Summary

Creator: Edwards, Babette

Title: Babette Edwards Education Reform in Harlem collection

Date: 1964-2006 [bulk 1966-1977]

Size: 16.2 linear feet (40 boxes)

Source: Donated by Babette Edwards, 2008

Abstract: Dr. E. Babette Edwards is a parent leader and advocate for school reform in New York City. The Babette Edwards Education Reform in Harlem collection dates from 1964 to 2006 (bulk 1966-1977), and consists of files documenting her work with the Harlem Parents Union and as a member of the Governing Board of the Arthur A. Schomburg Intermediate School 201 Complex. The collection includes fact sheets, grant applications, meeting minutes, memoranda, organizing files, pamphlets, position papers, professional correspondence, and research regarding education policy and racial politics in New York City.

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Processing note: Compiled by Heather Lember, 2015
Related Materials:
Preston Wilcox papers, 1940-2005. SC MG 235, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division.
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

Creator History

Dr. E. Babette Edwards began her career as a parent leader and advocate for school reform in New York City in the 1950s. Born and raised in Harlem, she remained in the neighborhood working to improve the education system and to raise awareness about educational issues, specifically those affecting African-American and Latino students.

In 1958, Edwards became involved with the negotiating committee to establish a new public school in Harlem, the Arthur A. Schomburg Intermediate School 201 Complex (I.S. 201), whose purpose was to alleviate overcrowding conditions in the neighborhood. The new school was conceived with the intention of having an integrated student body, and to offer a higher quality of education than the existing neighborhood schools. However, the Board of Education was unable to recruit white students to attend the school, and although it was slated to open in 1965, the school remained closed amid protests from parents.

In December 1966, Edwards participated in an occupation of a New York City Board of Education hearing in Brooklyn, in what was known as the People's Board of Education. At the hearing, members of the community were symbolically elected and took the seats of current Board of Education members, remaining in the hearing room for three days until they were arrested. The sit-in was an action to raise awareness about demands for decentralization of neighborhood public schools, and to promote a greater level of participation in educational matters by parents and community groups.

In 1967, Edwards served as co-chairperson on the East Harlem Task Force for Quality Education, which advocated for I.S. 201's independence from Board of Education management, and petitioned for an elected governing board of parents and community members to be put in place to run the school. In April of 1967, the school was opened to students when an agreement was reached with the Board of Education for I.S. 201 to be operated by a community-elected governing board that included parents, teachers, and community representatives. In the fall of 1967, Governing Board elections were held, and Edwards was elected as a community representative.

In September of 1968, I.S 201 received funding from the state of New York as one of three Community Education Centers known as "Demonstration Districts," whose purpose was to demonstrate how community control of a school district can improve the school. However, in 1970, Edwards and the Governing Board of I.S. 201 called for a boycott of the community board elections in response to the Decentralization Law of 1969. The new law placed control of the school's budget, staff hiring, textbook selection, curriculum, and construction under the jurisdiction of the New York City Board of Education, and created much larger school districts. In 1971, Edwards resigned from the Governing Board, and soon after the Board of Education voted to eliminate the demonstration districts.

Edwards went on to co-found and work as executive director of The Harlem Parents Union (HPU) in 1969. HPU's mission was to improve schools in Harlem and the education its students received. HPU performed advocacy services such as escorting parents to student suspension hearings, assisting students at the hearings, aiding students in gaining admissions to selective enrollment schools, meeting with school administrators, educating parent groups in school selection, communicating with local community school boards, and participating in citizen-led efforts to improve the public school system.
In 1974, Edwards and the HPU organized a New York City public schools boycott to protest conditions at neighborhood schools. The parents of eleven students withdrew their children from school and demanded that the Board of Education reallocate funds that would have been spent on public schooling to the families to spend on a higher quality education of their choosing. Edwards operated an alternative school from HPU's Harlem community center, which offered education to students participating in the boycott and to those dissatisfied with New York City's public school education.

Edwards was a strong proponent of implementing a voucher system for students enrolled in underfunded public schools. As chairperson of the Harlem based organization, Citizens Committee for Effective Education, she argued that vouchers would give the students at failing schools the same opportunities as those from more affluent backgrounds. In 1975, she presented her argument to the New York State Board of Regents at the Regents Legislative Conference in a statement entitled, “Education Vouchers for Blacks and Hispanics." In 1976, as a member of the National Board of Trustees with Citizens for Educational Freedom, Edwards spoke in support of education vouchers to members of the Democratic Platform Committee of the Democratic Party.

