

H- (do an oral history?)

MAY 31 1977

301 E. 21 Street 10010  
New York, New York 10001  
May 25, 1977

Prof. Joshua Lederberg  
Department of Genetics  
Stanford University  
Stanford, California 94305

Dear Prof. Lederberg:

Mr. Gaspar Fabbriante has turned over to me the correspondence between you and him and has asked me to give you whatever information I can gather relative to the History of Education for the Intellectually Gifted.

The xeroxed material that I am enclosing has been copied from the first Indicator (1905). Both the summary of the address by Prof. Ballet and the article "Aims of the Stuyvesant High School" clearly indicate the thinking that led to the establishment of Stuyvesant High School. As you can see from this material, Stuyvesant High School was not intended to be a school for the intellectually gifted. The course of study offered at the school was known as a SEMI-TECHNICAL course. The requirements for graduation were such that students satisfied the requirements for entrance into any college and acquired fairly intensive training in Mechanic Arts - training that made it possible for non-college bound students to enter industry with a considerable amount and variety of technical skills. There was no entrance examination. Any elementary school graduate who wanted this type of course of study was admitted. This course of study evidently proved popular, judging by the fact that it did not take very long before the school went on double sessions - 8:00-12:35 and 12:40-5:20 (6 periods for each session).

The original course of study, the original requirements for graduation and the double session were in effect when I arrived at the school February, 1925 as a teacher of mathematics. The school continued on the same course for a number of years thereafter.

The 1930's were years of significant changes for the school - the most important being the changeover from a semi-technical high school open to all, to that of a Science High School with admission through an entrance examination. This happened shortly after Mr. Sinclair Wilson became

(Continued)

Principal in 1934 upon the retirement of Dr. von Nardroff. With this change, Stuyvesant became a school for the gifted. Other changes that come to mind really had their beginnings earlier, were gradual in growth but made themselves felt significantly in the 1930's. I am referring to:

1. The growth of the Junior High School movement. This had the effect of practically changing Stuyvesant High School from a four year school to a three year school (The 9th year group was very small. It came mainly from the private and parochial schools).
2. The growth of the college-bound group. The growth was gradual and nation-wide. At Stuyvesant - now a school for the gifted - the growth was more rapid.
3. The closing of many of our shops. There were several trends that moved the school in this direction.
  - (a) A three year school did not need as many shops as a four year school. (The Mech. Arts requirements were decreased.)
  - (b) A college-bound student body benefited more from more courses in the academic field rather than mechanic arts.
  - (c) As skilled special shop teachers retired, there were no replacements available and several shops were closed (forge, foundry, black-smithing, ship design, etc.).

All of the above changes tended to lessen the emphasis on mechanic arts and increase the number of electives in other areas. This was the situation during your years at the school.

Mr. Sinclair J. Wilson died in 1943 and Mr. J. P. Clark was designated as Acting Principal. Soon thereafter Mr. Fred Schoenberg who held an administrative post at the Board of Education confided in me that he would be the Principal of Stuyvesant High School as soon as the formalities were completed. He was eager to change Stuyvesant High School into a single session school. A quick change considered was to move Stuyvesant High School into a larger underutilized school. We visited several such schools but found none suitable. When Mr. Schoenberg came to Stuyvesant High School in 1944, he tried to persuade the Board of Education to construct a new building for the school. There was no money for it. (This should sound familiar). The only way out was to renovate the old building (an adequate cafeteria was a must for a single session school). Plans for renovation were completed in 1953.

(Continued)

Fortunately for Mr. Schoenberg, he was spared the mess of renovation since in 1953 he was called back to the Board of Education as Assistant Superintendent. The renovation began soon thereafter while I was Acting Principal and was completed in January, 1957 under Dr. L. J. Fliedner as Principal. In February, 1957, Stuyvesant was placed on a single session.

