

The Baby Boom Echo?

Blame for school enrollment increase still being misplaced

by Linda Thom

Secretary of Education Richard Riley is at it again. For the second year in a row, he declared in August, 1997, that burgeoning school enrollments around the country are caused by baby boomers' children. The nightly TV network news picked up the press release and ran with it. Even in immigration-epicenter California, newscasters mindlessly told their listeners, "It's baby boomers who have delayed having children and are now giving birth before their biological clocks run out."

Why are parents with children in school not saying anything? They have the most to lose because of large class size and deteriorating schools. Perhaps they say nothing because in California, 51 percent of 1996-97 enrollment was comprised of Hispanic and Asian Pacific Islander children (CA Dept. of Education, California Basic Educational Data System [CBEDS]). The most overcrowded classrooms are full of immigrant children. Why would they complain about too many immigrants?

Los Angeles Unified School District has had the largest enrollment growth in the country according to the Department of Education. To help cope with the growth, Los Angeles voters approved a school bond last April in excess of \$2 billion. In Los Angeles County as a whole, only one third of the 1,549,833 students enrolled in October 1996 were white or black children (CBEDS). Secretary Riley should have come to Los Angeles to hold his press conference and to maintain a

straight face while he told the press that white and black baby boomers were responsible for all those Hispanic and Asian children.

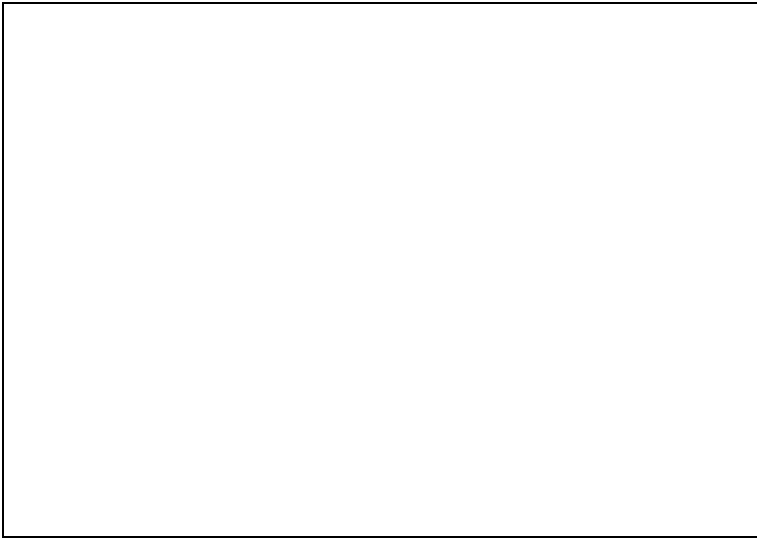
It is really quite simple to understand and, make no mistake, Secretary of Education Richard Riley understands the numbers perfectly. In *Projections of Education Statistics to 2007*, the National Center for Education Statistics, part of the Department of Education, projects that school enrollment in the United States will increase from 46,353,000 to 48,262,000 between 1997 and 2007. That is an increase of 1,909,000 students. Chart 1 shows that together, California and Texas will account for



1,334,000 added students or 70 percent of the enrollment change.

As California, alone, will comprise almost half the enrollment increase, the racial and ethnic composition of growth in the last 11 years suggests that virtually all of the new growth will be Asian and Hispanic children. See Chart 2 which shows that between October 1985 and October 1996, Hispanic and Asian children made up 92 percent of the added students in California. For the entire state of California, white students increased by 3,765 in

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eleven years.

This seems pretty conclusive but to wrap a bow around the package, birth data demonstrate that all of the increase in enrollment is, in fact, because of immigration and births to immigrants. National school enrollment peaked last in 1971. If one examines birth data for the longer term, 1970 to 1995, then one must come to the conclusion that baby boomers have nothing to do with crowded classrooms.

Chart 3 shows annual births in California between 1970 and 1995 by the mother's place of birth. Annual births increased from 362,652 to 551,226 in this period. From 1970 to 1995, annual births to native-born women declined by 16,164 and births to immigrant women increased by 204,738 (California Department of Health Services). Interestingly, births in the whole country rose from 3,731,000 in 1970 to 3,900,000 in 1995 for an annual increase of only 169,000 as compared to an annual increase of 188,574 in California (U.S. Department of Commerce). That is because in most other states, births declined.

Baby boomers were not having children; however, immigrants were. In 1995, nationally, immigrants accounted for 84 percent of births to Asian/Pacific Islander women and accounted for 62 percent of births to Hispanic women. Among non-Hispanic white women, 5

percent were foreign born and among non-Hispanic blacks 9 percent were foreign born (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

All of this data is available and known to Secretary of Education Riley. Why, one wonders, does he continue to tell the American people that the overpopulation of our schools results from baby boomers' children? More curiously, why is there silence among so many about what is so obvious? **TSC**

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