

**CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP:
TWO-YEAR PLAN ON INSTRUCTIONAL PRIORITIES
DIVISION OF ABBOTT IMPLEMENTATION
New Jersey Department of Education
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The Setting. New Jersey has embarked on an unprecedented effort to close the achievement gap between rich and poor, black and white, Latino and Anglo. The nation is watching as New Jersey becomes the first state to so substantially reverse the normal pattern of funding, so that the districts with the greatest concentrations of low-income students and the fewest fiscal resources receive enough state aid to make them the highest-spending districts. Second, New Jersey leads the nation in the percentage of low-income three and four year-old preschoolers who are enrolled in high-quality preschool programs.

The stakes for public schools are huge—if the gap does not close, then critics will argue that no amount of resources will make a difference and that public education is institutionally unable to educate poor children effectively.

New Jersey is attempting to do something on a scale no other state has tried. We can borrow here and there from Kentucky or Massachusetts, but in the main, we must develop our own solutions. The promising reform strategies that may have worked in other states may not work in New Jersey without major adaptation to the needs of our communities and schools.

This plan. Public education mandates a lot of plans from schools, districts, and departments. Most of the time, they are viewed as paperwork exercises quickly forgotten (“another plan on the shelf” is often heard). Plans work most effectively when they serve as dynamic, changeable, real roadmaps to fixed destinations. Our intent is that this plan fit the latter description.

This plan is an evolving document—it will be shared with those committed to closing the achievement gap in Abbott districts so as to seek recommendations which better reflect the needs of students, teachers, and other stakeholders as our work progresses. It will also be accessible on the Department of Education (DOE) Web site.

Two goals. Since January 2002, the work of the division has been driven by just two goals set by the New Jersey Supreme Court, and endorsed by the Legislature, taxpayers, parents, and educators: first, that Abbott students master the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS) as determined by state assessments; and, second, that this mastery be achieved in the most efficient manner possible.

Mastering the CCCS means that all students in the 31 Abbott districts graduate from high school prepared to handle the academics in a four-year university. The standards are the same whether a graduate pursues college, enters the labor force, or joins the military. Currently, only about half of Abbott students graduate and almost half of these graduates do not have the knowledge and skills required for success in postsecondary education or the workplace. Quick fixes will not

reverse these deep-seated problems, but that does not mean that Abbott students and teachers must be paralyzed by the chasm separating current results from the goal.

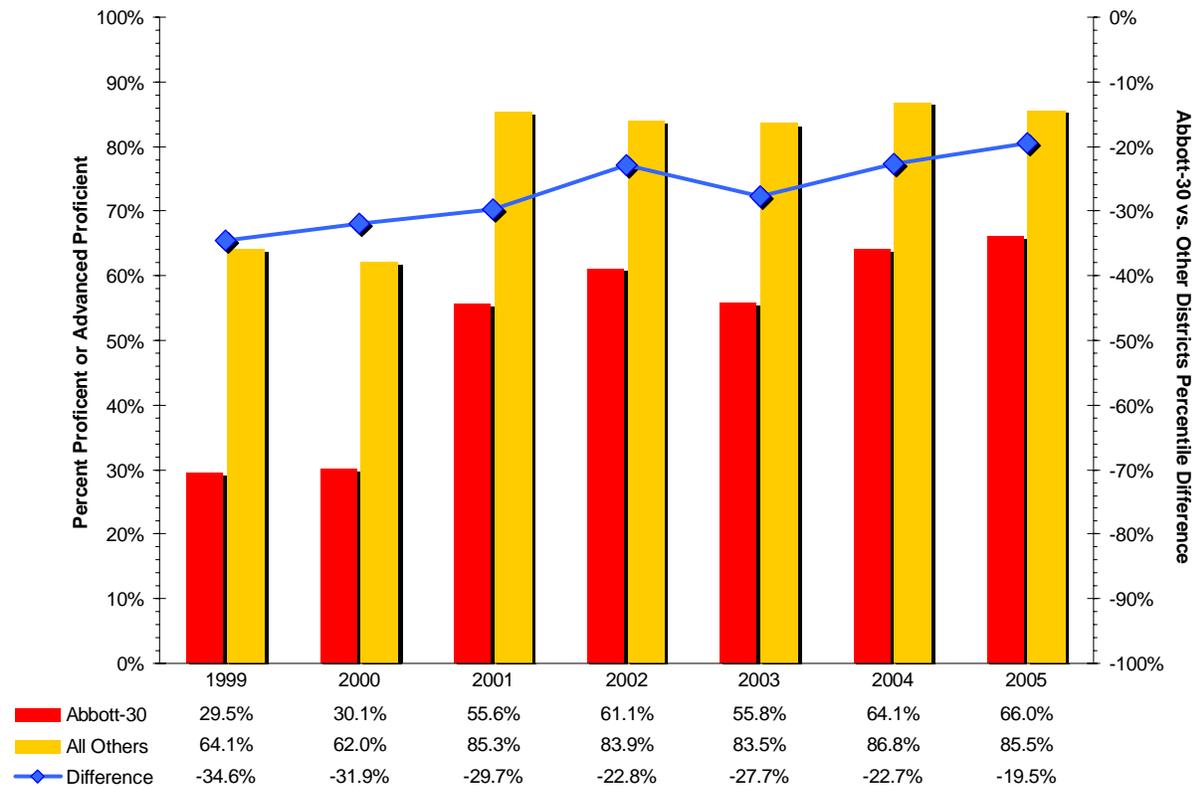


Figure 1: Percent Proficient or Advanced Proficient on the New Jersey Fourth Grade Assessment Language Arts Section for Total Students by District Type by Year (with Percentile Difference)

