

January 14, 2005

TO: Members, State Board of Education

FROM: William L. Librera, Ed.D.
Commissioner

SUBJECT: *Englewood Cliffs v. Englewood*
Report to the State Board

As you are aware, in its April 2, 2003 decision on the motions brought before it in the matter of *Englewood Cliffs v. Englewood*, seeking to vacate the State Board's 1990 directive prohibiting all public school districts in New Jersey from accepting high school age students from Englewood and Englewood Cliffs on a tuition basis or otherwise, the State Board required that the Commissioner report formally to the State Board semi-annually "to ensure that ... progress continues and to avoid the possibility of regression." This report is tendered to meet that requirement.

The report was due to the State Board in November 2004. At that time, the only staff member responsible for the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program and for collecting, maintaining and analyzing data on the Englewood School District was out on extended sick leave. The State Board, through its Legal Committee, granted the department's request for an extension of time to submit the report.

I. ENGLEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS GENERAL INFORMATION

In October 2003, the Englewood School District reported a total enrollment of 2702.5: 100 Caucasian students or 3.7% of the total student body; 1534.5 Black students, or 56.8%; 940 Hispanic students or 34.8%; 124 Asian students or 4.6%; and 4 Native American students or .01%.

The total enrollment for the 2003-2004 school year in grades 9 through 12, which includes both Dwight Morrow High School students and students enrolled in the Academies@ Englewood, was 846. Of these, there were 47 Caucasian students or 5.5% of the total high school population; 434 Black students or 51%; 292 Hispanic students or 34.5%; 72 Asian students or 8.5%; and 1 Native American student or .001%.

While the fall report for 2004-2005 is not yet available, we have added the newly enrolled ninth grade Englewood Cliffs and school choice program students to the reported student population for grades 8 through 11 in October 2003, which are grades 9 through 12 in the current school year. This results in an estimated total enrollment for the 2004-2005 school year of 1208.5. Of these, there were 77 Caucasian students or 6.37% of the total high school population; 490 Black students or 40.55%; 534.5 Hispanic students or 44.23%; 102 Asian students or 8.44%; and 5 “other” or interracial students or .041%. These figures reflect a slight increase in the percentage of Caucasian students, a 11% decrease in the percentage of Black students, and a 10% increase in the percentage of Hispanic students. Nevertheless, despite the changes, over 90% of the total student population of high school students in the district are minorities. See Table E.

II. ADMISSION TO THE ACADEMIES@ENGLEWOOD

In establishing the Academies@Englewood program, the department and the district anticipated the acceptance of 150 students per year into the ninth grade so that eventually the total population of the Academies would maintain a fairly steady total enrollment, in grades 9 through 12, of 600 students. Each year the Academies were expected to admit 75 students from Englewood and Englewood Cliffs, and 75 students from outside the district through the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program (school choice program).

In the first year of the program, the 2002-2003 school year, the Academies reported accepting 37 students from Englewood and 55 school choice program students. This class is the current 11th grade, still with a total enrollment of 92 students. See Table C. The second year of the program, the 2003-2004 school year, the Academies reported accepting 55 students from Englewood and Englewood Cliffs, and 64 school choice program students for a total of 119. This class is the current 10th grade with a total enrollment of 102 students for the 2004-2005 school year. See Table B. Changes in enrollment are discussed below.

The Academies@Englewood have enrolled a total of 117 ninth grade students for the 2004-2005 school year. Of these, 42 students or 35.9% are residents of Englewood, 4 or 3.4% are residents of Englewood Cliffs, and 71 students or 60.7% have been accepted through the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program from other districts. See Table A. While the number of students accepted through the school choice program is close to the numbers anticipated in the Academies program as originally conceived, the number of resident students accepted into the Academies remains low and each year constitutes yet a smaller proportion of the Academies student body.

At this point, in the third year of the Academies@Englewood program, the district had anticipated a total enrollment of 225 Englewood students and 225 out-of-district students. The actual enrollment for the 2004-2005 school year is 126 Englewood students and 179 out-of-district students. See Appendix D.

While we are pleased to report that four of the Englewood resident students and one student from Englewood Cliffs who have enrolled in the ninth grade at the Academies@Englewood for September 2004 have returned to the public high school from private and parochial grammar schools, the department remains concerned that so few students from Englewood's middle school appear to qualify for admission to the Academies program. Admission to the program is contingent in large part on a student's performance on an entrance examination.

III. RACIAL/ ETHNIC COMPOSITION

While the admission of students from outside the district through the school choice program has resulted in a well-integrated student body within the Academies@ Englewood program (see Tables A through D), the population of Dwight Morrow High School continues to belong overwhelmingly to minority groups. Progress toward integrating either the Academies@Englewood and Dwight Morrow programs or the Academies@Englewood and Dwight Morrow student bodies continues to move slowly.

