



New York State Archives

**New York State Education Department Commissioner James
E. Allen Subject Files W0104**

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Overview of the Records

Repository:	New York State Archives
Summary:	Commissioner James Edward Allen's subject files consist of correspondence, memoranda, meeting materials, reports, clippings, speeches, press releases, and other materials documenting the activities of the New York State Education Department (NYSED). Topics addressed include administration and financing of school districts, racial desegregation, state aid, consolidation of school districts, state and federal legislation related to education, elementary and secondary education curricula, educational television, the adjudication of teacher disputes, teacher certification, vocational education, professional education, civil defense, and health education.
Creator:	New York (State). Education Department. Commissioner James E. Allen
Title:	Education Department Commissioner James E. Allen subject files
Quantity:	53 cubic feet
Inclusive Date:	1939-1976
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Series:	W0104
Sponsor:	This series' description was enhanced as part of the States' Impact on Federal Education Policy Project (SIFEPP), in September 2006. The New York Community Trust - Wallace Special Projects Fund provided funding for this project.

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Arrangement

Alphabetical by subject.

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Administrative History

Dr. James Edward Allen, Jr. was born April 25, 1911 in Elkins, West Virginia. His father, Dr. James Edward Allen, Sr., was president of Davis and Elkins College, and his mother, Susan H. Garrott, was the college's librarian. James Allen, Jr. attended local elementary and secondary schools, and graduated from Davis and Elkins College in 1932. In 1933, Allen joined the West Virginia State Education Department, eventually becoming Chief of the Division of State Aid and Statistics. In 1938, Allen married Florence Pell Miller, with whom he would have two children.

In 1939, Allen left the West Virginia State Education Department for Princeton University, where he became a research associate with the Princeton Surveys, assisting with studies in educational finance for the State of New Jersey, and pursuing part-time graduate studies. From 1941 to 1944, he studied education administration at Harvard University, receiving his Ph.D. in 1944. After a brief stint as a civilian operations analyst for the United States Air Force, Allen joined the faculty of Syracuse University in 1945 as an Assistant Professor of Education and Director of the Bureau of School Services. In 1947, Allen left Syracuse for the New York State Education Department. He first served as Executive Assistant to Commissioner of Education Frances Spaulding. Upon Spaulding's death in 1950, he became Deputy Commissioner of Education under Commissioner Lewis Wilson. In 1955, Allen was appointed by the Board of Regents as New York State Commissioner of Education and President of the University of the State of New York. At the age of forty-four, he was the youngest person ever to have been appointed to the post.

As Commissioner of Education, Dr. James Allen presided over a vast expansion of the New York State Education Department, in terms of both bureaucratic size and authority. Taking advantage of vast increases in funding from both the state and federal governments, Allen oversaw the creation and expansion of many programs to address the growing need and demand for educational services in the State of New York. In elementary and secondary education, Allen oversaw the creation of the Boards of Cooperative Educational Services, which allowed for smaller, rural school districts to partner for the provision of expanded educational programs. Allen's administration used financial aid as an inducement for smaller school districts to consolidate, creating a more centralized governing structure for state education. In addition, he responded to the increasing number of poor rural and immigrant students in the New York City school system and elsewhere in the state by fostering new programs in urban education and bilingual education. In the realm of higher education, Allen established the Office of Administrative Services in Higher Education, which assisted colleges and universities in streamlining their operation and management; created Scholar Incentive Awards and College Proficiency exams to expand higher education services to poorer and non-traditional students; and supported the Bundy Commission's findings in 1968 in favor of providing state aid to non-public higher education institutions.

Building upon his background in educational research, Allen was a strong proponent of the creation and use of data systems, research, and evaluation to improve the education process. As a member of President Lyndon Johnson's 1964 Task Force on Education, he advocated

for federal funding for innovative education programs and for state education departments, which were implemented in Titles III and V of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Allen was an early proponent of national student assessments, and worked with organizations such as the National Association of State Boards of Education and the Council of Chief State School Officers to promote multi-state data systems and evaluation programs, such as the Committee on Educational Data Systems of CCSSO. Within NYSED, Allen established the Bureau of Education Finance Research, which studied school finance and local aid formulas, and created the Division of Electronic Data Processing. In addition, Allen implemented funding for experimental programs in local school districts, such as team teaching and ungraded primary schools.

