Overview of 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

Inclusive Dates:
1962-1979

Quantity:
4 cubic feet, including 4 loose-leaf binders
Series Number:
14043

Arrangement:
Arranged into three subseries: 1. General Files; 2. Binders; 3. Miscellaneous files
Arranged by numerical scheme developed by office staff.
Binders were numbered by Kurland. Arranged by number.
No apparent organizational scheme.

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.

Scope and Contact 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. This subseries contains records relating to the development of policy and legislation relating to New York City school decentralization. Included are 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 plans from the United Federation of Teachers, the Citizens Union of the City of New York, the Public Education Association, the New York State Senate (bill introduced by Sen. John J. Marchi), the Association of Assistant Principals, and the United Parents Associations of New York City. Furthermore, there are reports, completed prior to 1967, related to issues in New York City educational system, including desegregation, curricula, teacher compensation and unionization, and an extended school year. Also included are files documenting the progress of decentralization. These include copies of an interim decentralization plan, completed in October 15, 1968, as well as 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.

controversies within districts. This subseries consists of four sequential binders maintained by Norman D. Kurland that document the decentralization process in New York City. Binders are numbered in roughly chronological order. 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. This subseries includes some unfiled records apparently intended for the General File, as well as post-1969 records relating to decentralization. These post-1969 records include a dissertation by Eileen Elizabeth Byrne for Ph.D. Fordham University School of Education on “Community Participation After Decentralization in One New York City School District, 1970-1977.” Also present are 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, including the recommendation of the abolishment of the NYC Board of Education and Chancellor in favor of a single administrator.

Use of Records:

Access Restrictions:
There are no restrictions regarding access to or use of the material.

Related Information:

Related Materials:
Series B0444, Commissioner's Interim Subject Files, contains documentation of NYSED's involvement in decentralization and demonstration school districts.

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

Other Finding Aids:
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.

Access Terms:

Subjects:

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

Corporate Names:

• New York (State). Education Department. Center on Innovation in Education
• New York State Archives
• New York (State). Education Department

**Detailed Description:**
Contact repository for copy with container list information.