The first imperative is that 3rd and 4th graders in Abbott schools be strong readers and writers of the English language. A high-quality preschool education is a major contributor to the optimism that this goal can be realized. Students who are not reading at grade level by the end of third grade have a 1 in 8 chance of ever catching up to grade level without extraordinary and costly interventions. The CCCS increase the complexity and difficulty of the content to be mastered after 4th grade, so that weak readers are unlikely to ever catch up. In 1999, only 33 percent of unclassified Abbott 4th graders were proficient on the language arts test; this year that percentage swelled to 75, but when students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs) are included, one-third of 4th graders cannot read and write proficiently. Figure 1 compares the progress of all students by Abbott and non-Abbott districts over time, and shows the gap that remains, narrowed as it is.

The second imperative is that Abbott districts and schools adjust to the much more demanding academic standards initiated by the adoption of CCCS in 1996, particularly for middle grades students and particularly for mathematics. When Abbott V was decided in 1998, most non-Abbott districts were busy pouring through the recently-released standards to determine what changes had to be made in their curriculum. Abbott districts, on the other hand, were trying to implement one of the most sweeping educational judicial decisions in any state’s history.

Instead of wrangling with the new standards, most districts concentrated on how to decentralize decisions about curriculum and instruction to the school level, create new school councils, set up school-based budgets that they could not revise, and to ensure that each elementary school selected a national model of Whole School Reform. Little emphasis was given to standards-based instruction by the Department or the parties involved in Abbott. As a result, some Abbott districts have to focus on curriculum and standards alignment first.

Prior to 1997, “mathematics” was taught largely by each of 600 districts adopting its own math textbooks, opening to page one in September and closing at page 450 in June with lots of worksheets in between. In recent years, New Jersey adopted the national mathematics standards, which means that rote and drill are inadequate if students are to have a fighting chance to pass the 8th grade math test (in 2005, only one-third of Abbott 8th graders were proficient—see Figure 2). In many instances, middle grades teachers are not prepared to teach math to the standard now expected.

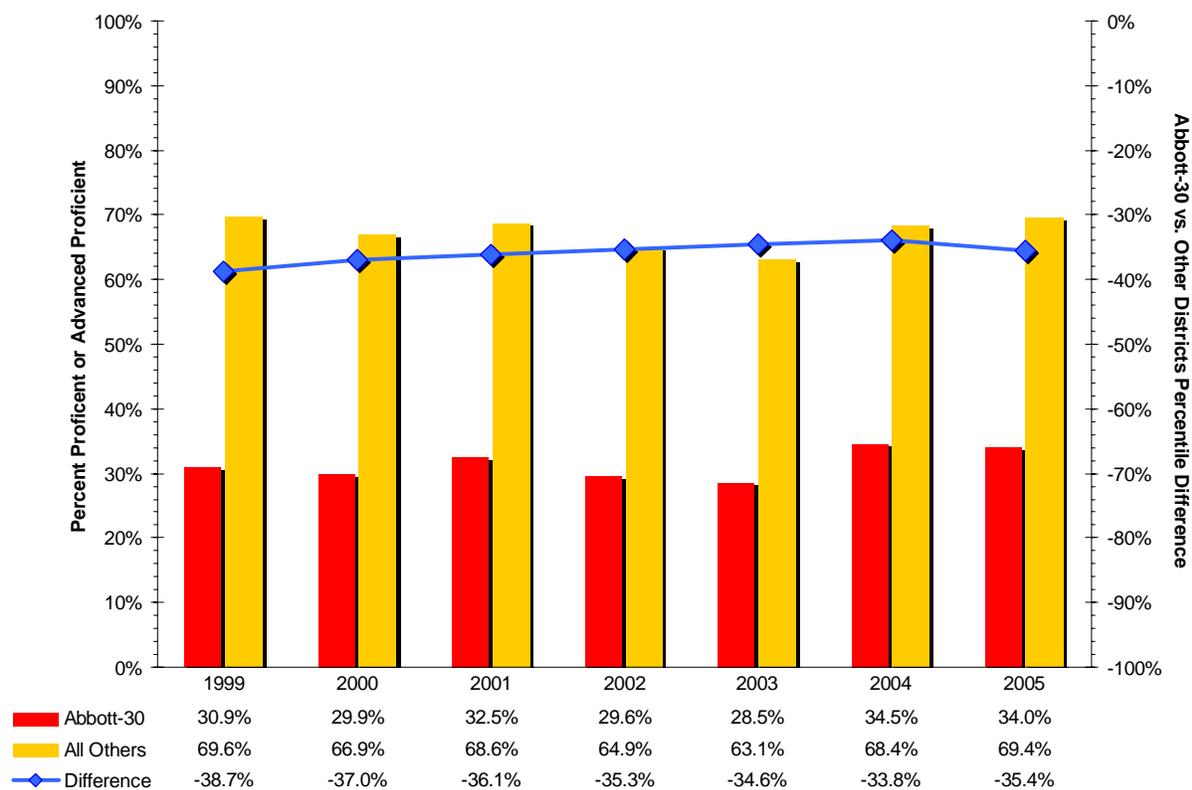


Figure 2: Percent Proficient or Advanced Proficient on the New Jersey Eighth Grade Assessment Mathematics Section for Total Students by District Type by Year (with Percentile Difference)

So, where is New Jersey realizing the Supreme Court’s expectation that students in its poorest districts are learning as well as students in its most affluent districts and what are the implications for the work of the Abbott division over the next two years?

