

I can think of no better course offerings than what we had at GW. Physics with Bill Pergerson, government with Tom Houser, English with Ruby Archie, and upper level math with Evelyn Hair were outstanding classes. The students who availed themselves of those and other advanced classes got one of the best educations in the country. But, we failed our lower level students. We provided them with too many classes that failed to challenge them and to provide them with the skills that they needed. (Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001)

Traditions and Culture

While most of the African-American community felt that desegregation afforded their children greater opportunities, there were some concerns about desegregation. When the African-American students from Langston High School entered the corridors of GW for the first time in the fall of 1970, in addition to leaving behind their school colors, their mascot, and their traditions, they left behind some of their identity.

Langston had been a cultural center for the African-American community for years. It was not uncommon for the school to host events and for the entire community to be in attendance at various times. Additionally, the principal required the teachers, to visit the homes of their students.

We were able to get a better understanding of our students and their family situations. It promoted a lot of support for the schools within the community. When problems arose, we were in a better position to deal with them and we knew that the parents would be supportive. With integration, we knew that home visits were not going to be feasible. I don't believe that the white teachers would have felt comfortable going to the homes of their African-American students and neither do I believe that the

African-American teachers would have felt comfortable visiting the homes of their white students. (Teacher # 1, interview, October 25, 2001)

In discussing this issue, a former student affirmed that integration took away from the African-American students feeling of community and that concern became a reality.

The values and ideals that had been instilled in a large number of black students had been lost. It seemed as if they had forgotten that their ancestors had fought for integration and equality and became involved in things to their detriment. A large number of blacks, particularly males, started dropping out of school and no one seemed to care like they did at Langston. Some students needed a sense of family and closeness that no longer existed. (Student # 1, interview, October 25, 2001)

Discipline and Safety

A concern in the African-American community was the safety of the African-American students who would be attending George Washington High School. While noting the fact that the African-American students would be in the minority, a former teacher made the following point in discussing this fear.

In 1970, we were scheduled to have almost 2200 students attending GW. At the most, about 700 black students would be in attendance. Our children were the interlopers. We were placing them in a building where they were not particularly wanted. I know that some of the white community was afraid. They had a perception of blacks and they feared that we were going to wreak havoc in their schools. But some of us were afraid about how our children were going to be treated in this situation. When school started, there was an undercurrent of tension. We wondered how our children would

be treated and we afraid of the racism that they might encounter from the students and possibly the teachers. (Teacher # 4, interview, November 6, 2001)

Another teacher goes on to state that while there was some tension, some fear, and some violence, the students learned to be accepting of one another despite the efforts of outside agencies.

We encountered a number of problems that fall after a black student was arrested following a fight at a football game. But, the students did a remarkable job of weathering that problem and they learned to get along with one another and to communicate on a rational and unemotional level. There were a number of whites and blacks within the community that tried to poison the minds of the students and to sabotage the work and efforts of the school. Desegregation would have worked better if it were not for the perceptions and the actions of these outsiders. They made our jobs more difficult. (Teacher # 1, interview, October 25, 2001)

As with the African-American community, the primary concern for the members of the white community was the safety of the students who would be attending George Washington High School. According to a former student, this concern was a point of emphasis at home and among friends.

My parents wondered what the schools were going to be like. They, especially my mother, cautioned me about my associations and constantly reminded me that I needed to be careful. Among my friends, there were concerns expressed about guns and knives being brought to school and about how the schools would be able to guarantee safety. But, there was never any talk about going to another school or going

to a private school. Most of us were committed to attending GW. (Student # 3, interview, November 22, 2001)

A former administrator acknowledged that the community had a concern about safety and noted the issue of safety a prevailing concern among all the parents.

