

TRACKING PROGRESS

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

Abbott Indicators Summary Report

Trenton

NEW JERSEY



SPRING 2005

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EDUCATION LAW CENTER



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Public education helps today's children prepare for an adulthood when they can take meaningful roles in society, compete in the labor market, and contribute as members of their communities. All of New Jersey's children and youth have a constitutional right to a "thorough and efficient" free public education.

This represents our state's promise to all children and youth that they will receive an education that at least equips students with the knowledge and skills to meet the state's academic standards. Until all of New Jersey's children receive the same high-quality education, this constitutional promise is not realized.

Introduction

Several years ago, education stakeholders recognized that children did not receive the same education throughout our state. Urban and suburban school districts did not have the same resources to support their schools. Thanks to the efforts of education professionals, parents, and advocates, the state legislature now provides the lowest income cities with the same funding as the wealthiest suburbs to support general education. The poorest urban school districts are also required to undergo a series of reforms and improvements to ensure that the funds are used to fulfill the constitutional promise.

Who should support these reforms and ensure that the schools continue to improve? Everyone who cares about public education. Schools belong first to the community and everyone in the community has a stake in them. Parents want their children to have the best education possible. Homeowners and businesses support public education through taxes. Community members want to be sure that their collective investment is used wisely and effectively to educate the children.

We wrote this report with Trenton's education stakeholders in mind. The report is a tool to help them identify and support what is working and ensure that remaining challenges are overcome. The goal of an equally sound education for all New Jersey students is reachable with their continued support and commitment.

Trenton Abbott Indicators Project and Report

Trenton is one of 31 urban school districts in New Jersey known as Abbott districts. The name comes from a series of lawsuits, collectively known as *Abbott v. Burke*, in which the New Jersey Supreme Court directed the state to implement a series of interlocking remedies designed to provide children with a thorough and efficient education.¹

As an Abbott district, Trenton receives funding to equalize its per student general education budget with the most successful suburban school districts in the state. Trenton's young people are also entitled to universal, high-quality preschool; reforms to

help them meet the state’s rigorous standards for academic achievement in Kindergarten through Grade 12; safe, healthy, and educationally adequate school facilities; and many other programs and services to ensure that they come to school ready to learn. Through a series of indicators, the Trenton Abbott Indicators Report presents the status of these reforms and student progress to date.

The Trenton Abbott Indicators Report and three others we are releasing this year in Camden, Newark, and Union City are products of the Abbott Indicators Project at the Education Law Center. The report is written for a wide audience: everyone with a stake in public education in Trenton. The project goals are to:

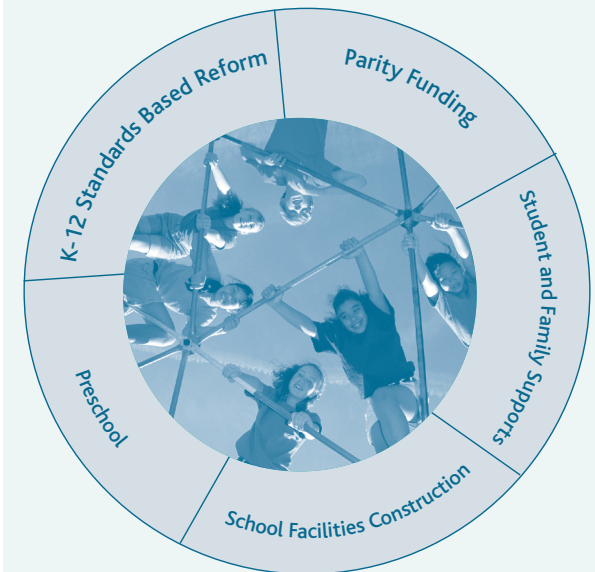
1. *Inform* people in Trenton about the status of school improvement efforts and student outcomes.
2. *Engage* people in Trenton in exploring and discussing what is working and what still needs to be done.
3. *Develop* and put a plan into action that supports school improvement.
4. *Establish* a system of accountability practices that local education stakeholders can use in years to come.

This is a summary version of the full Trenton Abbott Indicators Report. In it, we first list indicators about Trenton as a community and the students who are enrolled in the public schools. The remaining findings are organized by Abbott remedy: preschool, K-12 education (including standards-based reform and supports for students and families), and school facilities construction. All of the remedies we have in place in New Jersey are intended to work together to ensure a seamless plan for school improvement. They are presented separately because they have distinctive logics and requirements.

