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Interview

with

CHARLES JOHNSON

December 29, 1990

By Goldie F. Wells

The Southern Oral History Program  
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## INTERVIEW WITH MR. CHARLES JOHNSON

By Goldie F. Wells

Goldie: This is December 29, 1990, and I am in the home of Mr. Charles Johnson in Greensboro, North Carolina. I'm just checking to see if the equipment is working correctly.

Goldie: Mr. Johnson, I am so pleased that you consented to share with me this morning in this interview. I'm doing some research and trying to see if the role perceptions of principals in 1964, are the same as those of 1989. And you are a principal of a high school and you were there in 1989. I want you to introduce yourself and let us know that you know that this is being recorded.

Mr. Johnson: I am Charles Johnson and I am aware of the fact that this interview is being recorded. I am very happy to have the opportunity to assist in any way that I possibly can with the research.

Goldie: Would you tell me how you became a high school principal?

Mr. Johnson: Approximately six years ago I was employed at Dudley High School in Greensboro under the administration of Linda McDougald, who was the principal then who was a individual. I decided to pursue the administration degree and Linda McDougald was very excited about the fact that I wanted to become a principal. And also, I was influenced by Dr. Rita Gibbs, who is the Chairperson of the Physical Education at State University. Also, Dr. Charles Bailey, who is a very close friend of mine. During the time that I was working on the administration degree Linda McDougald would give me a chance to take up some responsibilities at the school. She would always say that these were the kinds of things that you would be expected to do when you became assistant principal and then principal. So I was very appreciative of her help and assistance. When I completed my administration I applied at the Greensboro City Schools and surrounding counties and at the time there were no openings. Then fortunately I decided that I had taught seven years at Dudley High School and it was time for me to move on. An opening became available in the Counseling Department in the Education Center. I resigned my job at Dudley High School and accepted the position at Education Center and I taught with Dr. Gerald Austin, who is the principal there. Before I could move into that position I received a phone call from Silus , Chatham County Schools, Mr. Morie Andrew, the principal of Jordan Mackey High School. They called the central office in Greensboro and he talked with Joe Books, who at that time was

the Assistant Superintendent in Greensboro, and I have known Joe ever since I have been in Greensboro. He asked Joe if he had names of any individuals who would like to become a principal and Joe gave him my name. He then called me and asked if that was okay. I said, that is fine. I realize that you would like to stay in the city but there are no openings at this particular time and he said this will give you the experience that you need. Then when you decide you want to come back and be a principal there won't be any problem. So I went down for the interview and I talked with the principal at Jordan Mackeys High School and from that point I left the principal's office and went to the central office and talked to the Superintendent and Associate Superintendent. I actually was very pleased with the interview and I returned home and the next day I received a phone call and the principal asked if I was still interested in the position. I said yes, I am. Would you please come back for another interview. And I went down for the interview and when I went down for the interview they asked me to sign a contract. However, I did not sign the contract until I returned home to talk with my wife about it. That is basically how everything happened. The contacts that were made from the central office.

Goldie: So you served as an assistant principal for two years. And then how did you become the principal of the school.

Mr. Johnson: The first year was an observation year. I had to feel my way. I had to find out exactly with whom I was dealing and working with. I had to find out exactly what kind of people were in the community, in the student body, learn the names understanding the location and what their needs were. Then the second year, and I was a very strong disciplinarian, there were so many problems that they were having there which created chaos. I felt that I needed to do something about that. The principal at the time felt that I had those particular qualities that I could handle the discipline problems which was one of my major responsibilities. The second year I asked the principal if I could develop some rules and guidelines and consequences so that faculty members understand what was expected of them, and what was expected of the students as well--and we could organize in an orderly fashion. So he said, fine. During the summer I worked on those guidelines and we implemented them at the beginning of the year. I had actually demonstrated that I could handle the discipline or any responsibility he had given me. Many school principals retire and the Superintendent came to my office and said, Charles, Mrs. Graine is going to retire and I would like you to go to the Middle School. I know what your preference is and that is secondary. I said, yes, however, I just have to take advantage of this opportunity and I feel that I certainly can handle this situation regardless whether it is

middle, elementary or high school. And he said, well, I'm going to recommend your name to the Board and he did. Shortly thereafter I suppose I had not been in the position before July 1 and it was a week my principal retired basically because he depended on me for the discipline and he was not that strong a disciplinarian.

Goldie: How long had he been there?

Mr. Johnson: He had been there sixteen years, close to seventeen years. He retired so the Superintendent came back to me and said, Charles, I know what your preference has been since you have been here. You've wanted a high school and Mr. Andrews has retired. Well, I was surprised and shocked. I want you to go back to the high school. I said, all this in the paper. He said, don't worry about this. I'll handle it.

Goldie: Because your new appointment had already been advertised and you had been there a week.

Mr. Johnson: I had been there a week and actually had not moved all of my files from my office to the Middle School so he said, I will take care of this and I am going to recommend you to the Board to become the principal of Jordan Mackey High School. He said we will handle it and so he went before the Board that Monday night and they approved it. And I've been principal there ever since.