Conditions and culture: It is important to acknowledge the conditions that govern our work, some of which may be influenced, some not. For the Abbott division, the fact that we operate

under Supreme Court rulings and are a division of state government are the two most important contributors to how we work. Consider the following:

- Litigation is an effective means to confirm academic standards and to make school funding equitable and just. However, when it comes to influencing student-teacher dynamics or how to align the CCCS or adjust teaching to changing circumstances, the adversarial process can lock in highly prescriptive practices that do not work universally. One example is the presumptive status granted Success for All, a reading model that, if implemented precisely as offered by the developer, fails to prepare students for the 4th grade test because it has a very weak writing component, which is half the value of the 4th grade test;
- The division operates in one of fifteen executive departments, the heads of which are appointed by the Governor. Particularly on matters of finance and operations, the division abides by policies and schedules set by the administration and legislature, which do not always coincide with the court-ordered schedules for Abbott districts. The fact that Abbott district budgets are rarely settled until after the legislative budget is enacted, introduces a continuous budgeting process not experienced by other districts; and,
- Most of the division's staff was recruited when the emphasis was on school-level budgeting, WSR adoption, and compliance reviews, and budget reviews focused on identifying targets for reductions in district budgets. Most staff had little experience working on teaching and learning issues in urban schools. Thus, the effort to operate as partners to districts to untangle instructional challenges and improve financial and business efficiency requires considerable retraining and a change in mindset among staff.

The last three years: Four years ago, there was no Division of Abbott Implementation and practically no emphasis on standards-based instruction in the Abbott districts. It is worth placing this plan in a context that includes some of the changes that have been realized since 2002. In general, the implementation of the Abbott opportunities has changed in the following observable ways, from:

- An emphasis on schools selecting and implementing specific remedies and programs to district-led standards-based instruction and student achievement;
- A DOE posture of compliance/monitoring to active collaborations with districts on instructional issues;
- A focus on 454 school-level budgets and programs to 31 district budgets and their instructional priorities;
- Radical decentralization of authority, decision-making, and budgeting down to the school level to shared responsibilities and goal-setting among DOE, districts, and schools;
- A preschool program of weak quality serving 19,000 children to one now nationally-recognized for providing a quality program for nearly 40,000 children;
- Accountability for complying with mandates and regulations to an accountability based on instructional outcomes and efficiency; and,
- Early literacy and math being but two of many high priority “programs” to an unrelenting focus on literacy and math.

When the division began the sharp policy and operating shift to building instructional partnerships with Abbott districts in 2002, it inherited a history of mistrust and suspicion between the department and the districts. Litigation was frequently the process employed to settle budget requests. The software the department provided for district budgets precluded any change from school-level budgets that had been first approved by DOE. The school construction program was a source of frustration to many districts. Regulations emphasized specific program and positions with no central emphasis on teaching and learning. In addition, the department lacked sufficient personnel who could add value to discussions of difficult pedagogical issues. The idea of a DOE/district partnership has not been, therefore, an easy idea to implement.

General principles: The changes that have swung the division’s work to a relentless focus on teaching and learning have been governed by five general principles that remain the guiding principles for this plan:

1. *Teachers and students.* The division’s work must help improve what happens between teachers and students. The classroom is the object of our policies, training, regulations, planning, meetings, and funding.
2. *Focus and simplicity.* There are so many federal, state, judicial, legislative, and regulatory mandates that sometimes the most obvious and widely-accepted purposes of public education can get overlooked. Standards-based learning begins with strong reading and writing in English and mastery of mathematical concepts—the instructional goal. Efficient business and financial operations is the other goal.
3. *What works?* The division pursues what works as confirmed by credible scholarship and practice in Abbott districts. The early literacy and middle grades literacy task forces are examples of bringing scholarship and practice together to set policy for Abbott schools. We have found districts where academic improvement has been sustained over time and across all schools (West New York, Union City, and Perth Amboy are examples of successful early literacy practices). Documenting progress, or its lack, with the introduction of specific practices should be a persistent way of working.
4. *Produce evidence.* The evidence of student work and achievement must be constantly gathered and analyzed and form the basis for changes in this plan. “Data-driven instruction” needs to be translated into a systematic curiosity about how well students are learning and why or why not, as is the case in higher-performing districts and schools; and,
5. *Integrate NCLB.* NCLB is changing public education with a host of new requirements and consequences around standardized test results. To the maximum extent possible, the division will integrate Abbott and NCLB requirements. The Collaborative Assessment and Planning for Achievement (CAPA) process is an excellent example of cross-divisional cooperation that has produced helpful school and district reviews while complying with Abbott X and NCLB mandates.