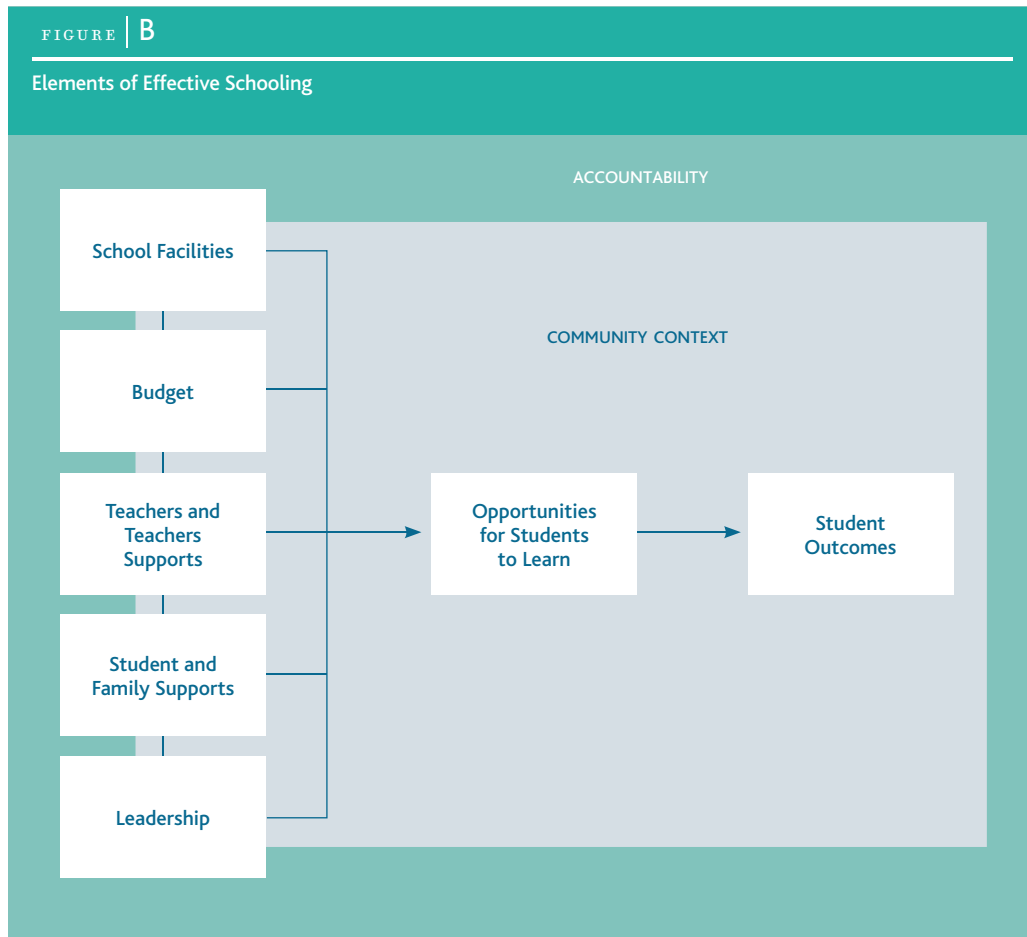
The indicators cover a broad range of topics about school practices and a number of student outcomes. We break down school practices into six “elements of effective schooling.”² Ultimately, maximizing opportunities for students to learn is the main focus of school improvement efforts. Other elements of effective schooling are needed to provide students with these opportunities. These are: *student and family supports, teacher*

FIGURE | A

Abbott v. Burke: New Jersey’s Framework for Urban School Improvement



Introduction



qualifications and supports, budget, leadership, and school facilities.

Academic progress and student well-being are the end products of *all* of the elements of effective schooling. We encourage readers to view student outcomes in light of how well all of the elements of effective schooling have been implemented.

In the full technical report (available at www.edlawcenter.org), the findings from the full set of more than one hundred fifty indicators are presented with figures and more detailed discussion. We also refer readers of this report to the technical report appendices for data sources and definitions, data collection and analysis methodology, and a glossary of terms.

Endnotes

1. More information about Abbott v. Burke is available at www.edlawcenter.org.

2. We thank Fred Frelow of the Rockefeller Foundation for suggesting this approach.

Research shows that living in concentrated poverty negatively affects the well-being and academic performance of children and youth. If our schools are to help all students meet the state's academic standards and grow up to take meaningful roles in their communities, these effects will need to be countered.



1

The Community and Students

FIGURE | 1.1

Conditions of Living and Learning in Trenton

| Municipal Characteristics | Trenton | New Jersey |
|--|----------|------------|
| Population | 85,258 | |
| Female Head of Household Families With Children 17 and Under | 45% | 18% |
| Highest Educational Attainment of Adults 25 and Over | | |
| Less Than High School Diploma | 38% | 18% |
| Diploma or GED | 32% | 29% |
| Some College | 21% | 23% |
| Bachelor's Degree | 6% | 19% |
| Graduate or Professional Degree | 3% | 11% |
| Labor Force Participation | 57% | 64% |
| Unemployment Rate | 11% | 6% |
| Median Household Income | \$31,074 | \$55,146 |
| Population Below Poverty Level | 21% | 8% |
| Population 17 and Under Below Poverty Level | 27% | 11% |
| Rent-income Ratio | 28% | 26% |
| Renter-occupied Housing | 55% | 34% |
| Vacant Housing | 13% | 7% |
| Violent Crime Rate (Per 1,000) | 17.3 | 3.8 |

SOURCE | Uniform Crime Report, 2002; 2000 US Census.

Here, we present indicators of community distress that inform the elements of effective schooling:

- At 11 percent in 2000, the unemployment rate is almost twice as high in Trenton as it was statewide.
- In 2000, more than one in five Trenton residents lived below the poverty level compared to eight percent of residents statewide. That same year, more than one quarter of Trenton's children were from families earning below the poverty level compared to 11 percent throughout New Jersey.
- In 2002, the violent crime rate was more than four times higher in Trenton than it was throughout the state.

The students who attend the public schools reflect the families who live in Trenton.

Their unique characteristics inform the educational content, the staff needed to teach and support teaching, the space and facilities in which teaching and learning occur, and the leadership that guides the whole educational process. Programs that meet the needs of Trenton's children and youth—such as bilingual programs and nutrition programs—also have different budget needs.

- In 2003–04, 61 percent of Trenton’s public school students were eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch compared to about one in four students statewide.
- Trenton students move more than New Jersey students on average—17 percent entered or left school at least once during the 2002–03 school year. High student mobility disrupts educational progress and has negative effects on student learning.

FIGURE | 1.2

Characteristics of Students in Trenton

| | Trenton | All Other Abbott Districts | I and J Districts | New Jersey |
|--|---------|----------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Total Enrollment | 14,322 | | | |
| Eligible for Free-/Reduced-price Lunch | 60.5% | 68.9% | 3.3% | 26.2% |
| Race/Ethnicity | | | | |
| Black | 66.9% | 40.6% | 4.4% | 17.1% |
| Latino/a | 28.6% | 42.9% | 3.6% | 17.1% |
| White | 3.8% | 13.3% | 80.3% | 58.5% |
| Asian | 0.6% | 3.0% | 11.5% | 7.1% |
| Native American | 0.0% | 0.2% | 0.1% | 0.2% |
| Limited English Proficiency (LEP) | 5.5% | 11.9% | 1.5% | 4.8% |
| Students with Disabilities (IEP) | 12.7% | 12.5% | 12.0% | 13.1% |
| Student Mobility Rate | 17.4% | 23.1% | 5.2% | 12.2% |

SOURCE | Fall Survey, 2003-04; School Report Card, 2002-03; Trenton Public Schools, 2003-04

The Abbott preschool remedy is based on research showing that intensive, high-quality preschool programs can help children perform better in school and participate more productively in the life of their communities as adults. Abbott preschool began in 1999–00; by 2005–06, all Abbott districts are required to serve 90 percent of the eligible population.