Goldie: Seems like this has happened to you twice--before you get moved you get another position.

Mr. Johnson: I've been very fortunate.

Goldie: Tell me something about the high school and your responsibilities and then I'll ask you different areas but just tell me something so I'll have a picture of how many people, students, population ratios.

Mr. Johnson: I have approximately 500 students, ratio 60% White and 40% Black. Predominantly a White faculty. I have four Black female teachers and the rest of them are White. I only have one male. He is a certified counselor. He is the coordinator of the ISS Department. I have a secretary/treasurer, receptionist, a SIMS operator, a guidance assistant, a library assistant, two school nurses based at the school, attendance counselor based at the school, and the assistant principal has a secretary.

Goldie: You have one assistant.

Mr. Johnson: One assistant. I must say that we both are strong disciplinarians. We operate a safe, clean, orderly environment that is conducive to learning and the students as well as the faculty members and other staff members are



aware of my expectations. So I don't constantly have to repeat daily what is expected of them. We have students from families of high income brackets to the very low. But what we try to do is try to meet the needs of all. My philosophy there is and basically all the faculty members share in this, all children can learn regardless of their economic status. And I emphasize this on a daily basis. All children can learn and this is why we are here. To see that all of them get a very good education. That means that we have to spend a little more time in the afternoon with those students who are having difficulties. I like to consider us as a family working together. I'm the kind of administrator who likes the team concept. Like everybody trying to pull together for a common goal and that is to educate the students. As I said we are small but we have accomplished a great deal of our goals. We had six students to receive the North Carolina Teaching Fellows and we were so pleased. Six from this school.

Goldie: You know, that is remarkable because they had to be influenced by some teachers to even want to because there are so many children who do not want to go into education so that says something about your teachers.

Mr. Johnson: Exactly. And I felt that the advisor of the North Carolina Teachers Fellow's Committee has such a rapport with those students. This is where we try to instill in all our faculty members because I say to them, you are standing in front of these thirty-five, twenty-five, twenty students and you are so powerful. What you say to them has a lasting effect on them and be positive, outgoing, innovative, creative, and let the students know that you are there to help them and that you care, which is the bottom line. You are a caring person and you have that positive attitude and that learning is going to take place in my school. So I try to instill this. I'm very visible. I move quite a bit to know exactly what is going on, to greet my teachers and let them know that I am here. If you need me please come and ask whatever your needs are and I will help you. I want to become involved in what is going on in the classroom.

Goldie: Tell me about the supervision of personnel.

Mr. Johnson: Well, when if there is an opening I will go to the county office and pull files but if I am aware of a sharp person in a particular area I will try to pull that person if they are not employed. If they are then I will try to convince them to come to my school. I keep in contact with the Black institutions, A & T in Winston-Salem, North Carolina Central and I try to pull in those teachers who are certified in that particular area and from that I'll get a pool. I'll start my interviewing. There have been times that I have not gone to the county office to pull those applications. Sometimes they are outdated and then there are

people who are already employed but there are times when I will have to go there to select, for instance science. If I know of no science individual that is available then I will go to the county office and pull all of those files and from those files I could find one.

Goldie: So one of your priorities in selecting at this point since you only have four, five Black faculty members you really want to increase your minority.

Mr. Johnson: I want to increase my minority because I think that it is very important that we have more role models within this school and I've found that, there are excellent teachers. However I've found that some of them have difficulties understanding the Black students. And the Black students have a tendency not to understand the attitude of White teachers. But I'm not saying that they are not good teachers--they are very good teachers but I think that we need--it needs to be balanced a little more.

Goldie: What about curriculum and instruction?

Mr. Johnson: I consider myself a strong instructional leader. I'm constantly talking to the secondary supervisor as far as curriculum is concerned. I try to pull in those courses that are going to be needed for these students who are going to college. I'm trying to develop a strong curriculum so that they are prepared for the entrance to college. Matter of fact, I was talking to a student the other day and he was interested in some Black history courses that we do not have. And we talked to the secondary supervisor about that and we have started working on that. Not only for the Black students but for the entire population. I've tried to establish some continuity as far as the curriculum is concerned. Certain material that ninth grade students should be aware of are a reading list, vocabulary. When they leave the ninth grade and go to their sophomore year and they have covered that material the sophomore teacher can start where they have left off. Pick up from there. I've asked the English teachers to emphasize writing. Write as much as you possibly can. I put a requirement in their curriculum about course syllabus to require each semester to have at least twelve papers written--good papers--not rough drafts--a final. And that is twenty-four papers within a year. I'm not saying that these papers should be three and four pages but excellent written papers on whatever topic. So I'm meeting with the departments, the math, social studies, science departments to find out exactly what there needs are. What we need to do as far as the curriculum is concerned? What do we need to do as far as the SAT? What strategies do we need to take? Do we need to implement a course? I think sometimes we become so confused of where am I putting all of my time? Is it a manager, or am I an instructional leader? We are pulled in so many different directions but I think I

would like to say that I am a pretty strong instructional leader and I think that it is important that we look at our programs as much as we possibly can and make as many changes. Not just for the sake of changing but certainly meeting the needs of the students.