Preliminary findings to guide the setting of instructional priorities: For three years we have been meeting with each Abbott district to discuss teaching and learning and poring through data on student performance. We can draw the following preliminary conclusions from these assessments:

- The most likely explanation for the gap between Abbott and other students is that Abbott students have not been instructed to master the content of the CCCS. Most districts have not yet fully revised their curricula to clearly and concretely spell out what is required of teachers and students at every grade level or included interim goals and assessments to judge progress. Districts that have done so, enjoy better-than-predicted performance by their students that can be sustained in the middle grades (e.g. West New York and Hoboken students now perform close to suburban norms on the 8th grade tests). State test results arrive too late and are too general to be of real assistance to teachers and students, so districts must take the lead in developing their own measures of performance;
- There are no remedies, services, models or programs that work in every setting. Instead, there must be tailored changes based on the evidence of academic shortcomings in each school and district. DOE can ask many questions, but it can provide few answers;
- The strong policy and scholarly consensus around early literacy practices that will produce stronger readers and writers has been borne out by the division's work in under-performing districts. In particular, Orange, Jersey City, Perth Amboy, and Pleasantville have made impressive gains that have persisted;
- Students in districts that have most faithfully implemented the specific remedies prescribed by the Supreme Court as interpreted by the DOE before 2002, have consistently performed less well than would be predicted when compared to other Abbott students. Districts that have relied on school-based curricular decisions have seen a decline in student performance relative to other Abbott districts; and,
- The particular instructional issues for English language learners and students with disabilities were not addressed in Abbott V or by its early implementation by the department, with the result that in many districts these students have been left out and left behind. This is an important finding as ELL and students with disabilities represent almost 40% of all Abbott students and students from non-English speaking family backgrounds are now the largest minority.

Where we are at the end of 2004-05: The division's plan builds on a careful assessment of the state of our work at the end of this academic year with particular attention to the same six areas that districts are required to cover in their Two-year Reports on Instructional Priorities that are due November 15, 2005 for the year ending June 2008.

Preschool: The Supreme Court mandated an unprecedented effort to simultaneously create high-quality preschool program opportunities for as many as 55,000 three and four year-olds, improve substantially the quality of all programs, and integrate preschool education into the fabric of 31 K-12 districts. Abbott preschool education has and will continue to be treated as an "infant industry" that requires special attention and its own focused staff in the Office of Early Childhood Education (a part of the Abbott division).

The following priorities remain in place for the next two years: first and most important is Quality, Quality, Quality! Unless preschool programs meet the scrupulous and lofty standards set by the court, their potential contribution to the improved achievement of Abbott students will not be realized. The office employs several means of improving and measuring quality, as follows:

- An internationally-accepted measure of quality called Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale –Revised (ECERS), which relies on observing a sample of classrooms annually employing trained and reliable observers. Until a program reaches 5 on a 7-point scale, it is not able to compensate for the disadvantages of poor three and four year-olds. In 2002, the average ECERS score was 3.96; by 2005 it was 4.77. Classroom quality will continue to be evaluated, as will the short- and long-term effects of the Abbott preschool program on children’s academic progress.
- The Self-Assessment Validation System (SAVS) to guide districts through a systematic self-appraisal of its preschool program. Derived from the state’s standards and guidelines for Abbott preschools, the system assesses all aspects of the district’s preschool program, from recruitment and outreach efforts to the ability of the curriculum to support the unique needs of the children in the district. A comparison of scores shows a steady increase in district-wide quality. A center level self-assessment system is being piloted this year.
- In response to low scores found during the statewide evaluation of language arts literacy practices, the office created a standards-based assessment, the Early Learning Assessment System (ELAS), derived from the state’s language art literacy standards for preschool and kindergarten. Teachers document children’s emerging skills on a regular basis, and use benchmarks to understand and support children’s learning. The 31 Abbott districts are currently either using or being trained in ELAS; a mathematics version is scheduled to be completed by September 2006.
- Professional development integral to the continued success of the Abbott Preschool Program is offered in three ways: 1) district-delivered, 2) regular meetings of job-similar groups, and 3) state-level conferences. Early childhood supervisors, master teachers, community and parent involvement specialists, fiscal specialists, building administrators and special education personnel have all received ongoing training, tailored to their specific role in the Abbott Preschool Program. Professional development topics are determined by the results of the state and district-wide evaluations.
- Program quality standards that are translated each year into more than 500 preschool budgets. While staff continue to work on fine-tuning the budget and planning process for districts and community providers, the Office of Early Childhood Education (OECE) is continuing to ensure that funds are used efficiently and appropriately. The department, via the Office of Compliance Investigation and the Office of Internal Audit for state-operated districts, conducted limited review examinations of more than 100 providers during fiscal year 2004-2005. From the findings, we conclude that providers continue to have difficulty segregating Abbott expenditures, accurately and fully completing Quarterly Expenditure Reports, and recordkeeping in general. However, progress is being made. To further this effort, the Office of Early Childhood Education staff are working with the Abbott districts to develop training modules on budget and accounting issues that they can turn-key with their providers.

Second, the early childhood office will continue to assist districts in increasing enrollment of eligible children to reach the goal of universal coverage. In 2004-05, the rapid increases of the previous three years stalled as a result of insufficient facilities, exhaustion of new able and willing providers (particularly Head Start), and the elimination of providers who failed to meet

program and management standards. The largest unserved population are children in the Head Start programs in Abbott districts that have not yet agreed to accept Abbott standards and funding. For example, if the approximately 3,000 unserved Head Start students in just Newark, Paterson, Camden and Jersey City were integrated into Abbott preschool programs, the statewide enrollment would grow by 5.7 percentage points to 81.2%. The Office will continue to explore how Head Start programs can integrate operationally their federal support and unique culture with the Abbott instructional standards.