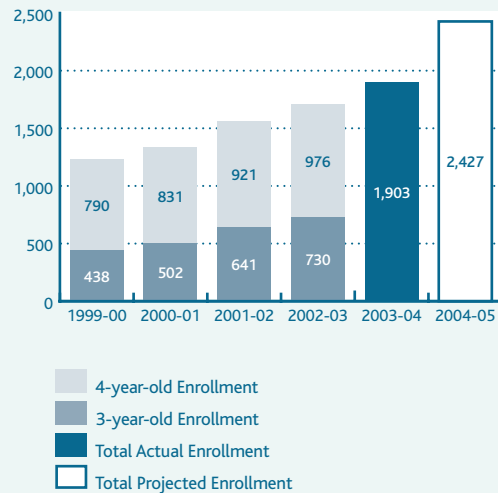
2

2

The Preschool Program

FIGURE | 2.1

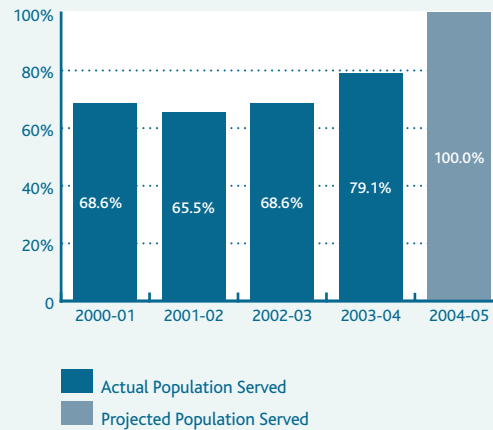
Preschool Enrollment: Trenton, 1999–00 to 2004–05



SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education: Office of Early Childhood Programs, 2003; New Jersey Department of Education: Office of School Funding, 1999–2003.

FIGURE | 2.2

Preschool Population Served: Trenton, 2000–01 to 2004–05



NOTE: The 2001–02 eligible preschool population is an average of the eligible population in 2000–01 and 2002–03

SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education: Office of Early Childhood Programs, 2003; New Jersey Department of Education: Office of School Funding, 1999–2003.

The major features of Abbott preschool are:

- Six-hour school day, 180 days a year;
- Provisions for full-day, full-year wrap-around child care services;³
- Certified teacher and an assistant for each class;
- Maximum class size of 15 students;
- Adequate facilities;
- Transportation, health and other related services, as needed;
- Developmentally appropriate curriculum that meets the state's Early Childhood Education Program Expectations Standards of Quality and is linked with New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS);
- Adequate state funding for all programs; and
- All three- and four-year-old children residing in the school district are eligible, with enrollment on demand.⁴

Opportunities for Students to Learn

Program Enrollment. By 2005–06, all Abbott districts are required to enroll 90 percent of their eligible populations of three- and four-year-olds.

- The Trenton preschool program is on its way to meeting the state's 2005–06 enrollment requirements. The program served 79 percent of

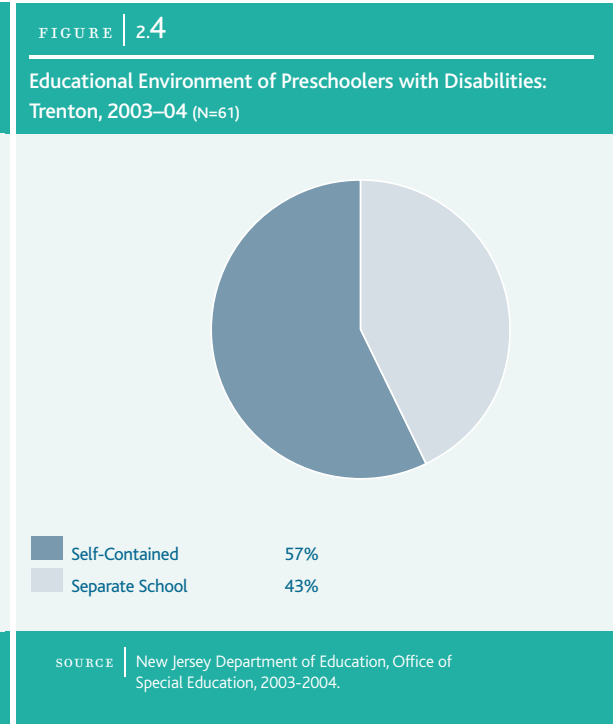
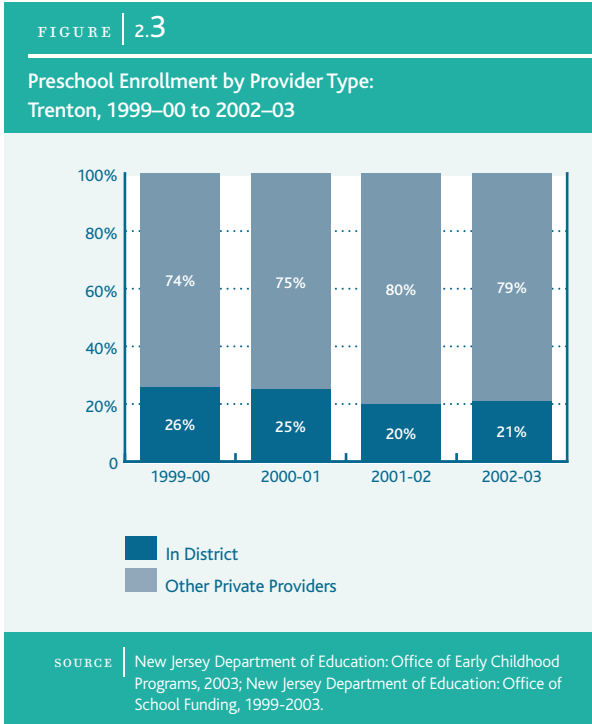
the eligible population in 2003–04 and was expected to serve all eligible children in 2004–05.