Goldie: When you say program--are you thinking about the BEP and Standard Course of Study--tailoring it to your situation?

Mr. Johnson: Exactly, because so many of the teachers have become so frightened because they say there is no way that we can cover all of this material and then try and be creative. I'm saying, oh yes, you have time. The End of the Course Test is going to be geared around this particular material. That means that we are just going to have to do the best we possibly can but yet, you still can find ten-fifteen minutes in your lesson plan to pull out those kinds of activities that you would like to involve your students with. So it's not the fact that I don't have time; we do have time and we can do it. After that statement they look at me and say, well maybe it is possible but we'll see. It worked, they can do it. One thing about it is they became very frustrated when they completed all of this teaching in the End of Course there are just so many questions that are being asked. They feel that tests should be maybe set up a different way or administered a different way or whatever or designed a different way. Because they actually do not know exactly what they should be teaching. I understand--just look at the Standard Course of Study and you cover these particular areas and these students are meeting the competencies then you have nothing to worry about when they take the End of Course Test. So just continue to instill in them-- read, study, and become involved in the activities and they should be fine. And we have done pretty well on the End of Course Test.

Goldie: What about discipline?

Mr. Johnson: This is one thing that I have appreciated so much. When I was at Dudley High school--I used to read all the articles saying that so many young people were leaving the profession because of discipline problems. I would sit there and I would say, whenever I am principal there is one thing that I am certainly going to take care of and that is discipline because if you get discipline under control you can accomplish anything else in school. Yet the teacher is spending twenty and thirty minutes a day dealing with discipline problems. He/she is not going to accomplish a thing. So, I said that that was one of my major goals. I was going to create that environment that was conducive to learning--safe, orderly. I said, I want an effective school and that is part of an effective school. If you have a clean, orderly, safe environment, that is a start right there and I said to the teachers, you are not trained disciplinarians and



I don't expect you to be--I said I don't expect you to spend twenty-five or thirty minutes a week doing the discipline problems. That is not your job. Your job is to teach for 55 minutes and go home. That's it. And when you have a discipline problem as I said, we have the office referral, the detention halls, and all this so just follow the procedure. If a student has violated a rule there is no reason to argue, no reason to stop your class and make a scene but just make a note and at the end of class say, Jim, you have a detention hall or if the student becomes so disrespectful then it is time that you send him to me or the assistant principal and we will handle that student from that point on. And this is being done.

Goldie: Have your number of referrals dropped?

Mr. Johnson: Dropped drastically. Students walk in the halls. We have three minutes between change of classes and I expect them to be in their seats when that tardy bell rings. If not, they go to detention hall. They understand this. I don't get on the intercom every day and say well, this is another warning. At the first of the year I pull them all into the auditorium and tell them what my expectations are. I say, you will not hear this again. And they understand me. They know that I mean business and when they come to my office I talk with them as I'm talking to you--the same tone of voice. They tell me what has happened and they say to me well, I have violated rule number 1,2,3,4 and I say, well, you are aware of the consequences? Yes sir. I fill out the form, call the parent and that is the end of it. When they return to school, they are not angry with me but they will come back to me and say well, if this situation were to occur again this is the way I would handle it. So as far as discipline is concerned, we have one of the strongest discipline policies in Chatham County. You can sit down and write rules and guidelines all year but if you don't enforce them and are not consistent with them, then you are not going to accomplish anything.

Goldie: What about transportation? Your buses--do you supervise them?

Mr. Johnson: No, I do not supervise the bus transportation. My assistant principal handles all the bus transportation. We have ten buses and he handles all of that supervision. They will leave the high school and go to the middle school to pick up the middle students and in the morning they drop off the high school students and then take the middle school students. That hasn't become a problem but I would like to see the middle school handle their own buses. We have had in the past some problems with high school students on the buses with the middle school students. I have written the Superintendent about this and he has gotten back with me and said we probably are going to have to make some changes.



They will only need about four buses over there, four or five buses, and we need maybe five or six buses so I think that will solve the problem but I do feel maybe next school term we have that problem solved.

Goldie: Utilization of funds.

Mr. Johnson: We give them a budget from the--an allotment from the county office and the principal has the discretion to distribute these funds throughout the school for the library and for each department, the drama department, the science department. I requested that each department be allotted \$2,000. Well, I requested this three years ago and last year was the first year that they allowed us to do that and the department chairpersons were very excited about that because the discretionary fund that we have really is not enough. And the departments have become very, very excited about this where they have a budget number and they send in a request and its been granted. So I've been very, very excited about this. I think next year we'll probably get a little more.