With Stuyvesant High School on a single session students had a longer day - 7, 8, and occasionally 9 periods of work. We were therefore able to increase requirements for graduation - especially in Mathematics, Science and the Humanities - and to offer a great many electives. With changes that have taken place in the past 15 years the number and nature of our electives have changed. The sheets marked Exhibits B and C will give you an idea of our current offerings.

One more important change! To quote one of Mr. Fabbriante's remarks at the May 5 Alumni Dinner: "In your years at Stuyvesant you didn't see students kissing each other on parting at the end of the school day!" It is quite a common practice now. We are co-educational (about 1800 boys-800 girls).

I have just reread your letters to Mr. Fabbriante and wish to address myself to several questions that you raise. From your letter of 3/24/77 - "But I have been trying to find some documentation on the policy background by which Stuyvesant High School was first established as a way of meeting the needs of academically qualified and scientifically interested students in New York City". The material from the 1905 Indicator (Exhibit A) addresses itself to this question. As for "sources that could describe how this purpose was assessed and evaluated through the years . . ." I must admit that aside from several studies that we've made at the school to determine the correlation between scores on the entrance examination and achievement at the school, we have no documentation. However, the feed-back that we get from the colleges regarding the fine performance of our graduates, the host of successful engineers, doctors, research scientists, educators, lawyers, judges, industrialists, etc. among our alumni attest to the success of our school. In this connection I should also like to cite the report by the National Academy of Sciences that shows that of all Ph. D. degrees awarded between 1957 and 1962, Stuyvesant High School ranked first.

As for "policy struggles that undoubtedly surrounded these contentions" - yes, we had many of them. The specialized high schools (Stuyvesant High School, Bronx High School of Science, Brooklyn Technical High School, Music and Art) have very few friends among the Principals of other high schools. Their grievance is that "we are skimming off the top of the cream". We have few friends among "ethnic" groups. Not enough blacks and Puerto Ricans do well enough on our entrance examinations. Some of these groups

(Continued)

Prof. Lederberg

-4-

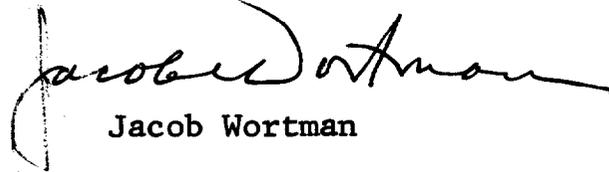
5/25/77

conclude that the examination is biased in favor of whites. These attacks and others (including from the "powers that be" at the Board of Education) led to the formation of The Council for the Specialized Public High Schools, an organization composed of representatives of alumni, parents and faculty of the Specialized High Schools. The Council has been very active and thus far successful in protecting the interests of the special schools. It even succeeded in having a state law passed mandating the existence and the maintenance of these schools.

In your letter of 3/31/77 you seek documentation for Mr. Fabbriante's statement that "Stuyvesant High School has been rated first in the high schools of the nation". Again, such documentation does not exist. I'm sure that there are other schools that lay claim to the distinction of being "first". I am sure that there is no way of determining which school is Numero Uno. Let us ascribe Mr. Fabbriante's statement to his justified pride in the school and to another factor. For many years the three New York City science high schools were ranked (1) Bronx High School Of Science (2) Stuyvesant High School (3) Brooklyn Technical High School mainly because the cut-off point on the entrance test was highest for Bronx High School of Science (the same test was administered in the three high schools). For the past several years, the cut-off point for Stuyvesant High School has been the highest. Hence, the rearrangement (1) Stuyvesant High School, (2) Bronx High School of Science (3) Brooklyn Technical High School seems warranted. Add to the above the facts that of all graduating classes in the State, Stuyvesant had the greatest percentage of State Scholarship winners and that in the U. S. A. Mathematical Olympiad Stuyvesant High School had four winners out of a total of 24 nationwide, you might agree that Stuyvesant High School is quite close to being "first in the nation".

I trust that the information I have given you will prove useful for your purposes. If I can be of any further help to you, please do not hesitate to communicate with me.

Sincerely,



Jacob Wortman

GW:EW  
ENC.