

A8 CENTRAL ILLINOIS Decatur, Illinois • Monday, November 15, 1999

'You can tell people are here to conquer the issue ... It's really inspiring.'

—Annie Walker, 21, Chicago student

EXPULSIONS: Politicians get involved

McGee's proposal

According to information from the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition Web site, Decatur school board members are considering this proposal from Glenn W. McGee, superintendent of the Illinois State Board of Education, and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Rainbow/PUSH leader, to get the expelled Decatur students back into school. The proposal came together last Wednesday.

1. District 61 will hold the expulsions in abeyance. Students are allowed to enroll in the alternative programs described below immediately. Full terms of the expulsion are put in effect for any of the individual students who commit an offense in the alternative placement that would result in a suspension.

2. The governor's plan for placement of students will take effect on Monday, Nov. 15.

3. Each of the students will be eligible for return to District 61 schools on the first day of the second semester of the 1999-00 school year provided that each student has maintained a high standard of conduct, attendance, completion of homework and a C average in the Alternative Placement Program and provided that the Review Panel (as detailed in point four below) recommends the re-enrollment of each individual student in District 61.

4. Two weeks prior to the beginning of the second semester, the State Superintendent of Education will convene a Review Panel to review the records of each individual student. The team will consist of the Deputy Governor of Education, Dr. Hazel Loucks, the superintendent of District 61 or his designee, and two members to be named by the State Superintendent of Education. The Review Panel will make a case-by-case recommendation to the Board of Education for re-enrollment for the second semester.

5. All high schools will reopen on Nov. 16. Neither Rev. Jackson nor members of his team nor the six students or their parents shall appear at the school or on school grounds in an attempt to re-enroll the students or to disturb the opening of school.

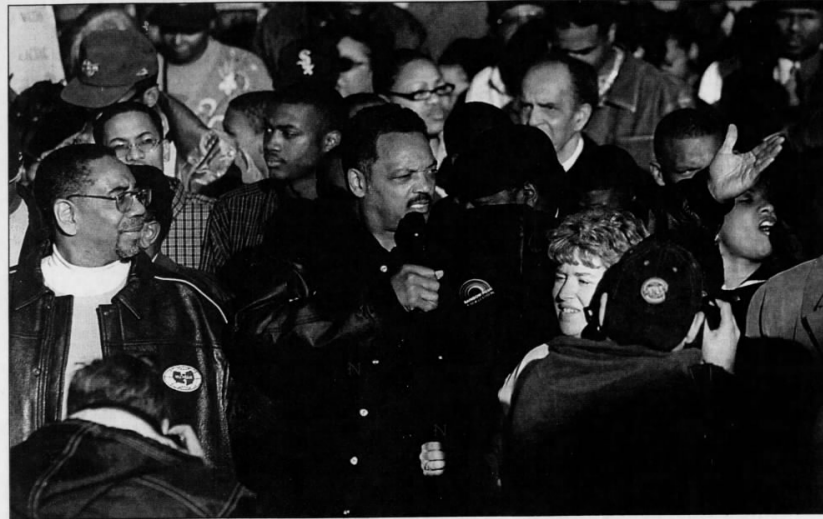
6. The State Superintendent will seek support of the Chair of the House, Elementary and Secondary Education Committee to convene statewide hearings on the number of minority students who are annually suspended or expelled.

7. The District 61 Board of Education shall review and clarify its "zero-tolerance policy" and establish a blue ribbon panel comprised of education experts, clergy and other community leaders to review disciplinary decisions and make recommendations for improvement.

8. The District 61 Board of Education shall establish a program of peer counseling to address school violence and conflict resolution.

9. The State Superintendent will reconsider revocation of the criminal charges.

10. Parties will seek an immediate resolution to the federal lawsuit.



JOIN US: The Rev. Jesse Jackson, center, motions for onlookers to join the movement Sunday afternoon as they pass along East Grand Avenue. U.S. Rep. Bobby Rush, D-Chicago, is at left.

Continued from A1
will call for an investigation of the zero-tolerance policy when the state legislature reconvenes this week.

"We want to know what those things are that led to this arbitrary ruling. We have a responsibility to make sure that what happened in Decatur doesn't happen anywhere else."

Police estimated that about 2,000 people participated in the march from the Franklin Street overpass to Grand Avenue and westward to MacArthur, where a rally was held.

Rainbow/PUSH members, including Rick Tomlinson, president of the Decatur chapter, carried a banner in the front row. It read "Save the Dream, and Leave No Child Behind." Jackson walked in the second row. He was locked arm-in-arm with Rush and just ahead of the expelled students.

Both Decatur police and Rainbow/PUSH estimated that Sunday's crowd doubled that of a march on Nov. 7, which was 1,200 by police estimates and 3,000 by organizers. More than half of the participants were from outside Macon County. Twenty-one buses from the Chicago area were parked at the high school during the rally.

A few blocks away, an estimated 250 people participated in a "Stop the Violence" march organized by Decatur City Council member Betsy Stockard.