Goldie: Does your athletic team--does that generate some funds for you?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, as a matter of fact we had a very good football season. We were in the playoffs and the gates were great. We made a great deal of money at the gates and now we have the basketball season. Those are the only two revenues for us. Football and basketball are the sports that we get our money from and the athletic department is in excellent shape. We have a Booster Club who also has an assistant to the athletic department and all of the other areas. Two years ago when Robert Solar was a football player and basketball player, he was an all-around athlete and I suppose people from all around came to see Robert. That is when we really made a great deal of money but we are in very good shape in the athletic department. The coaches receive a supplement. They put in a lot of long hours and it is amazing to find that these coaches are excellent teachers. Well, teaching is coaching, isn't it?

Goldie: Yes, it is.

Mr. Johnson: They are excellent teachers and they have actually established a rapport with those young people that is just wonderful. We have been able to motivate the students not only during that particular season when they are going to be conscious of grades and of course discipline, but it carries on throughout the year. We have been very pleased about that.

Goldie: What about your cafeteria management?

Mr. Johnson: We have an excellent staff, excellent staff. Again, going back to the effective school concept, there is no way that I could operate a school for long. So I always use the term "we" and someone asked me, why are you always saying "we"? You're the principal. I said, well, yes, that's a title, that's a title but yet it is going to take everybody pulling together to accomplish a goal and my custodians, they're just as important as I am. Whatever we have, a tea, a breakfast, a lunch, a dinner--I call in everybody, faculty meetings--come on in, if we're having something special--come in and get some refreshments if you're not interested in what we are talking about then you can leave. But you are part of us. Cafeteria--one of the managers--again, every year I meet the cafeteria staff and I say to them what my expectations are and certainly what they expect of me. They say we know that you are going to support us. I like food prepared very --they say that I'm a perfectionist.

Goldie: They say, "I gotta have it just right for Mr. Johnson."

Mr. Johnson: Yes, you sound just like them. "Otherwise he is going to come down and say something about it in his nice way." I say to you that it is just--the cafeteria is immaculate. They prepare food for those children--if my daughter was there, I would want her to be satisfied. If I wouldn't eat this, I wouldn't want anyone else to eat it. I can go to that cafeteria and feel comfortable eating anything because I have a staff that's very responsible and they are conscious of what they are supposed to be doing. They know exactly what their responsibilities are. So I said, if you have extra cookies spread them in the teacher's area. I have a special area for the teachers I had built for them and it's carpeted and ceiling fans. I provide coffee for the faculty members in their area. Coffee, tea, hot chocolate whatever they want. That's in the cafeteria area also in the main office area so it is in two locations. I provide for them. They do not have to buy it. And the cafeteria staff--hot cookies, Danishes, rolls that is provided for the faculty for breakfast, lunch, or what have you. She's comfortable about meeting with me about the menu. That may seem strange.

Goldie: She checks the menu with you?

Mr. Johnson: She comes to me and she says, Mr. Johnson, what do you think about this menu. I say, well, it sounds great. We don't want to become so repetitive, you know. You had this on Monday why serve it again on Friday or Wednesday? We want a variety. That's what she does. I may have special guests coming down and she will check with me. She'll say, "Is there anything special you want on the menu?" or "Would you look at the menu and see if you want to change Friday to Monday or whatever?" I say, well, this is fine. Leave it as

is. So we are talking about salad bar, we are talking about potato bar, super sandwich bar, then hot line; all the bars we don't have everyday but on specific days. It's nice for the students. Then we implemented the breakfast program. That wasn't at the high school. She has sausage biscuits or ham biscuits, cereal, grits. They learn better when their stomachs are full because we find that there are so many students who come to school and don't even eat breakfast.

Goldie: They don't.

Mr. Johnson: I just cannot say enough about the cafeteria staff.

Goldie: Did you choose your manager or was she there already?

Mr. Johnson: Well, I came in as assistant principal. The manager resigned and we moved Linda Phillips into that position and she is a go-getter. To get these kinds of things done I think a "thank you" or a "pat on the back". She needed a little office area and I had the carpenter or the cabinet-making class to go down and build her an office area with the glass window and file cabinets. That was a small thing but meant a lot to her. The same with my custodians.

Goldie: That's next. How do you keep that building immaculate? I bet your grounds are manicured too.

