

The Educational Opportunity Program: An Historical Overview

Prepared By
Dr. Carol A. McMillan-Lonesome
NJEOFPA Historian

Some twenty-five years ago, the New Jersey Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) was created and with its inception, challenged the conscience of New Jersey and developed its humanity. EOF has allowed students with tremendous talent to break the cycle of poverty and improve New Jersey and America. It has created a vision of unparalleled in the nation and achieved phenomenal success in spite of numerous challenges.

Separate and Unequal - Sowing the Seeds of Unrest

To begin the history of EOF, one must trace the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement and its struggle for human and economic rights. The Civil Rights Movement of the fifties and sixties chronicled the despair of the African American community, the urban poor, who were disenchanting with the slow pace of progress. New Jersey was no exception. Racial turmoil erupted in African American communities and focused attention on their plight and the plight of those in the urban milieu.

In response to the tragic riots in Newark, then Governor Richard J. Hughes addressed the "urban crisis":

"...a State has to use force [to end riots] but I think it must busy itself more importantly...in trying to resolve basic problems - the conditions of the riots. The solution isn't going to be cheap. But I don't know of anyone who doubts that it must be reached."¹

"Blacks are oppressed by circumstances. There exists behind them 100 years of discrimination and cruelty to them, in spite of the efforts of many sincere men to eradicate the cruelty and to bring a day when oppression will no longer be with us. But it still exists. We have underemployment of [B]lacks. A much larger percentage of [B]lacks able to work are unemployed than the percentage of [W]hite people."²

There existed a "commitment to change" on part of State and community leaders. There was also a genuine belief that the broadening gap in equity could be bridged by improving the conditions in urban areas. Energies were focused on ways to eliminate the causes of social upheaval, those deeply rooted in poverty.

A Moral Dilemma - A Bold New Initiative

Governor Hughes led the first major response of any state to President Lyndon B. Johnson's National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders and his own Select Commission on Civil Disorders, the Lilly Commission. Soon after "The Lilly Commission Report" in February 1968, the Governor issued a call to the State to undertake a major urban program, inclusive of education initiatives.³ On April 25, 1968, he delivered what was called the "Moral Recommitment" message to the New Jersey State Legislature. "This message contained a broad range of programs designed to change or ameliorate some of the basic social causes which The Lilly Commission cited as contributing to the Newark riots."⁴ Included in Governor Hughes' message was the creation of a program entitled the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF).

EOF would expand New Jersey State Scholarship Programs to provide scholarship assistance to talented, but educationally deprived students through a coordinated Statewide effort, utilizing existing Upward Bound Programs, teachers, clergy, and other

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community-based individual or groups. Students would be accepted as regular students and be required to attend a summer program prior to freshmen year. Supportive services would be provided including special classes, tutorial assistance, reduced course load, extra class sessions in regular courses, and extensive counseling services. Colleges and Universities would provide the support and enthusiasm for EOF to be a success and assume responsibility for providing access to EOF students.⁵

In Mid-May of 1968, Assemblyman Thomas. H. Kean, as primary sponsor, introduced legislation to enact the New Jersey Educational Opportunity Fund. Other sponsors included Senator David Dowd and Assemblymen S. Howard Woodson, Robert N. Wilentz, Hugo M. Pfaltz, Jr., George C. Richardson, Ronald Owens, Ralph Caputo, C. Richard Fiore, Kenneth T. Wilson, John N. Dennis, Phillip D. Kalten Bacher, Addison N. McLeon and Richard J. Vander Plaats. In support of this key legislation, Ralph A. Dungan, Chancellor of Higher Education urged its passage.

On June 24, 1968, Bill A.767 - The Educational Opportunity Fund was passed by the legislature and appropriated \$2 million for direct student aid and support programs; and it was enacted into law on July 12, 1968 at a public signing. In recognition of Assemblyman Kean, whose tireless efforts secured the passage of EOF legislation, the act was dubbed "The Kean Act of 1968."

EOF set the pace for many initiatives which today are widely incorporated into college life. Significant among them are pre-college articulation, basic skills testing, instruction in developmental courses, systematic retention efforts, peer counseling, peer tutoring, academic support courses, multicultural curricula, human relations programming, student leadership development, and outcomes-based program evaluation.

EOF has also been a leader and a linchpin in the higher education system's effort to increase diversity. While participation is not limited to minority students, EOF sponsors more than one-third of the African-American and Latino students at the state college and New Jersey's independent institutions. Over one-quarter of the African-American and Latino students enrolled at New Jersey colleges and universities participate in the EOF program. EOF enrolls approximately 11% of the first-time, full-time New Jersey freshmen who enter the state's colleges and universities each fall.

Works Cited

¹ "The Lesson of New Jersey's Riots," *U.S. News & World Report*, (July 31, 1967), p. 33.

² *Id.* At 34

³ Urban Plan for New Jersey's, *The New York Times*, (April 26, 1968), p. 48.

⁴ "Interim Report of the Educational Opportunity Fund," New Jersey Department of Higher Education (June 13, 1969), iv.

⁵ Dungan, Ralph., "Letter to College Presidents," EOF Archives (November 10, 1967).