OECE will continue its emphasis on the seamless integration of children completing four year-old programs into kindergarten, with improved sharing of curricular practices, student portfolios, and classroom visits by preschool and kindergarten teachers. The Abbott preschool investment is not yet fully accepted by all K-12 leaders as an integral part of the effort to educate Abbott students and realize the long-term benefits of an early start. However, the quality and operational difficulties of dealing with 31 districts, 450 community providers at more than 550 sites need to be more fully solved before transitioning to a pre-K-3rd grade OECE. A first step in this integration will occur with the inclusion of the “two-year preschool operational plan” in the district’s “two-year report on instructional priorities” for the years beginning July 1, 2006. Preschool budgets will continue to be prepared and reviewed separately and on a different schedule from district budgets through at least FY2007.

Recruitment and retention: The Abbott preschool initiative has become the most widely admired program in the nation. Because of Abbott, NJ has reached a higher proportion of children-at-risk than any other state with the highest-quality and highest-cost program. This advantage is a strong selling point in attracting well-prepared and experienced early childhood educators and in maintaining the current high quality OECE staff with early childhood educators who combine specialties in math, master teacher training, curriculum development, assessment, inclusion, and English language learners with responsibility to assist one or more Abbott districts. We will build on the example set by Ellen Frede, who came to the DOE on loan from The College of New Jersey in 2002, to build the office of early childhood education and to form the partnerships with districts and higher education needed to advance the quality of preschool programs.

Budget estimates. The cost for FY2006 of 15 professionals and 3 support staff (including employee benefits) is about \$1,096,756 and \$110,000 for general operations. Contracts for measuring quality and providing professional development require an additional \$935,000. Salary costs will rise in the 6 to 8 percent range in 2007 because of two raises being given and inflation adjustments. If the Division’s request for two additional professional positions is granted, the salary increase in 2007 will be about \$200,000 greater.

Literacy: The division has powerful evidence that its standards work for making every third grader a strong reader and writer. In just three years, most Abbott districts have moved from either a literacy model (SFA) that was not aligned with New Jersey’s standards or the chaos of multiple reading programs, to a uniform and consistent approach to literacy instruction. In 2005-06 we will concentrate our efforts on a few districts that have not implemented the Intensive Early Literacy standards in all schools, on the 15 or so districts in which most non-readers are found, on the particular problem of teaching literacy to growing numbers of students whose

native language is other than English, and on enriching literacy practices in grades five and six. The results of the 2005 summer LEADS program and workshops with six Abbott districts will be used to modify standards and practices for middle grades literacy.

In 2002, the division shifted priorities to give highest priority to Intensive Early Literacy (IEL). Under Abbott X, this attention was devoted to districts with schools in which more than half of unclassified and non-ELL students could not read and write proficiently in 4th grade. By introducing the ingredients of IEL and using our limited personnel to provide tailored professional development in those districts, we found strong evidence that many districts were not teaching to the core standards. The general problems were a lack of writing (which counts for half the score on the 3rd and 4th grade tests) and over-reliance on basal reading textbooks without providing supplemental reading opportunities. The results on NJ ASK3 and NJ ASK4 have been impressive, particularly in Orange, Pleasantville, and Jersey City.

In 2003-04, the department produced new standards for literacy instruction in the middle grades, based on the work of a task force chaired by Dorothy Strickland of Rutgers University and Penelope Lattimer of DOE. Their work addresses the well-documented plateau in New Jersey and the nation in student literacy after 4th grade. The key recommendation is to replicate the personalized and protective approach taken in the primary grades in the middle grades with a powerful focus on reading beyond textbooks and anthologies, with frequent writing and more time allotted to both (we seek a minimum of 80 uninterrupted minutes versus typical class periods of 40-45 minutes). If students struggle, the time should be extended up to 120 minutes. The task force recommended that small learning groups and the means to measure a student's reading level are essential.

In the next two years, the Division's Office of Urban Literacy will concentrate on the following middle grades objectives:

- Introduce, in the 27 districts that have volunteered to participate, the literacy specialists whom the division trained to work specifically with students with disabilities and their teachers in the same curricular materials and standards set for general education students;
- Intensify this summer's Literacy is Essential to Adolescent Development and Success (LEADS) model aimed at instruction in grades 4-8 with the participation of students from Perth Amboy, Pleasantville, and Asbury Park, with Elizabeth, Plainfield, and Passaic observing (nationally and in NJ there is a well-documented plateau that seems to begin in 5th grade). LEADS emphasizes working across disciplines, using more interesting and contemporary literature, frequent writing, diverse texts, and targeted interventions for students reading two or more years below grade level;
- In districts that have successfully implemented the IEL ingredients (e.g. classroom libraries, small learning centers, frequent assessments, uninterrupted time, "process writing," etc.), provide guidance and professional development in deepening and broadening reading and writing to cover novels, essays, short-form fiction, etc. and persuasive, expository, poetic, and fiction writing; and
- In districts that have not yet introduced IEL across all schools, assist in its introduction and the accompanying professional development that is required, particularly to help

teachers work in small groups, use guided reading, and evaluate writing. There are only a few districts that require this kind of support.

Since January 2005, the two full-time professionals in the Office of Urban Literacy provided more than 64 days and 75 workshops of more than 250 hours of professional development. Most of this was dedicated to building the knowledge base among administrators, principals, and teachers in the areas of elementary literacy. Included were phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension as well as differentiating that instruction for critical populations such as our growing population of English language learners and students with disabilities. More than 3,000 educators have attended professional development workshops in 2005 alone (through August). In addition, more than sixty school visits have taken place in 2004-05 with scores of hours of technical assistance to central office personnel. With the recent addition of a highly qualified third staff person, the literacy office intends to maintain its pace of value-added and collaborative assistance.