In 1993, Edwards and the HPU participated in an ACLU/NYCLU-authored amicus curiae in the case of Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc. (CFE) v. State of New York. The case brought by the CFE contended that state funding for education in New York City was inadequate, unequal, and resulted in inferior education for students attending New York City public schools. The litigation asserted that these inequities were in violation of anti-discrimination provisions of the New York State Constitution, and Title VI of the federal Civil Rights Statutes.

In 2000, Edwards helped found the Harlem Education Roundtable, where she served as both chairperson and Board president. In 2002, the organization proposed building a public charter school in central Harlem called The Harlem Roundtable Academy for Excellence in Education. They also hosted workshops for parents and public school students about education policy.

**Scope and Content Note**

The collection consists of materials documenting Babette Edwards' work as a member of the Governing Board of the Arthur A. Schomburg Intermediate School 201 Complex, executive director of the Harlem Parents Union, as an advocate for education reform, and her extensive research on education practices and policy. The collection recounts Edwards' decades of organizing to improve the education available to New York City youth. It is particularly strong in documenting the history and controversy surrounding the I.S. 201 Complex, and the political climate in Harlem in the 1960s and 1970s, specifically regarding racial inequities in public schools, and the community's collective efforts to organize around this issue. The narratives for the various organizations of which Edwards was involved and causes she fought for are revealed in her files and research. The collection chronicles education reform efforts within the context of the civil rights and black power movements, and reveals the ways in which reform strategies evolved over time.

Files are arranged alphabetically by subject or name, and Edwards' file names were preserved.

**Key Terms**

**Subjects**

African American children -- Education
Black power
Civil rights
Community and school
Education -- Parent participation
Education, Urban
Educational vouchers
School boards -- New York (N.Y.)
School integration
Schools -- Decentralization

**Occupations**
Community activists -- New York (N.Y.)
Executors and administrators -- New York (N.Y.)
Students -- New York (N.Y.)
Teachers -- New York (N.Y.)

**Genre/Physical Characteristic**
Correspondence
Memorandums
Minutes (Records)
Newsletters
Pamphlets
Research

**Geographic Names**
Harlem -- (New York, N.Y.)

**Names**
Wilcox, Preston, 1923-2006
Intermediate School 201 (New York, N.Y.)
Container List

Series I: Arthur A. Schomburg Intermediate School 201 Complex 1964-1971 (12 Boxes)

This series is comprised of correspondence, meeting minutes, memorandum, press releases, position papers, and publications regarding the planning, negotiations, and conflicts surrounding the I.S. 201 Complex in Harlem. The materials illustrate Edwards’ role in negotiations, protests, and as a member of the Governing Board. The files in this series chronicle the history of the I.S. 201 Complex, school desegregation efforts, and the rise of the community control movement.

Also included is Kweli, the bilingual community newsletter published by the I.S. 201 Complex, which chronicles activities at the school, and the work of the Governing Board. The November 1969 issue includes a photograph of Edwards.

There are also a number of proposals written for the Urban Education Project Implementation Grant, which details the curriculum and educational goals of the I.S. 201 Complex.

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Contains Babette Edwards letter of resignation from the I.S. 201 Governing Board.
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Materials from the Arthur A. Schomburg Chapter of the Harlem Parents Union.
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origsr.226380  I.S. 201 Amendment to the By-laws 1970
             sound recording (unavailable)
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Series II: Harlem Parents Union 1966-2006 (11 Boxes)

This series contains correspondence, grant applications, meeting minutes, organizational documents, planning documents, and proposals describing the work of the Harlem Parents Union (HPU), Edwards' role as executive director, and subsequent projects the organization managed. Included is documentation of the Harlem Parents School Community Neighborhood Center; Harlem Tutorial and Referral Project & Parent Information Center; and Harlem Tutorial and Referral Project Parent Involvement, Training and Advocacy Center.

The files in this series illustrate the day to day operations required to sustain a non-profit organization, and the services offered over the years. There are a number of grant applications and project proposals which provide insight into the various educational projects the Harlem Parents Union undertook and the sources of much of their funding.