Mr. Johnson: I have a lot of people say, "How do you get these things done at your school?" Well, I am saying it is not that I crack a whip, it is not that I am yelling or screaming; it is a real fact, climbing down off that pedestal or that title "principal" and saying I am one of you. I can do exactly the kinds of things that you are doing. I don't feel bad if I have to get a mop and mop the floor or take a broom and sweep the floor or pick up a piece of paper--and I walk the hall. I don't feel bad at all. I think the major thing is that I love people and I care about people. I'm a people's person and I treat them as I would want someone to treat me. I have told my faculty members--teacher, principal, custodian, cafeteria staff, secretary--those are titles but we all are human beings and we all have needs and that is the way I have operated. They come to me now and say--I suppose when I became principal the custodian was not used to doing certain things. I only had two. I told the Superintendent that there is no way I can keep this building clean with the staff that I have. So, I need some more personnel--I really do. He said, "You have to keep the building clean." I don't have the people, there is no way that I can do it. He said, "You tell me what you need." I said, "I'll be down during the summer." So I came down and I had my little list of things and how many full-time people I wanted for the grounds and so I had it all divided and when I



first got there was this person who had been there about ten years. He had everything to do. I'm saying--how in the world and I'm also saying who is going to take care of the bathrooms? And they were not cleaned to my expectations. I said I am spending three-fourths of my time in this building and I do expect it to be immaculate. I said we can get it done. I only said that once. I only said that once. And I'm going to give you the supplies, equipment and the personnel to get it done. So I have two full-time custodians; I have four part-time. I have a female coming in the morning to clean the office areas--vacuum and those kind of things and I have a female in the afternoon to clean classrooms, and I have a gentleman coming in to vacuum the office areas again and empty the trash cans; another gentleman to take of--we have A hall, B hall, C hall, D hall, F hall, and I have all these halls designated to certain ones. They know exactly what they have to do and they have four hours to get the job done. It has worked marvelously.

Goldie: Did you assign someone special for the grounds?

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Stone is the person who takes care of the grounds. First of all it is very interesting as to how I got him. We had, as I said, one custodian there who was doing everything and when I needed him inside, he was outside mowing so I called the Superintendent and said, why don't we contract this out to the in the community? He said, fine. You're talking about maybe \$250 in a month for the spring and summer and he said, that sounds good. So at that time I had not employed him as a custodian. He was employed to take care of the grounds. He started trimming. They had not seen anything like that in all their lives. Another principal would come by and say how in the world--who is doing this? I'd say, I don't know. They soon found out of course. But these are the kinds of things that I wanted.

Goldie: And then you had Dr. Bailey for an instructor. Dr. Bailey used to say, you can tell what kind of administrator is at the school when you drive up. If you see that lawn immaculate you know something about the person.

Mr. Johnson: You know what? As I said, I haven't talked too much about him. He was such a dynamic man.

Goldie: I was so shocked to find that he had died a few weeks ago.

Mr. Johnson: I still haven't gotten over that because I'm sitting here talking--these are the kinds of things that we used to sit down and talk about. He came over and he would say, Charles, you've done a wonderful job and I would say, I haven't done all of this alone. You are my mentor and I listened to you and I listened exactly to what you had to say to me and that is, talk to people, listen to them, what they



need and you can accomplish anything. So when I got this gentleman to do the lawn I said, well, since he has put in so much time why don't we just employ him as a full-time custodian and he can do the bathrooms. He used to work in a hospital and he knew about cleaning. When he came in, I'm telling you the truth, he did a wonderful job and still does a wonderful job. I supply him with whatever he needs to get the job done.

Goldie: So you don't have a central maintenance person who is in charge of maintenance in your system?

Mr. Johnson: Well, we have a maintenance department but I don't depend on them. I depend on them for the major problems such as sewage lines stopped up or we want an addition to the building. Those major problems. But as far as in house, I've got people there who can do the job and I don't call on them very much.

Goldie: What about community relations? How do you think your school fits into that community?

Mr. Johnson: I think it fits quite well. It has I suppose over the years--the community--you would have to know the principal prior to my coming here to understand basically how the community is thinking. They have the feeling of not being wanted. They were not comfortable coming to this school. They didn't feel comfortable coming to the principal's office. Not only parents but students. They did not feel comfortable coming to the office and talking because he was not that outgoing kind of person or he didn't feel that was important. He was basically there--we had a wonderful relationship but again, there were things that he obviously could have done to make things go better but he didn't have the open door policy. It has taken quite a few years to overcome that stigma. I've had parents come over and say well, do I have to call before I come to your office? I said, of course not. You don't have to do that. There may be times when you come over that I've not available to see you but if you want to wait my secretary will say, he will be with you in a minute or if you want to walk around or have some coffee but no, you don't have to call. Some of them say they still feel that way. What I am trying to do is open that door and say, this is your school, be proud of the school your children are attending. Take pride in this school and if there are any suggestions you can offer us, I'm open. And I think we're changing that because I've had several parents to come over for lunch after I've invited them. We go to the conference room and have a private lunch and we talk about some things that we need to improve on. I need to know exactly what they are thinking and they have given me some excellent ideas and I've given them the opportunity to tour the facility. I say, all you have to do is come by the office and check in and say to the secretary

that you are here and you would like to walk around for a few minutes and I suppose that I've had about twenty or twenty-five parents to come over in the last few months just to walk around the building. I've always said that it is very easy to criticize being on the outside looking in but when you come in you see what is going on. It's different, quite different. So we are trying to work harder in that area but it is going to take a little more time. It's just like the PTA. I would like to see a very involved PTA but we don't have that many parents who are actively involved with PTA. I suppose elementary the kids are small and you have to be there and the middle school, half of that population sorta drops off and says well, they are old enough, high school--forget it. I want to try to pull them back in and we have had some success as far as not saying that this is a PTA Meeting but this is pertaining to academics, it's pertaining to financial aid assistance. You call all these people in from Chapel Hill and they can talk about financial aid and test-taking strategies. We try to have some type of program planned therefore we generate a lot more interest. The parents will come out and listen.