- In 2004–05, Trenton Public Schools contracted with one Head Start program in 10 locations and 28 other private providers in 35 locations. The district also runs 14 programs in its own buildings. Since the Abbott preschool program began in 1999–00, the district has placed more children in community-run programs than in district programs. According to a community member who reviewed this report, Trenton has had a collaborative relationship with its community preschool providers and works with them as viable partners.

Programs for Children with Disabilities.

The law requires that school districts provide children with disabilities with educational experiences and services tailored to their individual needs. For as much time as possible, this education must be in an environment with general education students and not in self-contained settings.

- More than half of Trenton’s 61 preschoolers with disabilities (57%) were in self-contained classes. The remaining 43 percent were enrolled in a separate school. The data suggest that the district reported students enrolled at the Step Ahead Program as attending a separate school. According to a community member who reviewed this report, Step Ahead serves only children with disabilities, despite its efforts



2

The Preschool Program

More data on program quality are needed so that we can understand the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges confronted by Abbott preschool programs.

to develop an inclusionary program. If so, all of Trenton's preschoolers with disabilities were educated in self-contained classrooms.

Curriculum. The New Jersey Department of Education's *Early Childhood Education Program Expectations: Standards of Quality* set standards for learning outcomes and outlines how teachers should conduct specific activities. Since they were released in 2002–03, the *Expectations* have become the benchmark for determining how effectively the classroom curriculum is being implemented.

➤ Currently, Trenton's preschool providers use a variety of curricula. In 2005, the district plans to institute a uniform, research-based approach across program locations. As of the date of this writing, the new curriculum had not been selected.

Program Quality. One good way to understand the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges confronted by Abbott preschool programs is to have a consistent and reliable method of measuring program quality that is used regularly in all public preschool programs, including the Abbott districts.

➤ State-supported university-based researchers assess preschool program quality in several

Abbott preschool programs. Unfortunately, there were too few classrooms assessed in Trenton to use this information. More data on program quality—such as the results of reliable program evaluation measures like the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R)—are needed in all Abbott districts so that we can understand the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges confronted by their preschool programs.

Preschool Teacher Qualifications and Supports

Educational Attainment of Preschool

Teachers. Abbott preschool teachers are required to have a bachelor's degree. This standard applies immediately to all teachers working in district-run programs. Teachers in community programs who need fewer than 30 credits may be eligible for an extension until September 2006. Head Start teachers have four years from the date when their program first contracted with an Abbott district to complete this requirement.

➤ In 2004–05, all preschool teachers working in the district or private provider programs had earned their four-year degree.

Preschool Teacher Certification. In addition to earning a bachelor’s degree, Abbott preschool teachers must also be certified.⁵ Preschool through Grade 3 (P-3) is the standard certification for all new teachers entering Abbott preschool programs. One route teachers can use to earn the P-3 is to first obtain a provisional “certificate of eligibility” (CE) or a certificate of eligibility with advanced standing (CEAS). While teaching in a preschool program, teachers then complete a series of mentoring and evaluation sessions. CE candidates must also take part in early childhood instructional training. Teachers with a standard certificate to teach students in nursery school through Grade 8 (N-8) and at least two years of full-time teaching experience in an early childhood setting also fulfill the certification requirement under a “grandfather clause” in the regulations. Teachers with special education certification may only teach self-contained early childhood classrooms or serve as a second teacher in an inclusion classroom.

➤ In Trenton, the preschool teachers were on their way to meeting the Abbott certification requirement. In 2004–05, all but one teacher

in all of the programs had at least provisional early childhood certification.

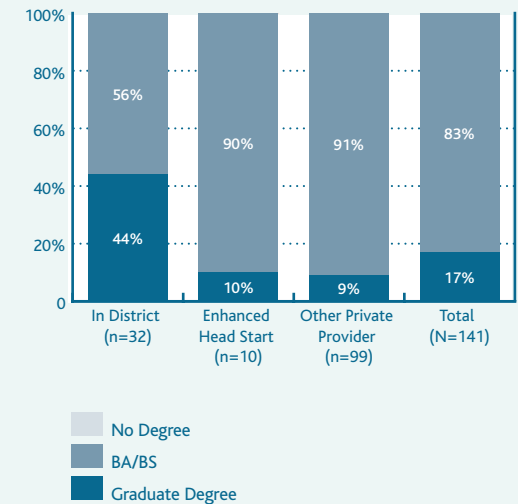
➤ Special education certified teachers only taught in self-contained special education classrooms in 2004–05. However, there were no special education certified teachers at Step Ahead, where some preschoolers with disabilities were enrolled.

Preschool Teacher Salary. All other things being equal, school districts that pay teachers well are more likely to attract a broader pool of applicants for teaching positions. Improving preschool teacher pay may also help to improve preschool program quality by reducing teacher turnover and boosting teacher morale. The New Jersey Supreme Court recognized this in 2002 when it ordered the New Jersey Department of Education to provide funds to help Head Start and other private provider programs raise their teacher salaries to levels equal to those of teachers in district-run programs.