The group, which wore blue ribbons in support of the school board, walked along Eldorado Street from Martin Luther King Jr. Drive to 16th Street and back.

Numerous other people honked their horns in support of the marchers, who included Matthew Whitson, who made an unsuccessful run for a city council seat last November.

Whitson, who is African-American, for taking a courageous stand in supporting the school board.

"I believe the school board has compromised and compromised," Whitson said. "If Rev. Jackson is truly a man of God, then he should put away the rhetoric and sit down and come to an agreement."

They protested Jackson's involvement in the issue and actively recruited members of the crowd — some of whom were Decatur residents. Wearing black

and white robes with red trim, 10 Klan members took turns giving speeches punctuated with yells of "White Power!" echoed by vocal crowd members.

Imperial Wizard Jeffrey Berry railed against Jackson's presence in Decatur. He derided local police for allowing the Rainbow/PUSH march and the Decatur school board for listening to the coalition.

The Klan and the Rainbow/PUSH marchers never came in contact, however, some participants at the Jackson-led rally wore stickers on the backs of their jackets calling for "Death to the KKK."

The police presence at the Rainbow/PUSH and Klan activities was evident Sunday afternoon. Decatur police Cmdr. Rich Ryan said 151 local, state and fed-

eral law enforcement officers worked some part of the security detail.

From about 11:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Macon County sheriff's deputies handled all priority police calls inside Decatur. Non-priority calls had to wait until city officers were available after 5 p.m.

During the Rainbow/PUSH march, hundreds of spectators were coaxed into joining.

In between songs, a group of Chicago teachers chanted, "This is not a parade" at spectators along the route and urged them to join.

Patrice Billingsley, who teaches fine arts at Martha Hughes Elementary School, estimated that they persuaded more than 40 bystanders to walk arm in arm with the group.

"They basically came right up and get in," she said. "I think they should all get involved."

For three Millikin University students, the teachers only had to ask once. They had been watching the march from a sidewalk "witness history."

"You can tell people are here to conquer the issue," said Annie Weller, 21, a senior from the Chicago area. "You can tell they're brave, determined and intelligent. I have goose bumps right now. It's really inspiring."

A small group of Progressive Labor Party members walked among the crowd during the march. Waving red flags, they called for an end to racism.

At the KKK rally, about 30 police officers including Decatur police, the Illinois State Police and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms stood between the rebel Klansmen and the crowd. The Klansmen and crowd also were separated by two lines of yellow police tape and about 100 feet.

Only one woman showed active opposition to the Klan during the rally. Nancy Waterman of Decatur held a sign saying, "Hey KKK! Open your small minds before you open your big mouths!"

Waterman yelled for the Klansmen to take off their hoods. Other crowd members yelled obscenities and threats at her.

Decatur school Superintendent Kenneth Arndt said Sunday that all schools will be open today. He said high school students will have to present a student identification card — the same procedure used last Wednesday — to gain admission to school this week.

"They have to have a valid ID with a photo on it to get in. If students have lost their ID, they can stand in a very long line to get a new one or they can stay home, call their school after 10:30 a.m. and arrangements will be made to get them a new ID," Arndt said.

No parents, news media or other outside persons will be allowed into the high schools this week, Arndt said. High school classes were canceled Nov. 8 and 9. Jackson said he was going to bring the expelled students back to school and risk arrest, however, Arndt said he closed school due to threats against the demonstrators.

A U.S. Department of Justice representative quietly observing Sunday's rally said he has contacted both parties about mediating the dispute and finalizing the matter with a written agreement.

Jesse Taylor, director of the partnership's community relations service Midwest region, said the service was created in



MEANINGFUL MESSAGE: Anita Munson and her son, Brad, 13, watch the traffic on East Eldorado Street prior to Betsy Stockard's 'Stop the Violence' march on Sunday.

1964 for the "express purpose in civil rights conflicts." He wouldn't say how Decatur's controversy compares to others he's monitored.

"I don't comment on the goodness, the badness, the righteousness of it," Taylor said.

Prayers for peace and a coming together of the community were raised Sunday morning from many Decatur church pulpits.

At First Presbyterian Church, the Rev. Jim Montgomery told the congregation to disregard the sermon outlined in the weekly bulletin.

"What a tough week this has been for you and for the city of Decatur," Montgomery said. "We had a tough time making sense of it and hope that you have, too."

Decatur school board members said Sunday the level of community support for their stand on the expulsions continues to be very high.

"One night I had 36 messages on my telephone answering machine and we're getting faxes and calls at the Keel Building. About 80-90 percent of all those people are behind us," said board President Jackie Greeter.

Greeter said efforts would be made today to schedule a special board meeting to consider the 18-point proposal offered by Rainbow/PUSH and state school



INSTRUMENTAL MARCH: Millikin student Charles Bell participates in the march.

Superintendent Glenn W. McGee for settling the conflict. Board member Mike Setina said he will attend any special board meeting but indicated he holds little interest in discussing the expulsion issue further because the board has already compromised.

— Staff writers Paul Brinkmann, Arvin Dorsey, Brad Muck and Bruce Wiczoszka contributed to this story