Goldie: How much administrative authority or power or control do you think you have of your school site and of your responsibilities?

Mr. Johnson: Interesting that you should ask. I have been given the latitude to implement various programs to make basic decisions about the operation of this school. For instance, when I want to start--the Superintendent has been very great about that. There are three high schools there and none of them start at the same time nor do we get out at the same time and basically because one school is on satellite--they have instruction by satellite. Then another school is getting out at least five or six minutes later than we are and the time between the changes of classes, where I may have three, they may have five. So he has been very--and I think that is great. But what has happened. I have a principal's advisory committee and we meet every so often and I tell them you are leaders, they are department heads who have been selected by the faculty of the school and from this particular organization group basic decisions as far as how the school is going to be operated will be done here--will be decided here. You go out to your departments and you come back and talk about it and put it on the overhead. We scratch out this--we generate a lot of enthusiasm that way. They have loved that. So what about the time. Should we change it now, I said. Yes, let's do it because what they are doing is they want to stand outside the door... and I said, fine. We will do it. So he has given me that kind of authority. As far as my recommending a teacher to not return he is not questioning that.

Goldie: How have you dealt with that if you have had a weak

teacher? How have you dealt with getting rid of her/him.

Mr. Johnson: Well, I document quite thoroughly and if you have nothing in writing then you forget it--the day, the time or what have you. I have these special cards. They are in a file box and it has the date printed all the way down the card and down the back side and I just make my little comments. I can't write very much but I make my little comments for instance I'll give you a typical example. When I arrived there was a gentleman who was a teacher who was an alcoholic and I was suspending students for drinking on campus or smoking. They would come back to me and say, Mr. Johnson I know that you have to do what you have to do but what about this teacher. That thing almost destroyed me. First year or two, I went to the principal and told him. We have to do something about this. What do you recommend? He would just give me this song and dance that it had been going on for years and years. He had a young administrator coming in there. I said handle this, I cannot put up with this because students are coming back to me and saying wait, if you can't do anything with a teacher -- is it different? So when I became principal I documented it. I started from that very first day. This was as seasoned teacher. He could have retired anytime. In my first year I pulled him in my office I was doing his formal evaluation and I pulled all of my cards and I said, Mr. Withers, this is what has happened. This day you were noticed to be under the influence--I personally smelled it and at ball games---this went on and on. Two or three cards I had it documented. He was such a good man. I must say to you that there is no way that this can continue. He said, if there is anything I can do for you you need to let me know. If there is any help that you need, please let me know. I said, but I cannot allow this to continue. He said, Mr. Johnson, you have been good to me. You have been so good to me. I realize I have a problem. I've not admitted it to anyone. You are the first that I have admitted too. He became very emotional. He said I don't know exactly what I'm going to do but I know that I will not come back. I took this information in to the Superintendent. He had been Superintendent there for twenty-two or twenty-three years and so I said this is what has happened. I put him on notice and so he retired. I've had two teachers to come in and I've released them. I didn't recommend them for reemployment the second year because of maybe attitude. I just felt that they were not ready to deal with the classroom. So the way I handled that is through documentation.

Goldie: How did the desegregation of schools affect your role as a principal?

Mr. Johnson: In many instances I find that it was very difficult for some of the Whites to accept a Black person, to accept a Black coming into the building and saying this is the way I want things done. I'm not saying that I would go



back to the old school but I think that we have gotten so far away from the--we no longer teach morals. That is something that is not happening. I don't see it anymore because when I was in school, I had all Black teachers and we were taught to respect. We were taught not only to respect ourselves but to respect others--to be very courteous and kind. We were taught to come to school looking decent and dressing as professionals. If you're going to consider yourself as a professional, act like a professional. Conduct yourself as a professional should. Put yourself three or four steps beyond the students. When I come into a classroom I want to be able to distinguish the difference between the teacher and the student. That, I am not seeing and I think from top down they're afraid to establish a dress code for the faculty members. I have no problem saying to a teacher you are a professional and at this school I do expect you to be dressed that way. I have no problem with that and that they cannot accept. They cannot accept that at all. I've had students to come with their knees out and I'm saying no, no, no. Where are you going? I say, we don't have a strong dress policy but you know exactly what I expect. Your body will be covered. Well, my mom--I say, well maybe I can talk to your mother about this. This is not the way you're to come to school. They go from first period to sixth period and no teacher said anything at all about these holes here. Tank tops I don't allow in school--no hats at all. So they have just forgotten about what we are all about. We not only have to teach a curriculum but we have to go back to morals, and values and what life is all about you see. I don't see it happening. Sometimes we hurt ourselves more than anyone else because we do more damage to the profession than anyone else does because a lot of people don't even think that we are professionals.