➤ In Trenton, the average preschool teacher salary was \$47,797. On average, preschool teachers in district-run programs earned \$20,000 more than teachers in any other type of provider. Teachers working in the district’s programs had more years of schooling and spent more years

FIGURE | 2.5

Preschool Teacher Educational Attainment by Provider Type:
Trenton, 2004–05

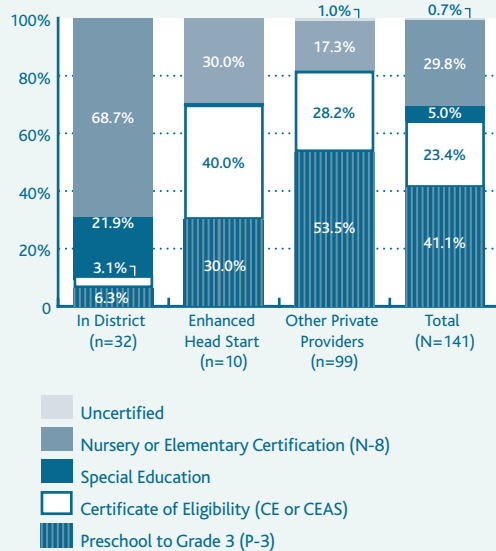


SOURCE | Trenton Public Schools, 2004–05

2 | The Preschool Program

FIGURE | 2.6

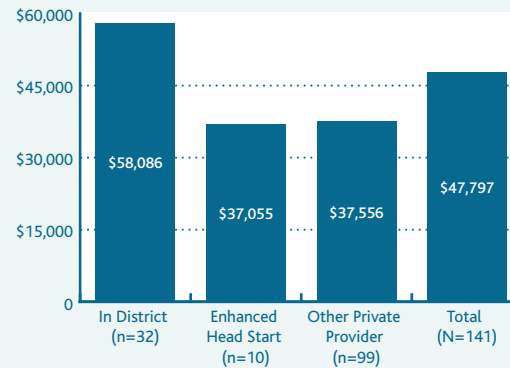
Preschool Teacher Certification by Provider Type: Trenton, 2004–05



SOURCE | Trenton Public Schools, 2004–05

FIGURE | 2.7

Average Preschool Teacher Salary: Trenton, 2003–04



SOURCE | Trenton Public Schools, 2003–04

in their current positions than their counterparts in other provider types.

Preschool Budget

The Abbott preschool program is funded by the state from two different sources. Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) is allocated to all Abbott districts and another 102 school districts serving low-income students. Since 2002–03, Abbott districts also receive Preschool Expansion Aid (PSEA) to cover the costs of expanding the programs to meet full enrollment.

➤ At \$12,183 per preschooler in 2003–04, Trenton’s preschool aid was comparable to the district’s combined education budget for Kindergarten through Grade 12.

Preschool Leadership

State regulations require each Abbott school district to establish an Early Childhood Education Advisory Council (ECEAC). The ECEAC is a group of community stakeholders who are interested in the education and welfare of preschool-age children. The purpose of the ECEAC is to meet regularly, review the school

district's progress towards full implementation of high-quality preschool programs, and participate in program planning, budget development, and early childhood facilities planning.

➤ In 2003–04, the district established an Early Childhood Education Advisory Council (ECEAC) to replace its early childhood advisory board. The ECEAC is made up of district early childhood staff, a parent, and staff members from Step Ahead (ARC-Mercer), Head Start, and other private provider programs. Also on the council are representatives from the New Jersey Departments of Education and Human Services. The ECEAC meets monthly and provides input in the development of long-term operational plans and budgets to make sure they reflect the needs of Trenton's early preschool children.

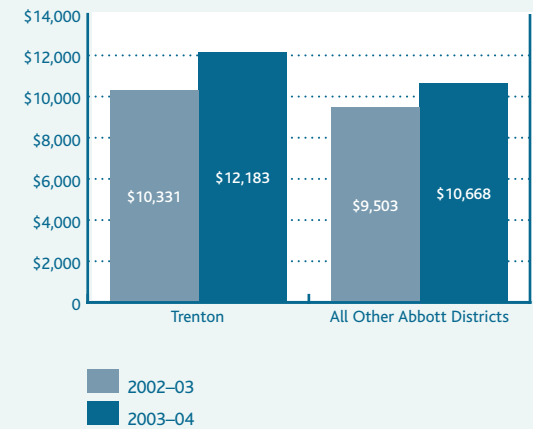
Preschool Student Outcomes

We turn to outcomes to ask if the elements discussed so far—student and family characteristics, opportunities for students to learn, teacher qualifications and supports, budget, and leadership—have worked together to improve learning among the district's three- and four-year-olds.

➤ As a recent report published by the United States Government Accountability Office noted, New Jersey's public preschools do not currently generate consistent and reliable information that will help us to understand how well children are doing statewide. We need to strike a balance between the concerns of early childhood education specialists about widespread assessment of young children and the need to know exactly how well the programs are serving Abbott preschoolers. Outcome measures are needed to help stakeholders to identify programs that work and those that need more assistance.

FIGURE | 2.8

Per Student Preschool Aid: Trenton and All Other Abbott Districts, 2002–03 and 2003–04



SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education, Office of School Funding, 2002–2004

2

The Preschool Program

FIGURE | 2.9

Abbott Preschool Program: Benchmark Status In Trenton

| Benchmark | Status |
|--|--------|
| District teachers required to have bachelor's degree | Met |
| Teachers in community provider programs have until September 2006 to earn a bachelor's degree | Met |
| Head Start teachers have four years from the date their program contracted with the district to earn a bachelor's degree | Met |
| District teachers required to have certification | Met |
| Head Start teachers have four years from the date their program contracted with the district to earn certification | Met |

Endnotes

3. The New Jersey Department of Education covers the cost for six hours, 180 days per year of preschool education. The New Jersey Department of Human Services funds before- and after-school "wraparound" care and care during the summer to provide a ten-hour, 245-day per year program.

4. Age eligibility for three- and four-year-olds is based on the date the district uses to determine age eligibility for Kindergarten.