Recruitment: The division investigated district-wide literacy programs that were producing consistently better-than-predicted results. This led us to Union City, where Fred Carrigg directed efforts reflecting his broad experience in early literacy, bilingual/ESL instruction, and in developing a standards-based district curriculum. Mr. Carrigg joined DOE in October 2002. We have employed the same approach in our other searches for district talent who can bring “real” experience to bear on our work. The approach works: Fred Carrigg has now worked intensively in the 16 Abbott districts whose students are further from our goal of universal literacy and, except for a handful of districts, we have seen enormous progress with both implementation and achievement. Recently, the Office recruited Linda Dold-Collins from Pleasantville, an Abbott district that made dramatic gains in the last two years. We will continue to search for district-seasoned professionals.

Budget estimates. In FY 2006, we expect the Office of Urban Literacy to operate with four professionals and one support staff (including employee benefits) at an estimated cost of \$414,450 with additional consulting and conference expenses of \$59,250. For FY2007, we propose adding three professionals, two to concentrate on limited English proficient (LEP) students and one to concentrate on students with disabilities, and one support person for an increased cost of \$320,950.

Mathematics: Mathematics mastery is a national problem, with American students falling farther behind students in other nations, particularly in the middle and high school years. The same is true in New Jersey, where math standards changed dramatically in 1997 with the State Board’s adoption of national standards for all students grades K-12. Seven years later, one-quarter of all students statewide and two-thirds of Abbott students cannot pass the 8th grade state test.

A plausible explanation for the math gap is that the Abbott districts did not move as quickly as most other districts to review the new standards, adopt new instructional materials, and offer intensive professional development on both content and skills to their teachers. For most Abbott districts, the 2004-05 school year and 2005-06 year is the time to refine their math curricula and increase teacher competency through intensive professional development.

The Abbott Division helped organize a twelve-day workshop last summer for 15 Abbott districts and 15 non-Abbott districts in math in the middle grades, which has been identified as a crucial time for increasing student mastery of still- new math concepts and skills; and, a workshop for all Abbott districts in teaching algebra I to 8th and 9th graders. The division has adopted in regulation a requirement that all districts abandon “math-lite” courses such as “consumer math” by September 2006. Moreover, the discouraging results on HSPA math are partly explained by the fact that most Abbott students do not begin 10th grade having mastered algebraic reasoning and problem-solving.

Recruitment: For DOE to assist districts more broadly, it must bring the same district-seasoned math experts to the division as it has in recruiting literacy experts. This is a field marked by scarcity of well-prepared teachers and supervisors. However, we will persist in identifying district-level experts who might work with us for one or more years on an intergovernmental loan, the way we buttressed our literacy competency. The division has hired two recently retired math supervisors who pulled together the summer workshops and will continue working with districts this academic year. We have advertised for a third math specialist to work full-time as soon as a candidate can be identified.

Budget estimates. In 2006, we expect to employ four math consultants, one staff professional and one support person (including employee benefits) at an estimated cost of \$488,036 plus \$62,000 for workshops, small grants, and materials. By 2007, we will request a second full-time professional that will add about \$100,000 plus the 6-8% inflation in the 2006 salary account.

Science: Since NCLB will add state test results on science to its framework for determining adequate progress, the Division must assist districts with science along with literacy and math. Our approach will be developed during the 2005-06 year.

Secondary: Large comprehensive high schools in urban centers have a low level of success. The evidence is overwhelming that the new core standards cannot be mastered by rising 9th graders who are not proficient in the middle grades skills and knowledge. Most Abbott 8th graders cannot read and write English at grade level; math results have been cited above. Large high schools tend to be remedial training centers that bore both faculty and students until most of them drop out or gain a diploma of questionable value through the Special Review Assessment (SRA).

The division benefited from the work of a secondary work group that made recommendations in 2004, which became the foundation of the Secondary Education Initiative. There are two strands to the Initiative: increased academic rigor and personalization via smaller learning communities. The first contains some specific requirements for math and literacy that all districts should begin studying and scheduling during this year. The DOE will assist with consultants who can work on academic content, skills and curriculum development, with particular attention to algebra and 9th-grade English.

For the second, we will work with four districts—Bridgeton, Elizabeth, Jersey City, and Orange—for all of 2005-06 and part of 2006-07 to test the standards and practices that can guide

the development of smaller communities in large middle and high schools. The national experience suggests that at least one year, maybe more, of careful planning must precede the transformation of large schools into smaller schools or communities in which students and teachers exercise their preferences and each student is taken under the wing of at least one adult. We want to find out “what works” in four districts before setting standards and practices for all 31 districts. The current goal is to fully implement these standards in all Abbott districts by September 2008.

Recruitment: DOE recruited Dr. Penelope Lattimer, the former assistant superintendent of instruction in New Brunswick, as the leader of the secondary effort. DOE has contracted with nationally-respected consultants to assist districts with both improved instruction to the core standards’ rigorous requirements and personalization via small learning communities.

Budget estimate. The secondary office includes a part-time director, full-time assistant, and four part-time education specialists, and one support staff at \$333,178 in FY2006 and \$483,538 in FY2007 (assuming that we are able to make the part-time specialists full-time); the consultant costs are estimated to be \$1,768,106 in both 2006 and 2007. Other expenses for workshops and materials are estimated at \$18,000 for 2006, and \$21,000 in FY2007.