Goldie: No, they don't. They sure can't tell it by our dress.

Mr. Johnson: No, and I think if you--and I don't mean that you have to go to the classroom everyday in a necktie. I would like to see it but just clean, not sandals, nice shoes with socks. These are the kinds of things I think the students are sitting back looking at. If they don't grasp anything about your lecture, they're going to learn something from you--well, he is professionally dressed or she is professionally dressed. That is gong to stick with them. But I think that some faculty members, White specifically, have difficulties handling Black authority figures. I do expect certain things to be done this way. I expect your lessons to be planned well. I went in there and I said, I need to see your lesson plan. You should have them a week in advance. Put them in your mailbox so that I may check them. I shouldn't have to do that because that is part of your job. I don't even know where you are going. I've gotten that straightened out because they know where they are going now.



Goldie: Do you do a lot of your observation of teachers? You do it yourself?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, and my assistant principal assists but oh yes, and we do three. Basically three formal and then I may walk through--I have these little cards printed--for instance if I'm just going to check on something I saw in a formal observation, for instance, instructional time. I just may have a little card and walk through and that is the only thing that I'm looking for--instructional time. Or I may have another little card that says behavior in a classroom and I just document behavior. I think three observations is not enough.

Goldie: I guess you really do not have enough time to do it as much as you would like to. Do you enjoy your job? I don't know why I'm asking you this. I don't know why I'm asking this question!!!!!!

Mr. Johnson: I love it, I love it!! It is just everything that I ever dreamed of and sometimes I get so impatient about things that I'd like to see done and I get frustrated sometimes when they're not picking up on the concepts that I am picking up on or they are not actually carrying out a particular concept fast enough. But that just takes a little time. Things are not happening but I do enjoy it.

Goldie: What do you consider the major problem of your principalship?

Mr. Johnson: My major problem I think is support at the top. I get that support but in many instances I find that it is not the kind of support that I am looking for. I think I am being very vague.

Goldie: Are you saying it is a questioning type--if you are trying to implement something that is questioned rather than just that you are going to do it right--that kind of support?

Mr. Johnson: Well, not so much as--because if I'm going to implement something then he obviously will know what my plans are and will allow me to go through with my plans but I think, for instance, it is more of a decision that I have made on discipline. I am just a strong disciplinarian and once I have said this is the bottom line there is no changing my mind. No one else is going to change my mind because if I have to sit down and think about what shall I do, then I know the decision is not the right one. Or if I have to question myself as far as, "did I make the right decision?" If I start questioning myself, I know I didn't--but if I feel very comfortable and I pull all my data together and I have evaluated and I've consulted all the parties involved and I know exactly what happened, when it happened, how it happened, then I look at that and then I make my decision. I

think in one instance I think I had made a decision and I wasn't supported in my decision.

Goldie: Do you think it was political?

Mr. Johnson: Political, oh, definitely political and I have never--even though I live here, they have the opportunity to call or come by but it doesn't matter to me as to what side of the tracks you belong. You know it could be a lawyer's child and if you have violated the rules and to be very fair to everyone you will have to suffer the consequences. And I think in many instances that has played a big part in it in his decisions on certain things.

Goldie: And you would say it was more political than racial in your community?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, than racial. I can personally say that by being a Black man in the community it hasn't been a problem at all. And some of the decisions that have been made from the Superintendent's office have not been because of race. Because if I felt that way, I would personally speak up because I could not work in an environment like that. But you can't escape it but you accept and go on. You have to.

Goldie: What do you consider the most rewarding about your principalship?

Mr. Johnson: The teachers--I feel good about the teachers. They feel that they are treated as professionals. Students feel safe and they feel that learning is taking place. And I think that my ultimate goal has been to create such an environment. A safe, clean, learning environment and have an open door policy. The relationship that I have established with the faculty and the students has meant a great deal to me and I think that if I were to leave that it would certainly affect--if it were an advancement, for instance if it were going to the central office in some position I would have to give some thought to that because I would hate to leave such an environment. So the most rewarding thing about my principalship is just seeing that learning is taking place, and the faculty feel as though they are professionals. They have the latitude to make various decisions and they just feel good about the area.

Goldie: And to think that you made a real difference. Doesn't that give you a sense of pride because when you look at the building and you see the changes in relationships and you see some of your ideas coming into place, it makes you feel like its worth while.

Mr. Johnson: And when I drive down and when I turn into the drive and into my parking space, I can't wait to jump out of that car.

Goldie: How far do you drive every morning?

Mr. Johnson: It's about 40 minutes. It's not bad at all.

Goldie: That's not bad. It's think time for you--think time in the morning and think time in the afternoon.

Mr. Johnson: I calm down on the way back.

Goldie: Has it been a problem because of your night activities as far as football games, basketball games? Is that a problem sometimes?