5. As with the Abbott preschool teacher education requirement, the certification standard applied immediately to teachers in district-run programs. Teachers in community provider programs have until September 2006, and Head Start teachers have four years from the date when their program contracted with the Abbott district.

New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards define what all students should know and be able to do at each grade and by the time they graduate from high school. Abbott provides several means to help students in low-income, urban districts achieve these standards.

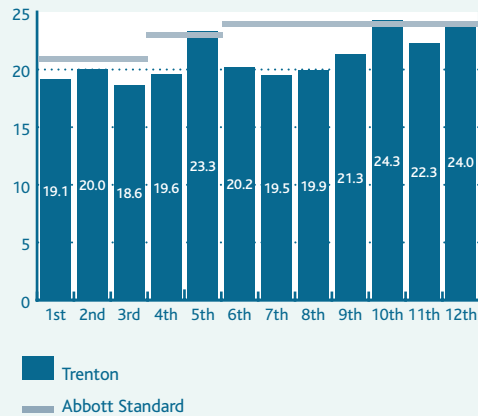
3

3

K-12 Education

FIGURE 3.1

Average Class Size by Grade: Trenton, 2002–03



SOURCE | School Report Card, 2002–03

These include:

- Funding at the same level as the wealthiest (“I and J”) suburban districts in the state;
- Class size limits;
- Comprehensive, or “whole-school” reform;
- Programs and services to meet the needs of students and their families;
- Assessment in each content area to measure student improvement at the classroom, school, and district levels; and
- Ways to help “low-performing” schools improve.

Opportunities for Students to Learn

Class Size. Research suggests that smaller class sizes can help teachers spend less time on behavior management and more time on instruction that is better attuned to students’ needs. In fact, there is strong evidence that smaller class sizes help students in the early elementary grades to perform better in school. Evidence on the benefits of smaller class sizes for students in later grades is less clear. In recognition of the potential benefits to students of all ages, Abbott schools have class size standards as follows:

Kindergarten through Grade 3: 21

Grades 4 through 5: 23

Grades 6 through 12: 24

- In 2002–03, Trenton’s average class sizes in most grades were smaller than the Abbott standard. Limited classroom space may have hampered the district’s progress in this regard, however: class sizes in Grades 5, 10, and 12 exceeded state standards.
- In 1994–95, the average Trenton elementary school class size was about 20. Class size dropped to 16.5 in 1999–00 and rose again to about 18 in 2002–03. Elementary school class sizes in the other Abbott districts decreased from 21 to just less than 19. Across the state and in the wealthiest districts, they have stayed at about 20 students throughout this period.
- Trenton’s high school class sizes were at about 12 students in 1994–95 and rose to about 24 students in 2002–03, larger than in any other district grouping. Trenton’s high school enrollment grew 24 percent during this period. The opening of the Daylight Twilight School likely caused some of the enrollment growth. Enrollment changes in Trenton’s high schools partly explain overall class size increases.

Programs for Children with Disabilities.

The law requires that school districts provide children with disabilities with educational experiences and services tailored to their individual needs. For as much time as pos-

sible, this education must be in an environment with general education students and not in self-contained settings.

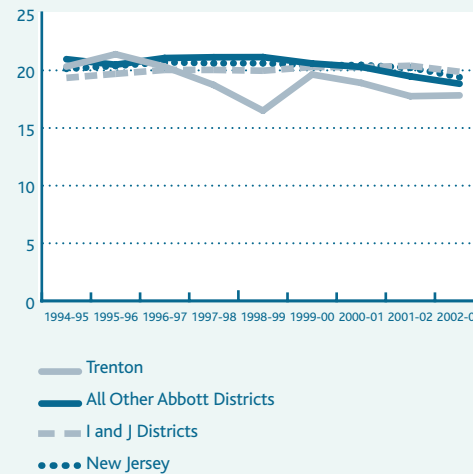
Trenton has about 2,500 special needs students ages six to 21. Only about one in five students with disabilities goes to school in a “very inclusionary” setting where they are educated with general education students for 80 percent or more of the school day. In Trenton, as in the other Abbott districts, about one in three students with disabilities is in a general education setting for less than 40 percent of the school day compared to one in six statewide and about one in 13 in the wealthiest suburbs.

College Preparatory Classes. Nationwide, high school students of color are under-represented in college admissions. One reason might be a lack of opportunity to learn challenging material that would make them more competitive applicants.

Trenton Central High School offers many honors and advanced placement courses to help students become more competitive applicants and prepare them for college. We compared Trenton’s honors and AP course offerings to those in Princeton, a nearby “I” district. Trenton offers 19 honors and advanced placement courses compared to Princeton’s 26.

FIGURE | 3.2

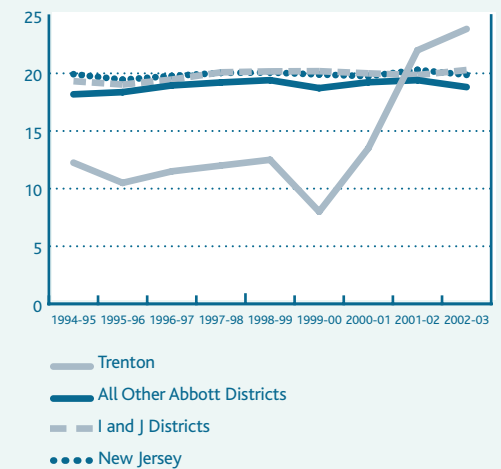
Elementary School Average Class Size by District Grouping, 1994–95 to 2002–03