English language learners: Most Abbott districts are receiving increasing numbers of students whose first language is not English, without the policies and practices to instruct them effectively. We have examined districts in which ELL students do much better than would be predicted and have developed guidance for all districts based on the evidence of what works. In 2005-06 we will try to supplement our literacy team with at least one person experienced in ELL instruction and effective at professional development.

Recruitment and budget: The division will continue to work on this problem by way of its efforts in literacy.

Special education: This is an area of public education that is dominated by a highly structured process set by federal and state laws and enforced through frequent litigation and compliance activity. The result is lots of instructional plans and corrective action plans but very little progress. The division relies on close working relations with DOE’s Office of Special Education to work with Abbott districts with particularly difficult problems. The current effort to train special education teachers and supervisors in the best literacy practices for students with disabilities is exemplary of this cooperation. Our general conclusion is that students with disabilities are too frequently placed in instructional silos and assumed to be not capable of mastering the core standards, and with quiet but widespread resistance to the idea of including them in “general” classrooms.

Recruitment and budget: The Office of Urban Literacy budget will cover a special education literacy specialist, and federal funds from the DOE Office of Special Education will cover the costs of the literacy project.

Building instructional capacity in districts and schools: Most of the work described above can fit into the category of increasing the ability of Abbott districts and schools to change what

happens in classrooms. Since its creation in January 2002, this has been the principal focus of the division's work. The early evidence from students and schools confirmed that there was no "template" or list of programs and remedies that could be mandated universally with the confidence that the achievement gap could be closed. Each Abbott district is unique in its demographics, leadership, faculty experience and competence, instructional philosophy and practice, and curriculum.

In 2003, the division shifted its emphasis from a uniform "Abbott program" to customized approaches for each district. We reviewed and compared student performance evidence, identified priority instructional issues, and conducted "face-to-face" conversations on teaching and learning with each district. This approach has created the opportunity for the division to work in partnership with each district, rather than to operate as the arm of compliance and monitoring. The face-to-face meetings provide the basis for agreement on what instructional issues deserve priority attention and agreement on what steps can be taken over the near-term (two years) to improve instruction and learning.

As a result of this tailored approach, the division has identified specialists and consultants whose expertise can be of particular value to districts. We expect to continue using outside assistance when it is more effective and economical.

In 2004, the division reorganized to improve efficiency and effectiveness; to better coordinate the initiatives in literacy, mathematics, secondary education; to integrate the review of instructional programs and budget requests at the district level; and to accelerate the focus of staff work from the school to district level. Two offices--the Office of Fiscal Review and Improvement and the Office of Student Achievement--were merged into the Office of Student Achievement and Fiscal Support under the leadership of Annette Castiglione, a former reading specialist and school facilitator recruited from the Camden Public Schools. During the last two years the office has implemented a rigorous professional development plan to build the capacity of program and fiscal staff to work as a team in providing the support districts need to address the various Abbott, DOE and NCLB mandates. The program and fiscal staff are housed in three regional centers.

In addition, as a result of the Abbott X and NCLB mandates that the department provide support to schools in corrective action, the Office assumed the leadership of Collaborative Assessment and Planning for Achievement (CAPA), a cooperative enterprise with the DOE Title I office. In FY2005, the division completed over 100 reviews of schools "in need of improvement" and generated agreements with the schools and their districts that set the instructional priorities for the current school year and are memorialized in Abbott and NCLB plans. A CAPA unit with one coordinator and six staff is responsible for coordinating scholastic audits in schools and districts identified by NCLB and Abbott X.

Budget Estimates: The Division's "headquarters" staff includes an assistant commissioner, three assistants, and three administrative staff; the Office includes a director, 11 support staff, an assistant director, three regional team leaders, 1 intergovernmental loan employee, 34 educational specialists, 15 budget managers. The salary cost in FY 2006 is \$7,705,584; assuming that four additional specialists are added during the current year to provide better

coverage of districts and increase specialization in mathematics and English language learning, the FY2007 budget will be \$8,078,535. Operations and materials in 2006 cost \$595,750. Consultants to assist districts are budgeted at \$1.9 million in 2006 and the same amount for 2007.

The Division's share of the CAPA unit and process is \$683,397 for staff in 2006, plus \$125,361 for consultants and expenses. The staff costs will be adjusted upward by 8% in 2007.

Efficiency and budgeting: The division has worked with McKinsey & Co., a leading management consulting firm, to develop a reliable comparative spending analysis to identify areas of potential savings. There are no hard targets set by the analysis, but the review highlights spending areas such as purchasing, operations and maintenance, utilities and transportation where a district's expenditures noticeably exceed its peer districts. The comparative analyses of district expenditures help the division and districts focus their attention on substantial saving opportunities and a closer examination of certain administrative practices that could be improved.

As with literacy and secondary education, the division has learned that we can work more effectively with the districts on budget review and efficiency if we retain someone who understands the business, accounting, and operational practices of Abbott districts. In the two budget reviews for FY2005 and 2006, we relied on the experience and skill of Peter Genovese, the School Business Administrator (SBA) for Long Branch. With his return to his district, we recruited Mark Kramer, the assistant superintendent for facilities and former SBA of East Orange, who previously consulted school districts on accounting and operational problems for Ernst & Young. The full implementation of the comparative spending model requires the recruitment and training of persons with expertise in the major expenditure areas like facilities maintenance, instructional support, and benefits to use the comparative spending results to work with districts to improve efficiencies and effectiveness of business and financial operations.