We tried to prepare for any contingency and we made a conscious effort to suspend more students from school for fighting than we previously had. Prior to that year, we brought parents in for conferences, but we were concerned that simple altercations would become major disruptions. Our thoughts were justified by the reactions of everyone to the incident that occurred in September. (Administrator # 2, interview, November 6, 2001)

In addition to the issue of fear and of fights, another administrator went on to address the concern that individuals had about threatening and intimidating behavior. “My biggest concern was about intimidating behavior. I did not want to see lots of people getting involved in disagreements. I did not want to see a gang mentality become part of the culture of our school by either the black or the white students” (Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001).

This administrator also stated that he was concerned about how the members of the community would impact the student’s attitude toward desegregation. He intimated that people outside the school community poisoned the minds of the students.

They made them believe that bad things were going to happen and they were going to be in danger. I have no doubt that this contributed to the tensions and the turmoil that we had in early September. If the students had been left alone from the influences of

these outsiders, I believe that some of our problems would have never happened.

(Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001)

As within the African-American community, the white community had its concerns about the integration of George Washington High School and Langston High School. There were many white citizens that opposed desegregation at any cost. According to one student, his neighborhood was a bastion of this thought.

The summer prior to 1970, desegregation was a very heated topic among my parents and among my friends. I lived in a middle class neighborhood and the people there were concerned about the potential for violence and they were afraid that the schools would become a haven for crime and drugs. There was a lot of posturing and a lot of negative comments. My neighborhood was very conservative and they were slow to accept any kind of change and for them, this was a major change. (Student # 2, interview, October 25, 2001)

This insidious attitude about desegregation was not confined to the general community. This dangerous attitude also crept into the thoughts of people that were prominent leaders within the community. According to one teacher, the class had been discussing integration in class that spring when she was asked about her thoughts on that topic.

I explained to them that I had never had any type of relationship with African-Americans and that while I had some concerns, I didn't think that it would be too bad. I told them I thought that it would bring about some interesting changes. I was surprised when I became the butt of criticism on a local radio show hosted by a local minister. I remember thinking that this person was supposed to be a source of reason,

understanding, fairness, and compassion, and he was criticizing me publicly about my stance. He was opposed to integration, he openly shared his opinion, and he later started his own private school in the community. (Teacher # 3, interview, October 25, 2001)

Discipline and safety were issues that were at the forefront of the faculty and staff at George Washington High School in the fall of 1970. A former administrator was concerned specifically about whether or not he would be allowed to handle discipline in the same manner that he had in the past.

I was afraid that they [central office] were going to shackle us and prevent us from dealing with some of the problems that might arise. We had always been very proactive in our discipline and sought to head off problems before they reached a critical state. (Administrator # 1, interview, August 24, 2001)

A former teacher from Langston High School noted that the discipline problems they had were minor. This was attributed to the close relationship that they had with the parents of their students and the community. This teacher feared that integration would inhibit this relationship and would contribute to an elevation of discipline problems. Additionally, this teacher wondered if they were prepared to deal with students of the opposite race.

We had very few discipline problems at Langston. I believe it was because we had a close relationship with the parents and the community. I'm sure that GW had very few discipline problems as well for the same reason. But by moving to GW, we were going to lose that closeness. Would we have problems in correcting our white students and would my colleagues have problems in dealing with the African-

American students? That was an issue that needed to be addressed. (Teacher # 1, interview, October 25, 2001)

In an effort to aid the teachers, the school division provided the teachers training in the area of group dynamics. This former teacher believed that this in-service was beneficial and provided the teachers with useful techniques that could be employed in dealing with student issues and to quell potential problems (Teacher # 1, interview, October 25, 2001).

While this teacher noted that she used these techniques frequently and with some success, other former teachers were not so ebullient in their assessment of these group dynamic programs. "Tensions were high from the beginning of school. I felt that we were sitting on a potentially volatile situation and the techniques that they provided us would be of little use if something were to occur" (Teacher # 4, interview, November 6, 2002).

According to a former teacher at George Washington High School, that while there was some tension, some fear, and some violence at the school, most of it was created by the attitudes of people outside the school (Teacher # 1, interview, October 25, 2001). A former administrator concurred.