Our estimates for the 2004-2005 school year show 25 Asian resident students enrolled in grades 9 through 12 in the district, or 2.4% of the total number of resident students in those grades. Of these, 9 are enrolled in the Academies@Englewood program, leaving 16 enrolled in Dwight Morrow High School, or 1.78% of the Dwight Morrow student body, a decline in the percentage of Asian students of .66%.

Our estimates for the 2004-2005 school year show 477 Black resident students enrolled in grades 9 through 12 in the district, or 46.6% of the total number of resident students in those grades. Of these, 64 are enrolled in the Academies@ Englewood program, leaving 413 enrolled in Dwight Morrow High School, or 46.02% of the Dwight Morrow student body, an decrease in the percentage of Black students of .59%.

Our estimates for the 2004-2005 school year show 16 Caucasian resident students enrolled in grades 9 through 12 in the district, or 1.56% of the total number of resident students in those grades. Of these, 4 were enrolled in the Academies@ Englewood program, leaving 12 enrolled in Dwight Morrow High School, or 1.34% of the Dwight Morrow student body, a decline in the percentage of Caucasian students of .23%.

Our estimates for the 2004-2005 school year show 503.5 Hispanic resident students enrolled in grades 9 through 12 in the district, or 49.19% of the total number of resident students in those grades. Of these, 47 were enrolled in the Academies@ Englewood program, leaving 456.5 enrolled in Dwight Morrow High School, or 50.86% of the Dwight Morrow student body, an increase in the percentage of Hispanic students of 1.67%. See Table E.

IV: CHANGES IN ENROLLMENT

Thirteen students who initially enrolled in the Academies program in the 2003-2004 school year and who would currently be members of the 10th grade class have left the program. Seven of these students were Englewood residents; four of these students were what the district describes as “academically exited;” one moved; one was sent by her family to an out-of-state boarding school and one chose to return to Dwight Morrow High School. Of the six choice program students who left the Academies, one returned to his district of residence. Englewood has provided no reason for the withdrawal of the remaining five students.

Thirteen students who initially enrolled in the Academies program in the 2002-2003 school year and who would currently be members of the 11th grade class have left the program. Eight of these students were Englewood residents; four of these students were “academically exited;” three moved and one chose to return to Dwight Morrow High School. Of the five choice program students who left the program, one returned to his district of residence; and three moved. No reason was provided for the withdrawal of the remaining student.

While the numbers of students who have left the program are small, the department has some concern about the Englewood students who have been “academically exited” and about the Englewood students who elected to return to Dwight Morrow High School. Department staff has had some contact with the parent of one of these students and intends to continue to explore the reasons behind the changes.

V: PROGRESS

The Academies@Englewood program has implemented five career academies: the Academy of Information Systems; the Academy of Law and Public Safety; the Academy of Pre-Engineering; the Academy of Finance and the Academy of Bio-Medicine. Each academy offers a “high school curriculum that is demanding and rich in academic challenge.” See Appendix A. In addition to standard high school courses, each academy provides specialized courses designed to help students to gain an understanding of the connections between their educational experiences and the workplace and to prepare them for successful careers. See, for example, the description and course sequence for the Academy of Law and Public Safety at Appendix B.

At the suggestion of the department, the Academies@Englewood program has moved information about its offerings to the Englewood Public Schools web site from the Bergen Technical Schools web where it was previously located. Also, at the suggestion of Dwight Morrow High School parents and students and the urging of the department, the Englewood School District has changed the Dwight Morrow High School schedule from a semester to a trimester academic year to conform to the calendar of the Academies@Englewood program.

Department staff visited the Englewood School District in January 2004, and toured the newly refurbished science laboratory, computer laboratories and career laboratory for the use of Dwight Morrow High School students. Parents and students had previously voiced concern over the disparity between the facilities that had been provided for the Academies students and those provided for students at Dwight Morrow High School. Voters in the district passed a referendum that will allow for the timely renovation of all facilities.

VI: ONGOING CONCERNS

Primary among the concerns of the department continues to be the slow progress of the Academies@Englewood program toward effecting positive changes in the long-standing segregation at Dwight Morrow High School specifically, and in the district in general. The current district administration continues to articulate a goal to integrate the Academies and Dwight Morrow High School eventually so that all Englewood resident students will participate in the Academies program. The administration must continue to come to terms with the relevant requirements of the school choice program. Currently admission to the Academies program for both resident and out-of-district students is by entrance examination. In order to admit all resident students to the Academies program, the district obviously will have to drop the entrance examination for resident students. The current school choice rules specify that a choice district may not impose on out-of-district applicants any criteria that are not also imposed on the district's resident students. This issue needs to be addressed now as part of the long range planning process for the district. See section VII: Summary below.

The district, having chosen to align the Academies@Englewood and the Dwight Morrow High School schedules so that both are operating on a trimester academic calendar, must now revise the schedule Academies@Englewood and Dwight Morrow High School so that all class periods and the school day at the Academies @ Englewood and Dwight Morrow High School begin and end at the same/similar times. The district must also implement a revised schedule for most, if not *all*, elective courses in the same block(s) of time during, and not after the end of, the school day, so as to enable all students to participate in these classes.

