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1. SCHOOL DISTRICTS—SECTION 3317.14, R.C.—DISTRIBUTION OF STATE FUNDS—DISTRICTS HAVE NOT “CONFORMED WITH THE LAW”—“LAW” EMBRACES ALL RULES AND PRINCIPLES ENFORCED AND SANCTIONED BY GOVERNING POWER—INCLUDES EQUAL PROTECTION PROVISION OF FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES WHICH FORBIDS SEGREGATION ACCORDING TO RACE.
2. DISTRIBUTION OF STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDS TO PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS—STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION PRIMARILY RESPONSIBLE FOR ADMINISTERING LAWS RELATING TO—SUBJECT TO APPROVAL OF STATE CONTROLLING BOARD.
3. STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION—PRIMARY DUTY TO DETERMINE WHETHER SCHOOL DISTRICT OR BOARD OF EDUCATION “HAS NOT CONFORMED WITH THE LAW”—SHOULD OBSERVE REQUIREMENTS OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE ACT, CHAPTER 119, R. C.
4. FUNDS MAY BE DISTRIBUTED TO SCHOOL DISTRICT WHICH “HAS NOT CONFORMED WITH THE LAW” BY ORDER OF STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION AND STATE CONTROLLING BOARD—ACTING SEPARATELY—FOR “GOOD AND SUFFICIENT REASON” ESTABLISHED TO SATISFACTION OF EACH BOARD.

SYLLABUS:

1. The term “law” as used in Section 3317.14, Revised Code, forbidding the distribution of state funds to school districts which have not “conformed with the law,” is used in the abstract sense and embraces the aggregate of all those rules and principles enforced and sanctioned by the governing power in the community. Such term embraces the equal protection provision in the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States under which the segregation of pupils in schools according to race is forbidden.

2. The primary responsibility for administering the laws relating to the distribution of state and federal funds to the several public school districts is placed with the state board of education, subject to the approval of the state controlling board.

3. It is the responsibility of the state board of education in the first instance to determine whether a particular school district, or the board of education of such district, "has not conformed with the law" so as to require the withholding of state funds from such district. In making such determination the state board of education should observe the requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act, Chapter 119., Revised Code, as to notice, hearing, summoning of witnesses, presentation of evidence, degree of proof, and procedural matters generally.

4. Following a determination by the state board of education that a school district "has not conformed with the law" so as to require the withholding of state funds as provided in Section 3317.14, Revised Code, such board and the controlling board, acting separately, may, for "good and sufficient reason" established to the satisfaction of each board, order a distribution of funds to such district notwithstanding such lack of conformity with the law.

Columbus, Ohio, July 9, 1956

Mr. R. M. Eyman, Executive Secretary, State Board of Education
State Office Building, Columbus, Ohio

Dear Sir:

I have for consideration your request for my opinion in which the following questions are presented:

"1) Does the term 'the law and the rules and regulations pursuant thereto' in said Section of the Revised Code (Section 3317.14) refer to all the statutes, decisions and constitutional provisions relating to schools, or to the Foundation Law only, or otherwise?

"2) By what procedure may the state board of education and the state controlling board determine whether a local board of education 'has not conformed with the law'?

"3) In determining whether good and sufficient reason for non-conformance has been established, to the state board of education and the state controlling board act separately or as a unit?

"4) In making such determination, what, if any, investigative and hearing powers does the state board of education have; what rules of evidence must be followed; and what degree of proof is required?"

As to your first question, a provision is found in existing Section 3317.14, Revised Code, for the withholding of state funds in the case of certain school districts as follows:

"A school district, the board of education of *which has not*

conformed with the law and the rules and regulations pursuant thereto, shall not participate in the distribution of funds authorized by sections 3317.02, 3317.04, and 3317.12 of the Revised Code, except for good and sufficient reason established to the satisfaction of the superintendent of public instruction and the state controlling board. * * *” (Emphasis added.)

Effective October 1, 1956, an amended provision, analogous to that above, will become effective as follows:

“A school district, the board of education of which *has not conformed with the law* and the rules and regulations pursuant thereto, shall not participate in the distribution of funds authorized by section 3317.02 of the Revised Code, except for good and sufficient reason established to the satisfaction of the state board of education and the state controlling board. * * *” (Emphasis added.)

The use of the article “the” in this statute is suggestive, but only faintly so, of the idea that reference is made to a particular legislative enactment. However, it will be seen that there is not the slightest suggestion in the context of this provision which would aid in identifying any such particular enactment.

Moreover, it is to be observed that the article “the” was inserted in the statute in the course of the 1953 codification, the prior analogous provision in Section 4848-6, General Code, reading as follows:

“A school district, the board of education of which has not conformed with *all the requirements of law* and the rules and regulations pursuant thereto, shall not participate in the distribution of funds authorized by the provisions of sections 4848-1, 4848-3 and 4848-9 of the General Code, except for good and sufficient reason established to the satisfaction of the superintendent of public instruction and the state controlling board; * * *.” (Emphasis added.)

It thus becomes clear, because of the legislative purpose, clearly expressed in Section 1.24, Revised Code, not to effect substantive changes in the recodification process, that the provision here in question, to the extent that the point is pertinent, must be read as though the article “the” had not been inserted as an incident of such recodification.

In Cyclopedic Law Dictionary, Third Edition, on the definition of the term “law” it is said:

“A distinction is to be observed in the outset between the abstract and the concrete meaning of the word. In the broadest

sense which it bears when used in the abstract law, it is the science which treats of the theory of government.