People outside the school community poisoned the minds of the students. They made them believe that bad things were going to happen and they were going to be in danger. I have no doubt that this contributed to the tensions and the turmoil that we had in September. If the students had been left alone from the influences of these outsiders, I believe that some of our problems would have never happened.

(Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001)

While noting that outsiders, both African-American and white, tried to sabotage the minds of the students and to undermine the work of the school division; consequently,

making their work more difficult. A former teacher acknowledged that the students overcame this interference and learned to get along. “The students did a remarkable job of weathering that problem and they learned to get along with one another and to communicate on a rational and an unemotional level” (Teacher # 1, interview, October 25, 2001).

The Business Community and Desegregation

While most of the white community would have preferred to keep the schools segregated. However, when they were faced with the inevitability of desegregation, they were accepting. For them, it was a quiet acquiescence because they were worried about how they would be perceived within their neighborhoods and how they would be accepted if they spoke in favor of desegregation (Administrator # 1, interview, August 21, 2001; Teacher # 2, interview, November 6, 2001).

A former member of City Council made the following point about the citizens’ attitude about desegregation.

I believe that the majority of Danville supported desegregation and they wanted to do the right thing. I had no fear about mixing the students at GW. I knew that the African-American leadership wanted desegregation to work and that they were preparing their students for this. I also felt good about the students already at GW and their ability to adapt to this change. My greatest worry was about outside influences and how they might impact the students getting along. (City Official # 2, interview, June 21, 2001)

The business community did not share the same concerns about desegregation as the community at large. O.T. Bonner, superintendent of schools, indicated in a letter to Dr. John Hope, from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, that there had been no

economic pressures against anyone, African-American or white, as it related to school desegregation (O.T.Bonner, correspondence to Dr. John Hope, August 21, 1967). A member of city council who operated a local business confirmed the above assessment.

As businessmen, we respected the African-American community. They represented a substantial part of our business from a consumer standpoint and I was happy to see the schools desegregate. I believed that it would enhance not only the school system but also strengthen the community at large. (City Official # 2, interview, June 21, 2001)

Another member of city council went on to state that desegregation not only impacted the productivity of local businesses it also impacted the overall economy of the region. According to this councilman, Dan River and tobacco farming had been the staple of the local economy for years and while Dan River was still very viable, it was important for Danville to recruit new industry and to increase its economic base. Corning and Goodyear were vital to that end. For the city of Danville to recruit and retain this type of industry, it was important to have an attractive school system. (City Official # 1, interview, June 18, 2001)

This official went on to point out that recruiting and maintaining these businesses allowed the city to grow and prosper and it also contributed to a higher standard of living for both the African-American and white communities. “They brought in more jobs with a higher rate of pay. Our community prospered by this association and it would not have occurred, in my opinion, without desegregation” (City Official # 1, interview, June 18, 2001).

September 14-18, 1970: A Week of Turmoil

Despite a relatively calm opening to school, tensions among the students reached a pinnacle on September 14, 1970. The African-American students staged a walkout in protest against the arrest of a black student at the football game on September 11, 1970. The African-American youth had been arrested for disorderly conduct in an altercation with a white youth. The focus of their concern was that the white youth, who was not a student at GW, had not been arrested. The white youth, which was involved in the altercation at the football game, was subsequently arrested and charged with abusive language and with evading the police on the night of September 11 (“Football Incident,” 1970).

The morning was charged with tension as the African-American students sat in the halls and refused to report to their classes. The police were summoned to quell the disturbance and then left after the students agreed to go to the gym and meet with the administration. Following the meeting, the African-American students encountered some other students in the hall and fights broke out (Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001). According to a parent who had come to GW to pick up his son, chaos was rampant as students were running throughout the building as Coach Pugh brought a student to the office who had been badly injured in an altercation in the hallway (“Football Incident,” 1970). A teacher went on to state, “There was an air of fear that permeated the building” (Teacher # 2, interview, November 6, 2001).