Of note is a 1977 interview with Edwards in which she discusses her work with HPU and her early organizing efforts with the I.S. 201 Governing Board.

Also included in this series is information pertaining to the public school boycott of 1976.

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origvid.226441  video (unavailable)
origvid.226413  Harlem Parents Union Workshop 1972
origvid.226429  video (unavailable)
origvid.226424  Harlem Parents Union Workshop - Lillian Roberts, District Council 37 1972
origvid.226422  video (unavailable)
origvid.226407  HPU Frances Fox River 1972
origvid.226410  sound recording (unavailable)
origvid.226410  HPU Workshop 1972
origvid.226410  video (unavailable)
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origvid.226425  HPU Workshop  1972
video (unavailable)

origvid.226414  HPU Workshop - Edith Gaines - Modern Efforts Towards Change  1972
video (unavailable)

origsr.226409  HPU Workshop - Frances Fox River  1972
sound recording (unavailable)

origvid.226420  HPU Workshop - Kenneth Haskins  1972
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origvid.226418  HPU Workshop - Lillian Roberts, District Council 37, John O'Neil  1972
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b. 23 f. 6  Response Sheets

b. 23 f. 7  Summer 1974

b. 23 f. 8  Youth Development Initiative 1995-1996

Series III: Other Educational Advocacy 1965-2006 (4 Boxes)

This series includes correspondence, planning documents, and position papers of various organizations of which Edwards was involved. Organizations represented in this series (with Edwards' role in parenthesis) include, Citizens Committee for Effective Education (chairperson); Citizens for Educational Freedom (board of trustees member); Confederation for Action on Integrated Quality Education (officer at large); East Harlem Coalition for Community Control (coordinator); East Harlem Task Force for Quality Education (co-chairperson); East Harlem Union for Equal Achievement in Schools; Harlem Community Neighborhood Based Alliance (co-chairperson); Harlem Education Roundtable (board president and chairperson); Harlem Parents Committee; Harlem Parents Committee Community Referral Center (coordinator); and Massive Economic Neighborhood Development Inc. (educational director).

Of special interest is Edwards' 1975 address on behalf of Citizens Committee for Effective Education to the New York State Board of Regents. In the address, "Education Vouchers for Blacks and Hispanics," Edwards states her argument in favor of education vouchers.

Also of note is a file on the People's Board of Education, which includes the group's proposal for a community school district, and meeting minutes from their December 1966 action at the New York City Board of Education meeting in Brooklyn.
Guide to the
Babette Edwards Education Reform in Harlem collection

Series III: Other Educational Advocacy (cont.)
Citizens' Committee for Effective Education (cont.)
b. 24 f. 5 Positions and Press Releases 1974-1975
b. 24 f. 6 Voucher Petitions
b. 24 f. 7 Citizens for Educational Freedom 1976-1977
b. 24 f. 8 City-Wide Coalition for Community Control 1968
b. 24 f. 9 Committee of Community Schools 1972
b. 24 f. 10 Community Board 5
b. 24 f. 11 Community Board 10 1991-1994
b. 24 f. 12 Confederation for Action on Integrated Quality Education
b. 24 f. 13 Conferences and Speaking Engagements 1966-1972
b. 24 f. 14 Council of Parent Association Presidents in Community School District Five
b. 24 f. 15 1975 Delta Sigma Theta Scholarship Committee 1984
b. 24 f. 16 East Harlem Coalition for Community Control of Schools 1968-1969
b. 24 f. 17 East Harlem Community Corporation 1968
b. 24 f. 18 East Harlem Federation Youth Association 1967
b. 24 f. 19 East Harlem People's Local School Board
b. 24 f. 20 East Harlem School District 1969
b. 24 f. 21 East Harlem Task Force for Quality Education 1967
b. 24 f. 22 Empowerment Zone
b. 25 f. 1 Harlem and South Bronx Appendices
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b. 25 f. 8 Harlem Education Roundtable
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b. 26 f. 6 Community School Referral Center 1969-1972
b. 26 f. 7 Index of File Folders 1970-1971
b. 26 f. 8 Questionnaires
b. 26 f. 9 Umbrella Programs and Coordinators 1972-1974
Series III: Other Educational Advocacy (cont.)
Harlem Parents Committee (cont.)