“In a stricter sense, but still in the abstract, it is the aggregate of those rules and principles enforced and sanctioned by the governing power in a community, and according to which it regulates, limits, and protects the conduct of members of the community. In the abstract sense, it includes the decisions of the courts.”

In the same work the use of a prefixed article is mentioned as follows:

“Used without an article prefixed, the abstract sense is generally intended; with an article, the sense is usually concrete.”

Applying this rule to the case at hand, and giving consideration to the circumstance that the context in which the term is used in Section 3317.14, Revised Code, gives no hint as to the identity of a particular statute to which reference might be intended, it becomes necessary to conclude that the term “law” as used in that section is used in the abstract meaning of the word.

Because the provision in question relates to the “requirements of law,” or conformity therewith, it is clear the term is not here used in such a broad abstract sense as to include the “science which treats of the theory of government,” but rather that it is used in the somewhat stricter sense which embraces “the aggregate of those rules and principles enforced and sanctioned by the governing power in a community” and that it “includes the decisions of courts.”

Although not set out in your inquiry in express terms, there is latent therein the question of whether the conformity with law provision in Section 3317.14, Revised Code, is sufficient in scope to include instances of segregation of pupils in school according to race.

In the 14th Amendment of the Constitution of the United States there is this provision:

“* * * No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

In Article VI of the Constitution of the United States there is this provision:

“* * * This Constitution, and the laws of the United States which shall be made in pursuance thereof, and all treaties made, or which shall be made, under the authority of the United States, shall be the supreme law of the land; and the judges in every State shall be bound thereby, anything in the Constitution or laws of any State to the contrary notwithstanding. * * *”

It is quite clear that these provisions are such as to be comprehended in the term “law” in the sense in which I have indicated such term is used in Section 3317.14, *supra*, and where there is a denial of “equal protection of the laws” there is an instance of not having “conformed with the requirements of law” or of not having “conformed with the law” as provided in that section.

The equal protection clause above quoted was the subject of consideration in *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U. S., 483, 98 L. Ed. 873, the headnotes in the latter report of the decision being in part as follows:

“5. The equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits the states from maintaining racially segregated public schools, even though the physical facilities and other tangible factors, such as curricula and qualifications and salaries of teachers, may be equal.”

In the opinion of the court, delivered by Mr. Chief Justice Warren, there is the following statement:

“We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.”

This decision is the unanimous pronouncement of the highest court in the land and must be regarded as dispositive of the question of the illegality of racial segregation in the public schools of this state.

It follows, therefore, that in those cases in which your board finds as a matter of fact that racial segregation exists in a particular school district the restrictive provisions of Section 3317.14, Revised Code, must be deemed to apply.

As to the question of your board and the controlling board acting jointly or separately, it is first to be observed that the action of the two

boards, in approving distribution of funds notwithstanding a failure to conform with the law, is called for only *after* it is determined that a particular district or board "has not conformed with the law."

Because the state board of education is given the authority and responsibility in Section 3301.07, Revised Code, to "administer and supervise the allocation and distribution of all state and federal funds," and because, in Section 3317.01, Revised Code, it is provided that "Sections 3317.01 to 3317.15, inclusive, of the Revised Code, *shall be administered by the state board of education*, with the approval of the controlling board," I conclude that the responsibility to ascertain whether in particular cases there is a lack of conformity with law is placed in the first instance with the state board of education.

In this connection, although the controlling board's approval is required in the administration of Sections 3317.01 to 3317.15, Revised Code, it is to be noted that that board's principal function is one in the field of fiscal management and accountability, whereas it is the duty of the state board of education to "administer" the laws relating generally to the operation of the schools, is provided with a departmental staff for the purpose, and is provided with extensive investigative powers as hereinafter pointed out.

Accordingly, until such an initial determination is made, the question of joint or separate action, under Section 3317.14, Revised Code, to distribute funds notwithstanding such failure, is purely academic.

I may observe in passing, however, that I perceive no language in the statute which in any way suggests joint action of such boards, and the fact that each is a separate entity, separately created by law, would clearly indicate the necessity of separate action.

As to the procedure by which your board may reach a determination as to a failure to conform to the law in particular cases, your attention is invited to the following provision in Section 3301.13, Revised Code:

"* * * In the exercise of any of its functions or powers, including the power to make rules and regulations and to prescribe minimum standards, the department of education and any officer or agency therein, shall be subject to the provisions of chapter 119. of the Revised Code. * * *"

Because one of the functions or powers of the state board of education is to ascertain whether a failure to conform to law has occurred, it is clear

that in such a proceeding the provisions of Chapter 119., Revised Code, will apply. Set out in that chapter are detailed procedures for holding hearings, summoning witnesses, receiving evidence, making adjudication orders, and for appeals from such orders by any person "adversely affected."

As to the rules of evidence to be followed and the degree of proof required, your attention is invited to the following provision in Section 119.12, Revised Code:

"The court may affirm the order of the agency complained of in the appeal if it finds, upon consideration of the entire record and such additional evidence as the court has admitted, that the order is supported by *reliable, probative, and substantial evidence* and is in accordance with law. In the absence of such a finding, it may reverse, vacate, or modify the order or make such other ruling as is supported by *reliable, probative, and substantial evidence* and is in accordance with law."

(Emphasis added.)

Accordingly, in specific answer to your inquiry, it is my opinion that:

1. The term "law" as used in Section 3317.14, Revised Code, forbidding the distribution of state funds to school districts which have not "conformed with the law," is used in the abstract sense and embraces the aggregate of all those rules and principles enforced and sanctioned by the governing power in the community. Such term embraces the equal protection provision in the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States under which the segregation of pupils in schools according to race is forbidden.

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Respectfully,

C. WILLIAM O'NEILL
Attorney General