E.L. Motley, principal, reported to the City Council that he had received numerous calls over the weekend apprising him that a demonstration was being planned for the school on Monday. At 8:45, he reported that he approached a group of African-American students and requested that they report to their homeroom. Motley stated, “While they showed no

disrespect to me, they weren't interested in going to homeroom" ("Football Incident," 1970).

A teacher confirmed the above incident,

They wanted some answers from the administration and were set on not returning to class until they received some response. I asked Mr. Motley if he wanted me to speak to the students and he allowed me to do so. . . . The students from Langston respected me and I believe they would have gone back to class without much of an incident if Chief McCain had not over-reacted to the situation. I was trying to let them [the students] know that their concerns would be addressed if they allowed the administration some time to look into the situation. (Teacher # 1, interview, October 25, 2001)

Mr. Motley confirmed that the police chief had exacerbated the situation with his caustic remarks. He was quoted as telling Mr. Motley, "I came in here and I'm taking charge. I will smack the ---- out of them" ("Football Incident," 1970).

Chief McCain confirmed in his report to City Council that upon his arrival at GW, on the morning of September 14, that the African-American students were blocking the main corridor of the school. He immediately informed Mr. Motley that he would do whatever was necessary to stem the disruption. After discussions with some of the African-American students, he was able to discern that they were upset over the arrest of the African-American student at the football game and the fact that the white student had not been charged. In a compromise with the students, he agreed to remove the police from the school at that time if they would report to the gym and meet with the administration ("Football Incident," 1970).

Motley went on to report that he and James Slade, assistant principal, met with the students in the gym along with some members of the African-American community. After

listening to their concerns, they selected a group of six students that would later meet with the administration and air the grievances of the group. When this group was dismissed from the gym to return to class, the bell rang for classes to change and they encountered other students in the hall and that is when the confrontations and altercations began between the students who had been in the gym and the students who were changing classes (School Board Minutes, September 14, 1970; “Football Incident, “ 1970).

The altercations that occurred that morning were mainly between African-American and white students. The white students that were involved were upset because they believed that the African-American students were being given favorable treatment by the administration.

While I chose to stay out of any altercations, I had some friends who were mad because the administration had allowed the black students to seemingly walk all over them. When classes changed that day, they started to verbally accost the black students. The black students engaged in the rhetoric as well. Things became tense and some fistfights broke out. I heard about fights in the halls, on the hill, and in restrooms. There was pandemonium all over the school. Students were everywhere.

(Student # 2, interview, October 25, 2001)

According to Mr. Motley, some of the altercations that morning were between African-Americans students. It appears that some of the students from Langston High School resented the black students who had previously attended George Washington High School (School Board Minutes, September 14, 1970). In confirming the above, a teacher pointed out the following,

There was a lot of resentment and animosity toward the black students that had attended GW prior to desegregation in 1970. The students from Langston felt that these students had abandoned their culture and their heritage. They felt that these students had sold out. They were, therefore, looked down upon and there was some stress between these groups. (Teacher # 1, interview, October 25, 2001)

Following this disruption, the police returned armed with tear gas guns and Mr. Motley closed the school without the permission of the superintendent or the school board (“Football Incident, “ 1970). In a subsequent meeting, the school board decided to keep schools closed on September 15, 1970, to allow for a cooling off period (School Board Minutes, September 14, 1970).

While there was no school on Tuesday, September 15, 1970, it was reported in the paper that a parent of a female student indicated that his child had been hit in the stomach the previous day. He urged the school officials to do what was necessary to take control of the situation and to promote a safe environment for all concerned (“Football Incident,” 1970). One of the administrators on duty that day confirmed that the school and the surrounding area was in turmoil and besieged by people when he compared the scene outside the school to Times Square in New York (Hunt, 2001, p. 7).

On Wednesday, September 16, 1970, George Washington High School was to resume operations with six plain-clothes police officers on duty (“All Schools Closed Today,” 1970). According to O.T. Bonner, superintendent, “We have had the cooperation of all departments of the City to get us back into operation. The safety of people is our primary concern. We certainly intend to do everything to insure the safety of all students” (“All Danville Schools,” 1970). Both the School Board and the City Council approved the assignment of the off-duty

police officers. They would be on duty from 8:00 to 4:00, and they would report to the school's principal ("All Danville Schools," 1970).