b. 26 f. 10 Views 1965
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b. 26 f. 12 Harlem Youth Consortium 1979-1981
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b. 26 f. 14 Location Education Committee (215 West 125th Street)

b. 26 f. 15 Legal Aid Society 1984
b. 26 f. 16 Malcolm-King College Extension 1970-1976

b. 27 f. 1 MEND (Massive Economic Neighborhood Development) 1966-1971
b. 27 f. 2 National Policy Conference on Education for Blacks 1972
b. 27 f. 3 National Urban Coalition - Urban Education Task Force
b. 27 f. 4 P.A.C.E.--Title III (Projects to Advance Creativity in Education) 1969
b. 27 f. 5 People Against Racism in Education 1972-1977
b. 27 f. 6 People's Board of Education 1967
b. 27 f. 7 Study Commission on Undergraduate Education and the Education of Teachers 1973

b. 27 f. 8 Task Force on Supplementary Education 2003
b. 27 f. 9 Union for Equal Achievement in Schools
b. 27 f. 10 Union of Concerned Parents 1968
b. 27 f. 11 United Federation of Black Community Organizations (UFBCO) 1969-1970
b. 27 f. 12 Urban Education Task Force (Meeting) Etc 1975
b. 27 f. 13 Workshops 1970

Series IV: Educational Research and Resources 1965-1993 (12 Boxes)

Series IV is comprised of Board of Education information, essays, government reports, newsletters, pamphlets, position papers, and school statistics that Edwards collected and filed to support her education advocacy work. The materials are primarily filed by subject or organization name, and present a broad scope of education reform movements, government legislation, racial justice, social justice, and civil rights. The series is strong in Edwards' research on education vouchers and New York City education policies. It also includes extensive information on other groups and organizations that were involved in education and social justice reform, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s.

Of note are a number of writings by Preston Wilcox, a Columbia University professor often cited as "the father of decentralization." The essays cover topics such as, community control, decentralization, I.S. 201, and the People's Board of Education. Also of interest are files for Two Bridges School District and Ocean Hill-Brownsville, which were the other two schools that received state funding, along with I.S. 201, as "demonstration districts."

b. 28 f. 1 Afram 1974
b. 28 f. 2 AFT: Changing Education 1969
b. 28 f. 3 Alliance for Children 1975
b. 28 f. 4 Alternative Education 1973-1974
b. 28 f. 5 American Documentary Films, Inc
b. 28 f. 6 American Sociological Association (Minority Fellowship Program) 1976
b. 28 f. 7 Audio-Visuals (Multi-Media)

b. 28 f. 8 Bank Street College (Day Care etc 1967-1969
b. 40 Banner--"Uhuru, Uniadt, Unity."
Guide to the
Babette Edwards Education Reform in Harlem collection

Series IV: Educational Research and Resources (cont.)

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b. 28 f. 15 Board of Regents Sub-Committee for Low-Performing Schools 1994
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b. 28 f. 18 Center for Community Education (H.M.L.I.) 1971
b. 28 f. 19 Center for Educational Reform - Washington, DC 1969
b. 28 f. 20 Center for Urban Education 1966-1967
b. 28 f. 21 Central Harlem Association of Montessori Parents (CHAMP) 1969
b. 28 f. 22 Chambers Memorial Church 1970
b. 28 f. 23 Charter Schools 1998
b. 28 f. 24 CHECK (Central Harlem Educational Cultural Key)

b. 28 f. 25 Child Care - Referral Services and Information 1974
b. 28 f. 26 Children with Retarded Mental Development 1975
b. 28 f. 27 Churches 1967
b. 28 f. 28 CIBI (Council of Independent Black Institutions)

b. 29 f. 1 Citizens Committee for Children of New York (CCC) 1967-1968
b. 29 f. 2 Citizens Committee for the Public Schools, Inc. (New York State) 1967
b. 29 f. 3 Citizens for a Better Society (CBS) 1965
b. 29 f. 4 City Schools Curriculum Service, Inc
b. 29 f. 5 Coalition for Accountable School Decentralization 1992
b. 29 f. 6 College Guidance 1974
b. 29 f. 7 Columbia University School of Social Work etc 1967-1968
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b. 30 f. 11  Drop Outs 1974-1976
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b. 30 f. 13  Early Childhood (Child Development-Pre School-2) 1970
b. 30 f. 14  East Harlem Block Schools
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b. 31 f. 11  Foundations (Grants, Funding)

