



New York State Archives

New York State Education Department Commissioner Lewis A. Wilson Subject Files W0103

New York State Archives
222 Madison Avenue
Albany, NY 12230
archref@nysed.gov
URL: <http://www.archives.nysed.gov/>

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Overview of the Records

Repository:	New York State Archives
Summary:	The series includes correspondence, reports, meeting materials, press releases, and draft legislation related to Lewis A. Wilson's tenure as commissioner, 1950-1955. Records document the Education Department's role in broader social and political issues, including civil defense and military preparedness; anticommunism and moral education; proposed creation of centralized school districts in rural areas; and promotion of the educational use of television.
Creator:	New York (State). Education Department. Commissioner Lewis A. Wilson
Title:	Education Department Commissioner Lewis A. Wilson subject files
Quantity:	29.5 cubic feet
Inclusive Date:	1932-1965
Bulk Date:	1950-1955
Series:	W0103
Sponsor:	This series' description was enhanced as part of the States' Impact on Federal Education Policy Project (SIFEPP), in July 2008. The New York Community Trust - Wallace Special Projects Fund provided funding for this project.

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Arrangement

Organized into three groups of records by two-year increments (1950-1952, 1952-1954, and 1954-1955), then alphabetical by subject.

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Administrative History

Lewis A. Wilson was born in Bergen, N.Y. on February 3, 1886. He graduated from the academic department of Brockport State Normal School, then received further training at Mechanics Institute in Rochester, N.Y., Stout Institute in Menomonie, Wisc., and Teachers College, Columbia University. He began his educational career as a shop teacher in Rochester in 1908. He joined the New York State Education Department in 1912 as a Specialist in Industrial Education. He remained with the State Education Department for the remainder of his career, serving as Director of the Division of Vocational and Extension Education from 1918 to 1927; Assistant Commissioner for Vocational and Extension Education from 1927 to 1941; and Deputy Commissioner of Education from 1941 to 1950. During this time, he was deeply involved in the rapid expansion of the state's vocational education program. He served as Acting Commissioner of Education after the death of Francis Trow Spaulding, and, on October 20, 1950, he was officially sworn in as President of the University of the State of New York and Commissioner of Education. He held this position until his retirement in 1955.

Throughout his career, Wilson was deeply involved on both the state and national levels in the development of vocational education, adult education, and vocational rehabilitation. He made numerous studies and surveys of vocational education programs in New York State. From 1921 to 1923, he was president of the National Society for Vocational Education, and in 1925, he was appointed by the U. S. Department of Commerce as a delegate to the International Exposition of Decorative Arts in Paris, France. In addition, he served on the White House Conference Committee on Child Health and Protection in 1930, and the White House Conference on Children in a Democracy in 1939.

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Scope and Content Note

Correspondence, reports, meeting materials, press releases, drafts of legislation and other materials related to the tenure of Lewis Wilson as New York State Commissioner of Education. Much of the collection reflects Wilson's role of overseeing the various divisions of the New York State Education Department, including Elementary and Secondary Education, Higher and Professional Education, and Vocational Education and Rehabilitation. Elementary and secondary education documentation primarily consists of correspondence and memos to and from Associate Commissioner for Elementary and Secondary Education. They also include correspondence with school district personnel and legislators relating to the proposed creation of centralized school districts in rural areas. Higher and professional education material includes correspondence with assistant commissioners of higher and professional education, meeting minutes and reports from the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York, materials from specific SUNY campuses, and reports from State colleges located at Cornell University and Syracuse University. Vocational education and rehabilitation materials

include correspondence with the U.S. Office of Education related to Wilson's service on the U. S. Commissioner of Education's Advisory Committee for the Further Development and Improvement of Vocational Education, as well as proposed legislation, budget proposals and a report on vocation education in the New York City schools. Also included are correspondence and reports from the Department of Research. Reports detail research projects such as a school census of upstate NY, evaluating effectiveness in secondary school teaching, and an extensive survey of Buffalo public schools.

The collection also contains materials documenting the New York State Education Department's role in many broader social and political issues of the time. Among these issues was a focus on civil defense and military preparedness in response to the Cold War. Documentation includes regulations and meeting minutes from the New York State Civil Defense Commission, of which Wilson was a member, and correspondence with U. S. Department of Defense officials, U. S. Congresspeople, teacher organizations, and others on the proposed creation of a Federal Manpower Authority. Also included are reports on actions taken by school administrators under the Feinberg Law against teachers suspected of membership in the Communist Party. The collection also contains letters from individuals, clergy, and school officials regarding their positions on a November 1951 statement by the Board of Regents in support of recitation of short prayer at beginning of school day. A considerable amount of documentation centers around efforts by Wilson and the State Education Department to promote the use of television for educational purchases. Included is testimony from Wilson to the Federal Communications Commission lobbying for the allocation of high-frequency bands and stations for educational television, as well as text of the Board of Regents proposal the allocation of eleven UHF channels for educational programming. Also included are newspaper clippings, proposed budgets for setting up stations, applications for employment in NYSED operated stations, and reports and correspondence from educational television systems in other states.

Also included are records related to Wilson's service in various interdepartmental councils and commissions. Among these was the Interdepartmental Health Council, which was charged with addressing various public health issues. Included are correspondence and meeting minutes, as well as reports related to alcoholism, medical aspects of civil defense, polio prevention, nursing services, and other health-related topics. Also, documents related to the Mental Health Commission include meeting minutes and agenda, correspondence, reports detailing grants to various state and local agencies, and recommendations for legislation related to mental health. Wilson also served on the New York State Youth Commission, which was responsible for funding programs related to juvenile delinquency prevention, day care, youth centers, and other extracurricular youth activities. Included in the collection are meeting minutes and correspondence referring to reports and publications of the Commission. Also included are documents from the New York State Citizens' Committee of One Hundred for Children and Youth, a committee set up by Gov. Dewey to work with Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth. The collection also documents Wilson's participation in regional and national education organizations, such as the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Northeastern Commissioners of Education.

Also included in the collection are materials documenting legislation related to education. Among these materials are texts of bills brought before the New York State Assembly regarding issues such as a minimum salary for teachers, methods of determining school aid formulas,

revising the structure of the Board of Regents, and school district formation. Also contained is correspondence to and from school officials, individuals, and organizations, related to proposed state legislation. Federal legislation is also documented, including texts of bills such as the Public School Construction Act, the Federal Education Agency Act, the Selective Service Act, and the National School Health Services Act.

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Related Information

Related Material

Series B0459, Education Department Deputy Commissioner's Subject Files, 1941-1970 (bulk 1941-1955, 1958-1970)

Series B0469, Education Department Cabinet Meeting Minutes (B0469-77 accretion) and

Series A2050, Associate Commissioner and Acting Assistant Commissioner for Vocational and Extension Education Subject Files, 1937-1941 contain related records.

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Use of Records

Access Restrictions

Commissioners in Schools Files: Restricted to protect personal privacy. Access may be permitted under certain conditions upon application to and approval by the State Archives.

Administrative Information

Processing Information

W0103-78: These records were transferred by the State Library in 1978 and originally accessioned as part of Series 15080. When Series 15080 was separated into individual series corresponding to each commissioner in 2017, the records were re-designated part of Series W0103.

This series description was enhanced as part of the States' Impact on Federal Education Policy Project (SIFEPP), in July 2008. The New York Community Trust - Wallace Special Projects Fund provided funding for this project.

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Access Terms

- Educational planning
- Educational law and legislation
- Monitoring education
- Education
- Education--Finance
- New York (State)
- Supervising education
- Education
- State University of New York
- University of the State of New York. Board of Regents