



New York State Archives

**New York State Education Department Center on Innovation
in Education New York City School Decentralization Files
14043**

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Overview of the Records

Repository:	New York State Archives
Summary:	In 1967, the commissioner of education initiated a study of decentralization plans by the director of the Center on Innovation in Education. These files resulted from that study and from the Board of Regents' review of the New York City Board of Education's plan for decentralization, proposed in 1969. The files include memoranda, reports, notes of meetings, and press releases concerning the development of a decentralization policy by the Regents and commissioner.
Creator:	New York (State). Education Department. Center on Innovation in Education
Title:	New York City school decentralization files
Quantity:	4 cubic feet
Quantity:	including 4 loose-leaf binders
Inclusive Date:	1962-1979
Bulk Date:	1967-1969
Series:	14043
Sponsor:	This series' description was enhanced as part of the States' Impact on Federal Education Policy Project (SIFEPP), in January 2010. The New York Community Trust - Wallace Special Projects Fund provided funding for this project.

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Arrangement

Arranged into three subseries: 1. General Files; 2. Binders; 3. Miscellaneous files

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Administrative History

For much of the first half of the 20th century, New York City school governance was characterized by a large central bureaucracy, with administrative and policy-making power centralized in the NYC Board of Education. Local school boards existed only in an advisory capacity, without any true policy-making or administrative powers, and were populated by Board of Education appointees. This system came under increasing criticism in the 1960's as being inefficient and unresponsive to educational needs. Criticism came from elected officials, such as Mayor John Lindsay, and from the Temporary Commission on City Finances, which recommended the creation of separate school boards for each borough of New York. In addition, community organizations and members of racial and ethnic minorities felt that the school system was uninterested and incapable of meeting the specific needs of their children. These latter groups staged protests and boycotts in 1966 in Harlem, particularly around the opening of I.S. 201 high school in East Harlem. They demanded either the integration of these schools through busing, or greater community control over public schools, with community representatives holding the right to hire teachers and principals, and to set the curriculum and educational standards.

In April of 1967, the New York State Legislature passed a bill, later ratified by the Governor, that required Mayor Lindsay to develop a plan for decentralizing the New York City school system, in exchange for greater state educational aid. Lindsay appointed a board of educational experts, headed by Ford Foundation president McGeorge Bundy, to formulate a plan. The plan, released in November, called for the creation of 30 to 60 community school districts in New York City, each controlled by an 11-member community school board. The Lindsay administration and the Board of Education both released plans modifying aspects of the "Bundy plan," reflecting a power struggle between the mayor's office and the board for control over the extent of authority to be given to the community school boards, as well as the ultimate authority over the dispersal of funds for school operations. Meanwhile, in July of 1967, the Board of Education announced a joint project with the Ford Foundation to create three experimental school districts with elected school boards consisting of parents, teachers, and community leaders. The districts were located in East Harlem (including I.S. 201), the Two Bridges area of the Lower East Side, and Ocean Hill-Brownsville in Brooklyn.

In May of 1968, the elected school board of Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district dismissed nineteen teachers and administrators due to perceived lack of support for the decentralization effort. The New York United Federation of Teachers responded by calling a strike in September, claiming that the school board had violated the teachers' rights to due process. The resulting conflict, which at times turned violent, pitted the unionized teachers against community members and organizations supportive of decentralization. Allen worked constantly to act as a mediator between the two opposing groups, postponing his acceptance of the position of U.S. Commissioner of Education to work on the conflict. After another walkout by teachers, Allen's mediation led to a compromise position, which allowed the return of the dismissed teachers to the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district, provided for a state-appointed trustee to oversee the school district, and retained the community school board and their selected district administrator. In April of 1969, the State Legislature passed a school decentralization law for

New York City, which maintained and broadened the use of locally-controlled school districts, while preserving teachers' job security and the right of teachers to bargain collectively across city school districts.

The Center for Innovation in Education was founded in 1966 by the New York State Education Department and was funded in part by federal funds provided by Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. During the conflict over decentralization of New York City schools, the center was charged with reviewing the various decentralization plans leading up to the final plan submitted by the mayor of New York City. In addition, staff of the center kept Commissioner Allen informed on developments with the demonstration school districts, including the protests and negotiations surrounding the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district.

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Scope and Content Note

The series consists of the office files of Dr. Norman D. Kurland, director of NYSED's Center for Innovation in Education. The records reflect his role in planning, evaluating, and monitoring the efforts to decentralize New York City school governance. Included are three subseries. The first contains records relating to the development of policy and legislation relating to decentralization. These include files on competing plans for decentralization, containing reports, correspondence, clippings, timelines and other materials. Among these are the original plan developed by Mayor's Advisory Panel on Decentralization of the New York City Schools, known as the "Bundy plan, as well as responses and commentary from various educational interest groups. Also included are modifications made in Bundy plan recommendations made by Mayor John Lindsay's office, and responding proposals from other education-related organizations. Also included are files documenting the progress of decentralization. These include correspondence and reports from organizations evaluating and advocating for or against decentralization, including Metropolitan Applied Research Center, Inc., New York State Teachers Association, NYS School Boards Association, Confederation of Local School Boards of New York City, Institute for Educational Development, Citizens Committee for Public Schools. Furthermore, there are records documenting the demonstration school districts in Harlem, Ocean Hill-Brownsville, and Two Bridges, including correspondence, bulletins from districts, and clippings detailing controversies within districts.

The second subseries consists of four sequential binders maintained by Dr. Kurland that document the decentralization process in New York City. The binders mostly contain copies of proposed plans for decentralization, as well as state legislation governing the decentralization process. Also included are copies of selected memoranda and reports. The third subseries contains miscellaneous unfiled records, as well as post-1969 records relating to decentralization, including reports on the relationship between NYSED and NYC school system going into 1970's, and proposals for further school decentralization and streamlining of central bureaucracy.

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Related Information

Related Material

Series B0444 Commissioner's Interim Subject Files contains documentation of the State Education Department's involvement in decentralization and demonstration school districts.

Series 14238 New York City School-Community Interaction Umbrella Program Files documents another State Education Department effort to increase community involvement in New York City schools.

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Other Finding Aids

Available at Repository

The first folder in the series contains an outline of the numerical organizational scheme maintained by Dr. Kurland's office and reflected in the first subseries.

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Use of Records

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions regarding access to or use of this material.

Access Terms

- Educational law and legislation
- Education--New York (State)--New York
- Education

- **New York (State). Education Department**