However, peace and tranquility were not in the offing on this first day back.

We had been in school only a short while and a group of white students had gathered on the hill next to Christopher Lane. There was a face-off between this group of white students and some black students. It created a potentially dangerous scenario for both those students, the students in the building, and the teachers. (Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001)

According to reports, this group of white students who had gathered on the hill, that was adjacent to the high school, was upset by the actions of the African-American students from that Monday. Seeing that the African-American students had blocked the doors, they had attempted to enter the building and were blocked at the doors by some police officers. While there were some bottles thrown and some students did get into physical altercations, the police helped to avert a full-scale riot between the two groups of students (Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001). During the course of these confrontations, one student was injured and another student was arrested for carrying a concealed weapon. Later upon questioning, this student revealed that she had been given the knife "as protection from a group of black students who had apparently singled her out as a target because of her height" ("GW to Open," 1970).

The police dispersed all of the students and about one hundred of the white students left campus and went to Ballou Park, located about a mile from the high school. Police Chief McCain went to the park and engaged the students in dialogue and allowed them to air their concerns. "They charged police with interfering with the white youths' efforts to protect

themselves while not taking efforts to disarm black youths. And, they said black students don't want to learn anything and don't want us too, either" ("GW to Open," 1970). He told the students they could stay in the park and "let off steam if they were orderly, but he told them he did not want them back at school" ("GW to Open," 1970). He also noted that many of the young men that had gathered at the park were well known agitators and he doubted if many of them were actually students at the high school ("GW to Open," 1970).

Following the discord on Wednesday, September 16, 1970, the City Council ordered the off-duty police officers assigned to GW to report in full uniform. Both the City Council and the school administration believed that the police would be more effective in full uniform and would act as more of a deterrent to any unruly behavior in the high school ("Get Tough Policy," 1970).

Additionally, the School Board adopted a get-tough policy that addressed student behavior and was intended to prevent an occurrence of events earlier in the week at GW. The two major components of this new policy included:

1. No unauthorized persons will be permitted on high school property or permitted to create unrest among groups of students. Any person doing so will be considered a trespasser and will be removed from the premises and prosecuted criminally.
2. All students are expected to follow the directions and orders of all school personnel. Any student who refuses to follow the directions and orders will be asked to leave school premises. Failure to do so will result in the student being considered a trespasser. He or she will be subject to suspension, expulsion, or criminal prosecution (School Board Minutes, September 16, 1970).

On Friday, September 18, 1970, Mr. Motley reported that approximately 81% of the 2, 237 students had returned to school and that Thursday and Friday classes had gone on without any further disturbances (“GW High School Nears Normal,” 1970). A former student shared the following memory of that week,

The memory that stands out the most is seeing the patty wagons, the dogs, and the TV stations outside of my classroom in A-wing. I saw police officers with nightsticks, I guess to beat students with if they had to. I remember the fights that broke out in the bathroom and the fights on the hill. I remember students rushing out of class because violence had erupted on the hill. I remember the student sit-in on C-wing near the steps. I can also remember people saying that the violence was the result of people who were not students at GW. They came on campus to fight. (Student # 1, interview, October 25, 2001)

Despite all the upheaval that occurred during that week, this former student took some positives from these experiences.

While that memory stands out, I can also remember after the problems at school had quieted down, I got to know the other students and came to the realization that we weren't so different. That we all had the same goals and aspirations and that all most of us wanted was to go to school and to do the best we could in our studies and in our different activities. I learned a lot about myself, about my perceptions of others, and about how to get along with others. (Student # 1, interview, October 25, 2001)

In spite of all that was learned by the students and the staff from that week of turmoil, for a former teacher, this poignant memory of that week still lingers.

