



NJDOE News

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Department of Education, Morris School District Celebrate 50 Years of *Brown v. Board* *Cheryl Brown Henderson Delivers Keynote Address, Commissioner Librera Says:* *"We've Made Great Progress, but We Still Have Much Work to Do"*

Citing a need to continue discussing the importance of diversity in our classrooms, the Department of Education (DOE) today hosted its final *Brown v. Board of Education* recognition event with help from the Morris School District and keynote speaker Cheryl Brown Henderson. The morning event, sponsored by the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, included a student panel discussion on the importance of diversity in the classroom and the insight of Brown Henderson, one of three daughters of the late Rev. Oliver L. Brown.

In the fall of 1951, Oliver Brown, alongside 12 other families and led by attorneys for the NAACP, filed suit on behalf of his daughter Linda and other black children against the local Board of Education. Their case made its way all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court and on May 17, 1954, became known as the landmark decision: *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*.

The Supreme Court unanimously ruled that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." The impact of the Supreme Court decision meant an end to segregation in Topeka, and over time, the nation.

"Although we've made significant progress," Commissioner of Education William L. Librera said, "we still have a long way to go in providing equal opportunity to every child, which is the spirit and intention of Brown and the New Jersey Abbott decision, as well as *No Child Left Behind*. All of us in the education community must concentrate on delivering the promise of Brown to all children who have an equal right to a thorough and efficient free public education."

Fifty years after Oliver Brown's courageous journey, the nation still struggles with segregation, but now it is the result of zoning, housing, and socio-economic patterns, the Commissioner said, rather than bigotry and racism. In 1954, nearly 80% of African-American students attended schools that were predominantly black, according to the U.S. Department of Education. By 1997, more than 70% of black students attended overwhelmingly minority schools.

By celebrating the *Brown v. Board* decision over the last year, the Department of Education and others have tried to call much needed attention to the importance of creating diverse and multiple paths to success in the classroom — the mission of the Department and the New Jersey education community. It has been especially important to partner with various school districts throughout the state, including the Morris School District today.

"The Morris School District is honored to host this important event," said Superintendent Thomas Ficarra. "In many ways, the history of our District, which was formed as the result of a forced merger ordered by the New Jersey Supreme Court in order to avoid 'segregation in fact,' is a reflection of the national challenge to keep the promise of Brown."

About the Program

Sponsored in part by the Dodge Foundation, today's program included musical performances from Morristown High School students Seth Harrow, Alicia Motta, Ellen Quinn, Matthew Gray, Emily Eddey, Nicole Baker, Marquis Glover and Nyaisia Williams.

The morning program also featured a panel discussion with esteemed local historian John Cunningham; attorney Stephen Wiley, who represented the district in its own efforts to desegregate in 1972; and other esteemed educators and students.

About the DOE's Year-Long Call for Attention

Last May at the War Memorial in Trenton, Commissioner Librera joined a host of distinguished guests and elected

officials in leading a student panel discussion and addressing the lasting importance of the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision.

The two-hour commemoration was the first of two Department of Education (DOE) events scheduled to kick-off a year-long commemoration of the Brown decision's 50th anniversary. The second event, a statewide videoconference, was scheduled for this afternoon with schools participating from across the state.

"What we want to do this morning, this afternoon and for the entire year is not only celebrate this vital decision, but also study, discuss and learn from it so that we can continue not only the good work that has occurred in the last 50 years — but most importantly, continue this into the future," Commissioner Librera said at the time.

"What needs to be done involves all of us."

In addition to today's partnership with the Morris School District and the Dodge Foundation, the Department has recently co-sponsored events with JPMorgan Chase and NAACP Chairman Julian Bond in New Brunswick (May 13) and Prudential and Archbishop Desmond Tutu in Newark (March 15). All events focused on the need to end racial divides and embrace diversity.

"Education is of utmost importance because educated people will not accept being oppressed," Archbishop Tutu said in Newark in March. "When people have a good education, they will be creative and innovative."

About the Keynote Speaker

Cheryl Brown Henderson is currently serving as President and CEO of the Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research, which she founded in 1988. She is the owner of Brown & Brown Associates, an educational consulting firm and has an extensive background in education, business and civic leadership, having served on and chaired various local, state and national Boards.

In addition she has nearly two decades of experience in political advocacy, public policy implementation and federal legislative development. She is also an associate with the Westerly Group a public advocacy firm in Washington, D.C.

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