The district must open most, if not all, elective courses to all students at the Academies@Englewood and Dwight Morrow High School, except where there is an accepted academic prerequisite for an elective course (*e.g.*, sequential foreign language courses). It is unnecessary, for example, to require a student to maintain an 85 average in order to enroll in a weight training course. Further, the district must recognize that creating an opportunity for both Academies and Dwight Morrow teachers to teach electives does not contribute to what the district has described as “the overarching goal of a heterogeneous student population.” The *students* must participate in classes together regardless of the regular assignment of the teachers of those classes.

The district must reconsider the credits offered for elective courses. Students, for example, who are enrolled in a five-day per week art elective surely should be entitled to more than one credit for this course. While the district has informed the department that it will reevaluate the graduation requirements for Dwight Morrow High School students and their corresponding credit value, no time table as been provided. This evaluation and the new graduation requirements and credit values should be put into place for the next freshman class.

The district must develop and implement a plan that will allow it to admit to the Academies program any Englewood resident student who may fall “slightly short” of the requirements for admission to the Academies program. Whether this consists of a summer program before the students enter the ninth grade and/or additional support during the students’ first semester or first year of the Academies program, such a plan will address the concern expressed in a report from the district that until the Academy Prep middle school program “is able to provide us with the numbers needed to equalize the distribution of students from Englewood and out-of-district, we may in fact, be forced to take a higher number of out-of-district students.”

The district administration must aggressively implement measures that will negate thinking of the Academies@ Englewood and Dwight Morrow High School as two separate entities. This is brought to mind by the description, in a report submitted to the department, of the juniors and seniors at Dwight Morrow High School as a “special interest group.” References such as this have helped to foster a fundamental barrier to the integration of students at the Academies and Dwight Morrow High School. Integration must go beyond allowing Dwight Morrow High School students to participate in activities such as clubs, trips, assemblies and pep rallies, with Academies students. This approach in and of itself identifies the Academies students as “haves” and the Dwight Morrow students as “have-nots.” This perception is legitimate.

The department is currently collecting data regarding the joint participation during the current school year of Dwight Morrow High School students and Academies@Englewood students in courses and activities offered by each of these educational entities. This information will be available in the next report to the State Board of Education.

VII. SUMMARY

While progress continues to be made in the district, the summary to this report is only slightly better from that of the department’s previous reports in October of 2003, and September of 2004. The department is sensitive to the unanticipated leadership transition that the district has undergone in the past several months, and is prepared to work with the new administration to accomplish the goals established by the district and supported by the department.

While the implementation of the Academies@Englewood as an Interdistrict Public School Choice Program offering has attracted out-of-district students and resulted in an ethnically balanced student body within the Academies program, these gains in integration do not extend to the district as a whole or even to the entire student body of Dwight Morrow High School. In addition, while in the past both the district as a whole and Dwight Morrow as a whole suffered from serious racial imbalance in the student population, there now appears to have developed a pattern of segregation within Dwight Morrow which may lead to even more serious problems than those that existed before the implementation of the Academies program. Action plans to address this problem must be developed and implemented as soon as possible.

Although we never anticipated that the solution to the decades long segregation problem in the Englewood public schools would prove to be a simple one, we remain optimistic that the Academies@Englewood program, with further modifications, will create a solution to the district's long-standing problems; however the solution is creating changes in issues with regard to patterns of segregation in Dwight Morrow which are absolutely new. To address this, the department's next step is to work more assertively with the district to extend first to all the resident students enrolled in Dwight Morrow High School, and then to the resident students in the district's middle and elementary schools, the desegregation benefits accrued to the district's resident students participating in the Academies@Englewood program.

An over-arching approach might be to open the Academies program to all resident students of the Englewood school district as early the fall of 2005 or as late as the fall of 2006. This might require the implementation of additional Academies at Dwight Morrow High School and would require a legislative override of the requirement in the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program that a choice district cannot require more of out-of-district students than it requires of in-district students for admission to a school choice program. Under this hypothetical scenario, once it has been established that all Dwight Morrow High School students may elect an Academies program, it would become necessary to revise the district's middle school program even more aggressively in order to properly prepare middle school students for participation in an Academies program upon enrollment in Dwight Morrow High School. A revised middle school program could be opened to out-of-district students through the school choice program and would attract parents who want better preparation for high school (whether Dwight Morrow or another high school) for their children. Admission of a child to the Englewood middle school via the school choice program would provide automatic entree to the Academies program since school choice program students would be entitled to remain at Englewood, as choice students, until graduation from high school.

Ultimately, such a program must take form down in the middle school and have roots that extend into the elementary schools.

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The Department of Education will continue to work closely with the Englewood Public School District to explore this and other potential plans for continuing to address the segregation issues remaining in the district. We have made progress through the implementation of the Academies@Englewood program. However, our commitment to provide better educational opportunities for *all* of Englewood's resident students requires that we continue to develop and implement additional innovative programs to address the long-standing problems of this district.

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Attachments

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