It was a horrible time that I don't like to remember. I never felt safe in the building and the students were out of control. You heard rumors of students getting kicked and beaten up. I was worried that weapons were present and being used. That Monday, we were told to keep our students in class. I remember standing at my door and turning around to see a girl standing there with a bottle pointed at my face. I will never forget the look in her eyes. She left and I shut my door. (Teacher # 2, interview, November 6, 2001)

Following the near riots in September, a student led group surfaced with the goal of making desegregation work and promoting harmony among the races. The Danville Youth Commission was directed by Jim Greiner of the Parks and Recreation Department and met in the offices of the Community Improvement Council. It was comprised of students, both African-American and white, and arranged for cultural exchanges that helped all students have a better understanding of each other. Realizing that outsiders were starting and escalating many of the problems, they were committed to being a conduit of communication for the community and the schools. They were dedicated to the elimination of rumors as they related to desegregation. They were an effective student organization that contributed to the general well being of the school and the community (City Official # 1, interview, June 19, 2001).

A member of the youth commission noted that the organization that served as a liaison between the students, the school, the Community Improvement Council, and the City Council. The students who participated in the Youth Commission had the best interests of all students at heart.

We had several goals: to serve as a voice of the student body in communicating concerns and sharing ideas, to discredit rumors within the community, to promote the concept of diversity, and to help students learn how to live with the changes that had taken place. (Student # 4, interview, January 18, 2002)

According to this student, the Youth Commission worked well together and was successful. In hindsight, there was one other thing they could have done.

Our membership was composed of the best students in the school and we were able to make a difference with these students and the ones that truly cared. I don't know that we had the same impact at the grass roots level, with the students that reacted more out of emotion. I don't know that we were able to change their perceptions. However, it was an exciting, tumultuous time and I am glad I was a part of this organization. We were able to open some lines of communication within the community, both in and out of the school, and we had a positive impact. (Student # 4, interview, January 18, 2002)

Agreeing with this assessment, an administrator stated, "They were very effective, but they needed to talk with some of the average students. They could have provided another component or another view of the needs and concerns of the student body" (Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001).

Refer to table 6 in the appendix for a synopsis of the attitudes and concerns as identified through the interviews and a review of related documents.

Summary

In August of 1970, George Washington High School began a new era in education in Danville, Virginia. It was the first year that the schools were completely desegregated and operating solely under a unitary system. Prior to 1965, Danville had operated a dual system with separate schools for African-American and white students. Beginning in 1965, Danville's school system functioned under freedom of choice. African-American parents were given the opportunity to send their children to previously all-white schools and white parents were given the opportunity to send their children to all-black schools.

Freedom of choice never had the intended impact on the integration of schools as desired. Because they were basically satisfied with their schools and teachers, few parents, both African-American and white, opted to enroll their children at schools in which they would be in the minority.

O.T. Bonner, superintendent of schools, was a master planner. He realized that desegregation of schools was imminent, and he sought to ease the transition. Realizing that teachers would be a key to the success of desegregation, he began soliciting teachers to work in schools in which they would be in the minority. He assigned a shop teacher to Langston who had previously worked at GW and an African-American science teacher to GW. They both acknowledged that their assignments were a success. One stated that, "I enjoyed my time at Langston. The students were very receptive to the program that I was implementing and were anxious to learn. The students treated me with respect and courtesy" (Teacher # 6, interview, May 5, 2001).

Demonstrating his acumen for facilities and planning, Bonner realized that additional facilities would be required to meet the needs of desegregation. He, and his staff, arranged

for the building of a new junior high school that would help to disperse students and to eliminate overcrowding at the other junior high schools when the ninth grade was assigned to them.

E.L. Motley was a weaver. As the principal, he brought people together and encouraged them to work together to ensure a smooth transition. Additionally, Mr. Motley wanted people to be a part of the process and to have ownership. He encouraged communication among the members of the staff because of the example that it set for the students. While not everyone agrees, Mr. Motley was given credit for making desegregation work at GW. It was his non-threatening demeanor and his calm that enabled him to work with the students, the parents, the teachers, and the local civic leaders in a trying time.