SOURCE | School Report Card, 1994-95 to 2002-03

FIGURE | 3.3

High School Average Class Size by District Grouping, 1994–95 to 2002–03



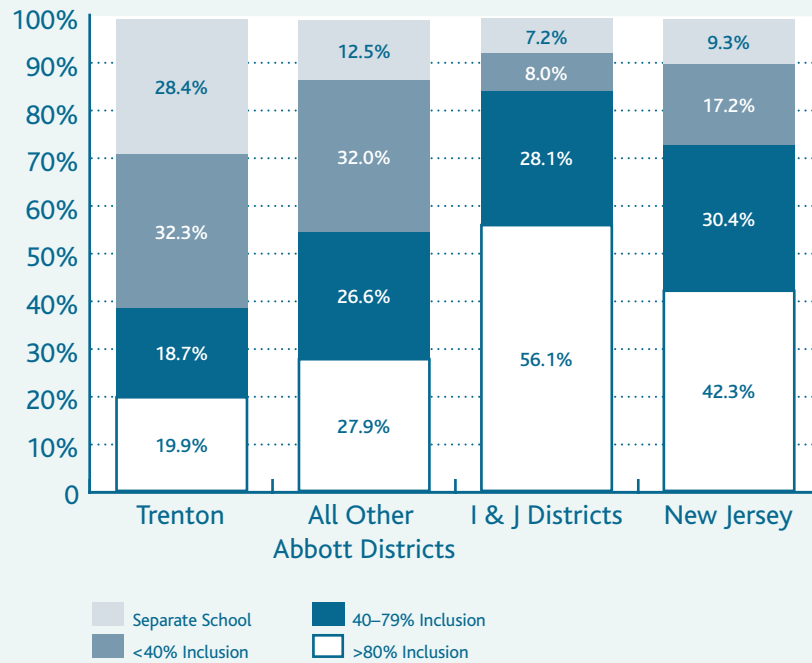
SOURCE | School Report Card, 1994-95 to 2002-03

3

K-12 Education

FIGURE | 3.4

Educational Environment of Students with Disabilities Ages 6–21 by District Grouping, 2003–04



*Home and residential placements, less than one percent.

SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education: Office of Special Education Programs, 2003–04

Student and Family Supports

Under Abbott, the state funds and the districts implement “supplemental programs.” The purpose of these programs is to address disadvantages experienced by young people who grow up in poor cities. There are two kinds of “supplemental” programs under Abbott. Some programs are required; funding to support other programs is available if a school or district can show that the students need them. Below, we present information on some of the supplemental programs and services available in Trenton’s public schools: intensive early literacy; parent involvement; access to technology; and alternative education and dropout prevention. More supplemental programs are described in the larger technical report.

Early Literacy. Under Abbott, schools are required to provide 90-minute blocks of reading instruction to children in Kindergarten through Grade 3. Students in Grades 1 through 3 who are not reading at grade level must receive one-on-one tutoring; older elementary grade students not read-

ing at grade level must receive small-group tutoring.

- We reviewed early literacy programs in four schools that serve students in the elementary grades. They all offered tutoring for some, but not all of the students who needed it. Gregory School students in Grades 1 and 2 received one-on-one tutoring from program staff from the Newgrange Educational Outreach Program of Princeton; and CFL/ALEM, the school's Whole School Reform Model, provides small-group tutoring to students in Grades 4 and 5. Parker and Washington Schools offered tutoring to students in Grades 1 through 3. Rivera School only provided literacy tutoring to special education students in Grades 4 and 5 in inclusion programs. All of the schools cited staffing or budget limits as the reason they did not have the complete tutoring programs required by Abbott.

Parent Involvement. Emerging research suggests that children with parents who are engaged in their *learning* are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, improve their social skills, graduate from high school, and go on to college. Parent involvement in the *school* can be important too if it is linked to improving learning, developing specific skills, or encouraging children to take more challenging classes. Parent involvement can

also build a sense of community accountability for student learning. Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, districts are required to use a portion of their federal funding to form and support a district parent advisory council. Abbott schools are required to make efforts to involve parents and caregivers in their children's education and in general school decision-making. At the very least, each school should have a parent-community coordinator (or family liaison) and parent representation on its SLC.

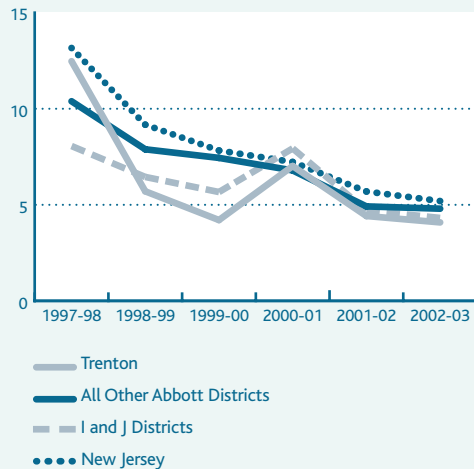
- One of the most visible districtwide parent involvement efforts in Trenton is the DADS program that has been in operation since 2002–03. Trenton DADS are volunteers who tutor and mentor students and provide safe passage to and from school in neighborhoods where there have been violent incidents. DADS also visit schools daily and recruit other parents to participate in school activities.
- Trenton has not had a formal districtwide parent committee in recent years, but intends to re-establish one in 2005–06. The district will encourage the new parent committee to affiliate with the National Network of Partnership Schools who can provide resources to support and enhance meaningful parent involvement. Even without a formal districtwide parent committee, the district has sent 30–40 parents

3

K-12 Education

FIGURE | 3.5

Student–Computer Ratio by District Grouping,
1997–98 to 2002–03



SOURCE | School Report Card, 1997-98 to 2002-03

to attend the convention of district parent advisory councils every year.

- According to the district, most schools have parent-teacher organizations and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) funds are allocated to support them every year. Schools use NCLB funds to provide refreshments, childcare, and informational resources for parent meetings.
- Community members who reviewed this report observed two obstacles to parent involvement in Trenton: a lack of parent training and insufficient cultural sensitivity from the schools. According to them, the training shortage is partly the result of a layoff at the end of the 2003–04 school year. They also said that parent-community coordinators are sometimes asked to do multiple tasks outside of their job responsibilities. The reviewers also observed that some school staff and officials do not communicate effectively with families with cultural backgrounds that are different from their own. Research shows that schools that effectively involve parents show respect for cultural differences and engage diverse families.