Mr. Johnson: It is a problem sometimes. When I first accepted the position and my wife was so excited about it--my getting the position. She was so enthused, matter of fact, she was a pusher as far as my going back to school. I was teaching full-time at Dudley, teaching part-time at DTCC and working on my master's degree and I said, Sandy, I have so much going on now I just don't know if I can do it all. She said you can do it because you made up your mind--I know you well enough--but you just can't get into that little slump or you might feel that you are so overwhelmed that you just can't complete your master's so she pushed me on like that and I appreciate that. She has been there for me.

Goldie: Is she in education also?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, she is a guidance counselor. So I got the position and I called Dr. Bailey and I said, tell me what should I do. He said, I can't make that decision for you. Talk to Sandra and you two talk it over and call me back and let me know what you have decided. So I called him back and I said, Sandra says okay. He got on the phone with Sandra and said, Sandra do you realize that Charles is going to be down there for basketball games, football games, extra curricula activities. She said, yes, yes,. He said, all right. She was so enthused. And so when I leave here at six o'clock and return at eleven o'clock at night--that went on for a while and my little girl was just a baby. Sandra was saying, what a mess. My little girl was saying, I never see daddy and I started feeling guilty. Well, so the long hours paid off and now I can leave at a decent hour but if there are some reports I need to do, I do them.

Goldie: A lot of things you know what is expected--you know the forms and you know what is coming up.

Mr. Johnson: Exactly and I know when they are due. My secretary is aware of when they are due and so it has worked out fine but I'm telling you it was touch and go for a while.

Goldie: I know, one of the principals that I interviewed

said it was like having two wives and sometimes you can't satisfy either one of them.

Mr. Johnson: Well, that's right. This is my life.

Goldie: Now if you had to give some advice to a young Black person who aspires to be principal of a high school in the State of North Carolina, what kind of advice would you give to that person?

Mr. Johnson: I would say, listen to an individual who is in the position as I listened to Dr. Bailey. He was such a strong influence and I would also say read everything you possibly can as far as leadership is concerned and how to deal with people, all kinds of people. Maintain a caring attitude for individuals. I think that is probably the most important things I would say to an individual. If you find that you do not enjoy what you are doing there is no reason to stay in that position. Seek other employment but if you love what you are doing be the best that you possibly can be. No one is perfect. You're going to make mistakes and that is what I was afraid of. I was so afraid of making a mistake when I became a high school principal. I was just saying that I had to do everything right but that is impossible. Make those mistakes, learn by them and go on.

Goldie: Just make sure that you don't make the same mistakes.

Mr. Johnson: Exactly.

Goldie: We have covered all the questions and this has been an interesting interview. I've enjoyed it. You have an outgoing personality anyway. It's been a warm, and an easy interview and I hope that you have enjoyed it as much as I have because it gives you a chance to go over some things that you probably haven't thought about--maybe in a little while but it seems like you are making a real impact on the faculty and the students down in Chatham County. You are the kind of administrator that we really do need in the State of North Carolina and I appreciate your taking your time today to share with me. You will get a copy of the transcript and of course, when I finish writing, you'll get a copy.

Mr. Johnson: So you will have a copy of all the interviews.

Goldie: Each person, and this is what they told me when I went for my defense of a proposal. They said, now Goldie, do you have any funding? They said it is going to cost you a lot of money because I have to take the tape to a typist and she has to listen to it and type it all up, and the oral historian, one of my advisors, told me that sometimes it takes four hours to do one hour of tapes. I don't know how much it is going to take to pay Gloria to do all of that and



once I get all the interviews and the tapes transcribed then I'll start putting it together. But since I'm interviewing myself, I can already--there are some things that --one belief that I have. I have the belief that the principals in '64 had lots of power and they did. Principals in '89 have a lot of power. The only thing is that there is a central control that they have to make sure is straight but they still have a lot of power in that building.

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Goldie: I felt like since integration and being a Black principal in these integrated schools their hands were tied, but that is not it. An administrator is--and just about everyone has said that. It doesn't matter. If you are an administrator, but the problem that we are having with the numbers is because Blacks have to prove themselves. You've got to prove--you've got to be a step above and you've got to be real determined. See if you hadn't been determined...

Mr. Johnson: Exactly. The thing is when I was an assistant principal I had to prove to them that I could do a good job. That's why they moved me into that slot.

Goldie:: But if you had just been mediocre, you know how they think we are, just go in there and accept everything.

Mr. Johnson: Exactly, and then after getting in there and if he felt that, well, he's just going to take anything that I say, but he realized that I spoke up. I had a conference with him. I said, wait a minute. You put me in this position and I told you that I could do the job and I am going to do the job. Now those kinds of things that you were talking about politically involved and then he...

Goldie: The you realize how political the Superintendency is. At least you have tenure. One of the interviewee's said that moving principal's around is to try to take their power base because when you are a principal of a high school you do have a lot of power.