The topic of desegregation was more openly discussed at Langston in the spring of 1970 than it was at GW. The teachers at Langston were very much aware of the pressures that their students would face in integration and they were committed to working with them to make certain that desegregation was a success. They provided encouragement and direction that enabled the students from Langston to bolster their self-esteem and to face the changing culture.

Lawrence Campbell and Ruth Harvey were two noted members of the African-American community that favored desegregation and fought for its implementation in the school system. Known for their passion, they realized that desegregation was an opportunity for African-American students to be placed on a level playing field with their white counterparts. They would then be given the opportunity to succeed or fail based on their own merits.

Evidence from the research indicates that the community was not prepared for the desegregation of schools. According to the sources, the school system failed to communicate with the members of the community about the requirements that they were under related to desegregation. Additionally, it was noted that they could have smoothed this transition had they had gone into more depth in their planning, had involved more members of the community and had better publicized their plans.

Planning for the teachers involved seminars with consultants from the University of Virginia and Old Dominion University. They worked with the faculties on sensitivity training and on group dynamics. There were mixed feelings on the effectiveness of these seminars. Some of the staff thought that they provided another tool and a useful tool to work with children while others thought that the information and techniques were too generic and impractical.

Preparation for teachers also involved group meetings and discussions about their thoughts and concerns leading up to desegregation in the fall of 1970. These meetings generally involved the department heads or other leaders within the school. Four problems emerged from these meetings. First, the teachers did not always return to their schools and share the important information with their colleagues. Second, there was a feeling of mistrust that permeated these meetings that lead to a lack of meaningful dialogue. Third, they were attempting to prepare for the unknown and were not conversant in all of the issues that might arise. Fourth, more teachers should have been involved in these meetings to get a broader view of possible issues.

In the spring of 1970, the preparation of students modeled that of the faculties. Student leaders were brought together from each school to share ideas about desegregation

and to help identify areas that needed to be addressed by the administration. Much like the faculties the very best student leaders were used for these steering committees. These steering committees offered suggestions that led to revisions in the method of selecting teams and clubs and in the method of selecting class officers and SCA officers.

At each high school, the teachers attempted to prepare the students for desegregation. The research indicates that the teachers at Langston took a more proactive approach to this preparation and attempted to address issues in a positive manner. While the teachers at GW took the process seriously, they were not as open or as thorough as their counterparts at Langston.

Desegregation was important to the African-American community. It afforded them the opportunity to attend schools that were better equipped and afforded them an opportunity to compete on a “level playing field” (Administrator # 3, interview, November 6, 2001) with their white counterparts.

The white community, however, was resistant to this change. There were some subdivisions, Southwycke Farms and Grove Park in particular, that resisted the pairing of schools. In their petition to the school board, they asked for the board to reconsider the pattern of pairing that they had chosen for the school system or for an ungraded system that would allow students to progress at their own pace.

While many of the citizens in Danville were ambivalent about desegregation, the business community and the city council embraced desegregation for two reasons. First, it afforded them the opportunity to attract and to retain industry. Second, this industry would allow the city to expand its tax base and to foster a higher standard of living for the citizens of Danville.

Both the African-American and white communities were concerned about what might happen after the schools desegregated. There were two fears: the loss of identity and the prospect of violence. Both schools had great traditions and a very strong sense of culture within the community. All were worried that with desegregation, their cultures and traditions would be absorbed into the other. This was of primary concern to the African-American community.

Both groups of citizens expected that there would be some problems. This became a reality when there was a fight at the football game on September 11, and an African-American student was arrested. This event set off a week, beginning on September 14, of turmoil that was highlighted by walkouts, sit-ins, fights, and school closings. The police were summoned to attend to the disturbance and uniformed guards were assigned to the school for the remainder of the year. However, this also led to the formation of the Danville Youth Commission and the beginning of a new period in the history of George Washington High School. This era represented an attempt on the part of the students to set aside their differences, to learn about each other, to share in each other's culture, and to embrace diversity.