It is worth noting that after many years when as many as 23 districts appealed the DOE budget determination, in the last two years, there has been a single appeal that was settled quickly. This is a testimony to the effectiveness of Mr. Genovese and to the adoption of the presumptive budget opportunity for FY2006.

Evaluating Abbott: If, in 1998, New Jersey had begun operating a student-level database so that the educational experience and performance of every student could have been tracked across schools and districts, the evaluation of Abbott's impact would have been much easier. In the absence of such data, the division has evolved a three-part approach to begin the Abbott evaluation:

1. We use a variety of analytic techniques to provide both quantitative and qualitative perspectives on student performance. One tool is a sophisticated analysis to set the agenda for the annual "face-to-face" conversation with each district and to provide comparative results based on individual student test results not available to districts compared with other students with identical economic and demographic characteristics. The division also uses qualitative studies of early literacy and of school and district performance for those in "need of improvement" under NCLB (CAPA).

2. The division advocates for the full implementation of NJ SMART (Standards Measurement and Resource for Teaching), a student-level longitudinal database that will enable DOE to track the individual performance of students according to a variety of indicators over time even though students may move from one district to another. NJ SMART will significantly improve the validity and reliability of data and permit value-added analyses of programs and practices. The division initiated NJ SMART in April 2002. It will begin on a pilot basis in FY2006 beginning with data from the Abbott districts.
3. To develop a more formal and useful evaluation of the impact of Abbott resources, the division recruited a panel of nationally-recognized scholars (Andy Porter of Vanderbilt, Ronald Ferguson of Harvard, and Cecilia Rouse of Princeton) to help improve our overall evaluation model including the use of randomized controlled trials. The recommendations from this panel will be reviewed by the Abbott Evaluation Workgroup this fall as the next step in formulating a more formal evaluation.

Recruitment and retention: The division recruited Peter Noehrenberg in 2002 from the RAND Corporation, one of the most respected research institutes in the world. He has expanded the division's use of student performance data, created analyses of value to all Abbott districts, and greatly improved the presentation of data for wider public understanding. There is much more work to be performed. The division has advertised for a second analyst, with the hope that we can expand our analytical work. The Division also recruited Jun Choi in 2002, an MIT-educated former management consultant with Ernst & Young Consulting who worked with Fortune 500 companies to improve their management and technology practices. Jun led the NJ SMART project from 2002 until early 2005.

Budget: The division has budgeted \$250,000 a year to the analytic techniques group. NJ SMART will be funded outside the division. Based on the recommendations of the research panel and the Abbott Evaluation Workgroup, a budget level will be set for other research, but we expect to contract for \$500,000 in FY2006 and as yet unspecified greater amount in FY2007.

Problems and opportunities: One of the problems with plans as brief as two year is that so much changes while they are being implemented ("education is what happens while you're planning"). That has certainly been the experience of the last 3.5 years as we have learned that the standards-based educational movement had largely by-passed the Abbott districts. We think that most, but not all, districts are now on track to do the hard work required, which means working backwards from the high school graduation requirements to three year-old students and determining the cumulative knowledge and skills required to graduate from high school in New Jersey without the SRA. Districts that have been doing this work are the districts whose students are performing better than would be predicted.

Here are the problems and opportunities facing the Abbott Division over the next two years:

1. There has not been sufficient attention to publicizing the work in Abbott districts nor to the results of that work. At a minimum, the division's Web site should be a rich source of data and links.

2. The division lacks sufficient numbers and quality of experienced educators who know how to adapt their expertise to the very particular circumstances of any Abbott district.
3. The effort to strike collaborative efforts with districts to jointly solve instructional puzzles does not work in every district. How to improve instructional practices in such places is difficult to determine. If mandates and threats worked, these districts would have succeeded long ago.
4. Despite the streamlining of paperwork requirements (the annual district report on instructional priorities is a relatively short letter to the division), there is still too much paperwork.
5. Most districts and the division are not yet consistent in the use of student achievement data to guide educational decisions. Moreover, most districts have not yet created a dynamic, classroom-usable district curriculum to guide instruction, assess progress, determine priorities for professional development, and select aligned instructional materials and software. The advent of NJ SMART will provide richer and more reliable student data to help districts.
6. Not all districts accept preschool as an integral part of the educational design for effective education. It is still seen by some as a nuisance that involves too many “outside” providers.
7. The area of greatest waste in instructional spending is likely to be technology, where hardware was mandated without any determination of whether or how it would assist improved instruction. This area requires more systematic attention from the division.
8. Evaluation of Abbott is made more difficult by the rapid pace of change in priorities and practices. The hope that a single comprehensive evaluation that treats education as mechanical process where the individual “inputs” can be rigorously measured for their contribution needs to be dashed.

Benchmarks. There is a single measure for Abbott’s success—do students master the CCCS? If the division does everything perfectly in its planning and recruitment and workshops, but does not contribute to improved mastery of the CCCS, then we will have failed. However, since the division does not operate a single classroom, our contribution is not simple to measure. Therefore, a second benchmark will be employed: the extent to which division standards and practices are adopted, implemented, and broadened by the 31 districts. What percent of all Abbott K-3 classrooms have their own libraries? How many K-1 teachers have been trained and now use a screening instrument to determine reading levels? How many 5th and 6th grade teachers spend at least half of their literacy instruction in small group instruction?

Budgets. The aggregate budget for the division in 2006 is \$17, 624,547; the estimate for 2007 is \$18,500,000.