Allen was an early proponent of the need for "de facto" school desegregation. In 1957, he established the Division of Intercultural Relations within the State Education Department, the first such office in any U.S. state to deal explicitly with the issue of school integration. In 1960, Allen worked with the Board of Regents on a policy statement affirming the need to desegregate schools and to provide for equal education for all, a statement that was reaffirmed in 1968. In June 1962, he appointed an Advisory Committee on Human Relations and Community Tensions to advise the State Education Department and local schools on issues of racial imbalance and local control of schools. Allen ordered various school districts to desegregate and often met resistance. Most notably, the Malverne school district of Nassau County filed and won a lawsuit against the State Education Department challenging an integration order, but the State Court of Appeals overturned the ruling, upholding the power of the commissioner to order desegregation.

Allen's last year as Commissioner was dominated by the controversy surrounding the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district in New York City. The situation stemmed from a joint-project by the New York City Board of Education and the Ford Foundation to set up three community-controlled school districts within New York City, among them Ocean Hill-Brownsville, with locally-elected school boards holding much of the decision-making power. 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 groups 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. Eventually, Allen's mediation led to a compromise position, 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. In April of 1969, the State Legislature passed a school desegregation law, incorporating much of Allen's proposed compromise.

Allen's work as Commissioner of Education ended in February of 1969, when he was chosen by President Richard Nixon to be the Assistant Secretary for Education in the United State Department of Health, Education and Welfare and U.S. Commissioner of Education. During his short tenure, Allen advocated the reorganization of the Office of Education to achieve greater control over programs, proposed the creation of the National Institute of Education, and spearheaded the Right to Read program to combat illiteracy. However, significant

disagreements emerged between Allen and the Nixon administration over school desegregation and the role of the federal government in education. Allen was dismissed from his post in May of 1970. In October of that year, Allen joined the faculty of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and remained there until his untimely death on October 18, 1971.

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Scope and Content Note

Commissioner James Edward Allen's subject files consist of correspondence, memoranda, meeting materials, reports, clippings, speeches, press releases, and other materials documenting the activities of the New York State Education Department (NYSED) under Dr. Allen's leadership. Some records are directly related to the operation of the Commissioner's Office and the State Education Department as a whole, while other records relate to issues surrounding the administration and financing of school districts, including issues of racial desegregation, state aid to public schools, and consolidation of school districts. Other records relate to NYSED's and Commissioner Allen's work to influence state and federal legislation related to education. There is a considerable amount of material related to education policy organizations, such as the Education Commission of the States and the Council of Chief State School Officers, in which Dr. Allen played a significant role. Also documented are other organizations with which Dr. Allen was involved, either personally or through his role as Commissioner of Education. The remainder of the series deals with various subjects, including elementary and secondary education curricula, educational television, the adjudication of teacher disputes, teacher certification, vocational education, professional education, civil defense, and health education.

Files labeled "Commissioner" document the functioning of the Commissioner's Office, as well as Dr. Allen's personal activities. Included is a considerable amount of correspondence relating to personal appearance and speaking engagements accepted and declined by Dr. Allen; letters of congratulations and recommendation for school personnel; and correspondence, newsletters, and meeting materials from organizations of which he was a member, such as the Advisory Council on the 1960 White House Conference on Children and Youth, the Joint Council on Economic Education, and the Learning Resources Institute. Also included are agenda and minutes from meetings of the Commissioner's Cabinet; texts of speeches, filed with accompanying correspondence, press releases, and suggestions from NYSED staff; and official written statements of the Commissioner.

Files labeled "Department Administration" refer to the daily operation of the State Education Department. Of particular note are correspondence, reports, and agenda of the Joint Legislative Committee to Revise and Simplify Education Law. In addition, there are published reports of the Governor's Study of Education, a series of five studies, initiated by Governor Nelson Rockefeller, of the "emerging requirements and increasing costs" of public education in New York. Also included are programs from yearly NYSED staff conferences, annual reports of

NYSED, summaries of budget proposals, materials related to personnel issues, and planning documents relating to Department construction projects.