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b. 31 f. 14  Gittell, Marilyn--"School Reform in New York and Chicago" 1992
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b. 31 f. 21 Harlem Neighborhood Association, Inc. (HANA) 1966
b. 31 f. 22 Harlem School System (HSS) 1967
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b. 31 f. 25 Health Education and Welfare Department of Washington, DC (HEW) 1967-1970

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b. 33 f. 7 Morgan Community School 1968
b. 33 f. 8 Muslims (Islam)

b. 33 f. 8 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) 1965-1970
b. 33 f. 9 National Association for Black Child Development Inc. (Washington, DC) 1971
Series IV: Educational Research and Resources (cont.)

b. 33 f. 10 National Association of Community Schools--Washington, DC 1969
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b. 33 f. 12 National Committee for Citizens in Education--Parents Network 1975
b. 33 f. 13 National Institute of Education 1974-1975
b. 33 f. 14 National Program for Educational Leadership
b. 33 f. 15 National Renaissance Party
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b. 33 f. 26 New York City Council Against Poverty 1967-1968
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b. 33 f. 29 New York University--Reading Institute (Continuing Education)

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b. 34 f. 3 O’Gorman, Ned--“The Education of the Oppressed Child in a Democracy” 1983
b. 34 f. 4 Operation Bootstrap 1967
   Includes the essay, “The ‘Educated’ and the ‘Unlettered,’” by Preston Wilcox.
b. 34 f. 5 Operation Breadbasket 1969
b. 34 f. 6 Operation Broad Jump (Trinity School) 1969
b. 34 f. 7 P.A. Presidents and Members 1973-1975
b. 34 f. 8 Parent Advisory Council 1974
b. 34 f. 9 Parent Associations 1967-1970
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b. 34 f. 12 Parent-teacher Associations (P.T.A.) 1975
b. 34 f. 13 Parents League of New York, Inc 1971
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b. 34 f. 17 Privacy 1974-1975
b. 34 f. 18 Private Schools 1968-1971
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b. 35 f. 11 Retardation (CRMD- Children with Retarded Development)

b. 35 f. 12 Rough Rock Demonstration School--(Navajo Reservation in Arizona) 1970
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b. 35 f. 18 School Evaluations 1975
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b. 35 f. 21 SEEK (College Discovery Program) 1969
b. 35 f. 22 Segregation 1965
b. 35 f. 23 Sensitivity (Awareness) 1966-1970
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b. 35 f. 25 Social Policy Publication 1970

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b. 36 f. 2 Solicitations (For Funds, Clothing, Toys etc.)

b. 36 f. 3 Solidarity 1970

b. 36 f. 4 Soul City (Floyd N. Mc Kissick Enterprises, Inc.)

b. 36 f. 5 Special Education 1974
b. 36 f. 6 State Charter Revision Commission 1975
b. 36 f. 7 State Education Department, New York--News 1975
b. 36 f. 8 State Office Building --125th Street

b. 36 f. 9 St. Mary's Community Service 1969
b. 36 f. 10 Steering Committee for a National Follow Through Parent Advisory Council 1972

b. 36 f. 11 Stein, Annie--"When is a School Not a School" 1975

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b. 38 f. 7  WIN (Periodical) 1975
b. 38 f. 8  WNEW--Save Our Schools 1977
b. 38 f. 9  Women's Talent Corps 1966
b. 38 f. 10 Zoning 1974

Series V: Academic Writing 1969-1976 (1 Box)

This series includes materials written by or about Edwards which relate to her graduate school education. Of note is Edwards' dissertation from Union Graduate School entitled, *A Review and Analysis of Three Educational Strategies for Positive Change in the Public School System of the City of New York*. The dissertation recounts the history and controversy surrounding the I.S. 201 Complex and school reform in Harlem, and addresses the case for education vouchers.

Also included are papers Edwards wrote as a graduate student, letters recommending her for admission to graduate school, and a few different versions of her resume.

b. 39 f. 1  Academic Papers 1975
b. 39 f. 2  Dissertation - Union Graduate School 1977
b. 39 f. 3  Letters of Recommendation 1969-1975
b. 39 f. 4  Resume
b. 39 f. 5  Writings, Interview, and Speaking Engagements 1967-1976