Much of the series relates to the administration, financing, and organization of school districts in New York State. School district desegregation was a prominent issue among school districts during Dr. Allen's tenure. The series documents attempts to achieve racial balance in school districts in Buffalo, Malverne, and Mount Vernon, N.Y. Included are letters from Dr. Allen to school districts asking them to submit plans for eliminating racial imbalance, reports issued by school districts in response to Dr. Allen's demands, press releases from NYSED on desegregation efforts, and correspondence with community leaders, school administrators, and others regarding official statements made by Dr. Allen in support of school desegregation. Other documents in the series relate to the changes in governance of the New York City school system, including the creation of a new Board of Education for New York City in 1963, and the creation of community-controlled school districts within New York City in 1967, which precipitated a city-wide teacher's strike in 1968. The files also document efforts by NYSED to consolidate smaller school districts and promote large, comprehensive high schools within school districts. These records include correspondence relating to 1956 legislation authorizing Commissioner Allen to revise the Master Plan for School District Reorganization, and responses to petitions from community members in school districts facing possible consolidation. Records relating to school financing include correspondence with legislators and school district administrators on revisions to the state aid formula and increases in state appropriations for school districts, as well as correspondence with members of the Joint Legislative Committee on School Financing, which was formed in 1960 to study the increasing scope and cost of state education.

Legislative files document the attempts by Commissioner Allen and NYSED to affect legislation at the federal and state levels. Dr. Allen's tenure coincided with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Acts (ESEA) of 1965, which greatly expanded the federal role in funding education. Included among the legislative files is correspondence from Dr. Allen to New York's congressional delegation noting problems with implementing ESEA in New York schools and offering suggestions for further amendments to the law. Also included are reports on the impact of ESEA on New York State schools, copies of ESEA legislation, and a transcript of Dr. Allen's testimony in 1967 to the U. S. Senate on proposed amendments to ESEA. Other federal legislation documented in these files includes the Higher Education Act of 1965, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Higher Education Facilities Act, the National Defense Education Act of 1958, and the Vocational Education Act of 1963. There is also extensive documentation of regular meetings between Dr. Allen and New York's congressional delegation, including reports distributed at these meetings on the likely effects of federal legislation on NYSED activities, as well as correspondence with specific congresspersons regarding NYSED views on federal legislation. Records relating to New York State legislation include correspondence with state legislators and legislative staff, lists of proposed legislation, and texts of bills. Also included are legislative proposals from the Board of Regents, as well as official messages from the governor relating his suggestions for legislative action.

There are an extensive number of files relating to various education-related organizations with which Dr. Allen was involved in his capacity as Commissioner of Education. Prominent among these organizations was the Education Commission of the States (ECS). Records, including drafts of the authorizing report of the ECS, "The Compact for Education," clearly

document Allen's role in the formation of the ECS. Also included are correspondence and reports related to task forces, steering committees, and studies authorized by the ECS. Also present are documents relating to Dr. Allen's involvement in the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), including correspondence relating to the Heald study on the role of state education departments in American education, and correspondence relating to executive sessions of CCSSO to review drafts of the Elementary and Secondary Education Acts (ESEA). CCSSO materials also include agenda, minutes, resolutions, addresses from annual meetings, bulletins, and official position statements. The series also includes correspondence, meeting minutes, and newsletters from education organizations in New York State, including the New York State Citizens Committee for the Public Schools, Inc., the New York State School Boards Association, Inc., and the New York State Teachers Association.

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Related Information

Related Material

Series B0444, Commissioner's Interim Subject Files, contains general files compiled by the commissioner's office for use by James E. Allen's successor.

Series B0466, Education Department Office of the Commissioner Outgoing Correspondence, contains additional records compiled by Commissioner Allen's office.

The James E. Allen Personal Papers, 1955-1971 (SC20854) are held by the New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections.

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Use of Records

Access Restrictions

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

Administrative Information

Custodial History

W0104-77: These records were transferred to the State Library by the Education Department in 1969 and subsequently transferred to the State Archives in 1977.

Processing Information

W0104-77: These records were transferred by the State Library in 1977 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 W0104.

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
- School integration
- World War, 1939-1945
- Educational law and legislation
- Monitoring education
- Education
- Education--Finance
- New York (State)
- Supervising education
- State University of New York
- Allen, James E., Jr., 1911-1971
- University of the State of New York. Board of Regents