Access to Technology. Under Abbott, there should be no more than five students to each computer in each school throughout the district. Abbott districts are required to have staff to make sure that students master the technology needed to reach the state’s Core Curriculum Content Standards, classrooms

and libraries have adequate equipment, and technology is effectively used to support teaching and learning.

- After 1997–98, Trenton students had easier access to computers than their peers in other district groupings. There were 12.4 Trenton students to every computer in 1997–98 and 4.1 students to each computer in 2002–03. Computer access improved dramatically in the other Abbott districts too. The average number of students to every computer decreased from 10.4 to 4.8 in the other Abbott districts, better than the Abbott standard. Access to computers also improved throughout the state and in the wealthiest districts.

Alternative Education and Dropout

Prevention. Abbott districts are also required to identify and provide services to students at risk of failing and dropping out. At a minimum, the districts are required to provide alternative programs for young people in middle and high school, and be adequately staffed with dropout prevention specialists.

- Daylight/Twilight High School serves Trenton students ages 16 and older that have dropped out of school or who are over age for their grade. About one-third of the students are adults who did not finish high school. The school has four sites: the original Bellevue Avenue location and three other satellites

throughout the city. The program, originally modeled after University City High School in Philadelphia, offers courses in all of the core content areas; and elective credits in community service, work-study, and life experience. There are three school shifts throughout the day to accommodate students who work and/or take care of children. Each school session is 10 weeks long making it possible for students to begin at almost at any time during the year.

- A key feature of the Daylight/Twilight program is its support system for students. Students experiencing problems of any kind meet with an administrator as soon as possible. By the end of the school day, each student meets with his or her lead teachers and appropriate subject area teachers in a discussion intended to eliminate issues and concerns. If needed, parents or caregivers are invited for a third session with administrators, teachers, and the student. The district believes that this support process is at the heart of Daylight/Twilight's success in retaining students in school and improving their academic and social/emotional progress.
- Trenton does not currently run an alternative education program for middle school students.

K-12 Teacher Qualifications and Supports

Highly Qualified Teachers. The Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) outlines several measures that schools and districts must take to ensure a quality public education to all of

their students. One provision requires that certain teachers must be “highly qualified” in each subject they teach.⁶ The requirements of becoming highly qualified vary depending on when the teacher is hired and what type of school he or she teaches in. In general, a teacher must hold a four-year college degree, be fully certified, and show a level of knowledge in his or her subject matter by passing a state test. New middle and high school teachers must also have a certain amount of college credits in the subject matter they teach. The law applies equally to teachers who teach many core subjects (such as many elementary school and special education teachers), those who specialize in a single subject (such as many middle and high school teachers), basic skills teachers; and bilingual and ESL teachers.

All districts must submit a “highly qualified teacher” report. Many districts, including Trenton, had difficulty compiling the information needed to fulfill this reporting requirement. In Trenton, the district attempted to collect the needed information from the schools. Schools were to survey teachers and transmit updated information to

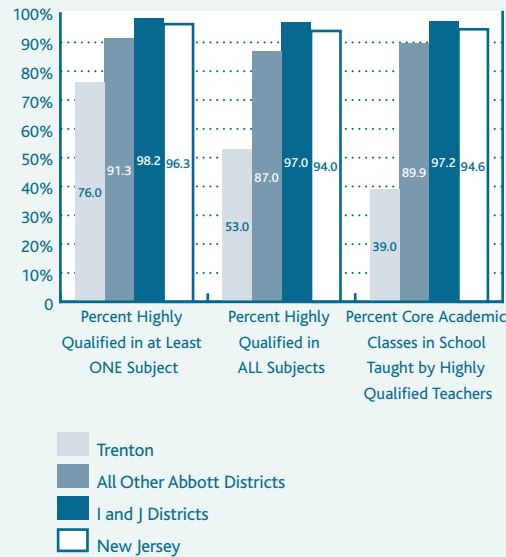
The Daylight/Twilight Program offers courses in all of the core content areas, and elective credits in community service, work-study, and life experience.

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K-12 Education

FIGURE | 3.6

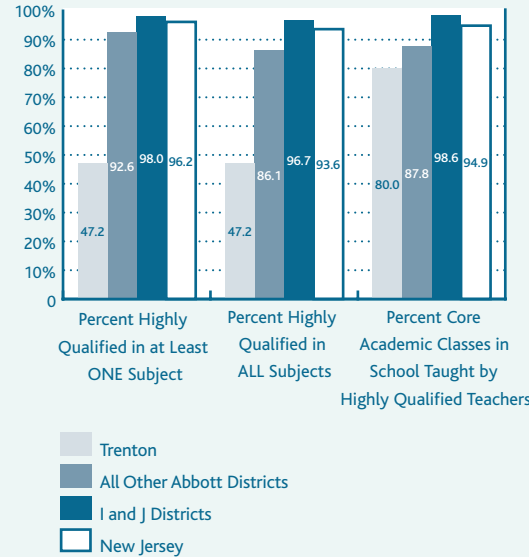
Highly Qualified Teachers by District Grouping:
Elementary Schools, 2003–04



SOURCE | Highly Qualified Teacher Survey, 2004

FIGURE | 3.7

Highly Qualified Teachers by District Grouping:
High Schools, 2003–04



SOURCE | Highly Qualified Teacher Survey, 2004

the district office. Because of uneven compliance with this request, district staff needed to find another way to comply with the federal reporting requirement. In the end, district staff compiled the needed information from human resources files which may have lacked complete, up-to-date information. The Trenton report review team believed that this occurred as a result of intradistrict communication problems. After confirming that the following information was what the district had submitted, the reviewers concluded that it should be viewed—despite its potential problems—because of its importance as a proxy for teaching quality.

- The vast majority of teachers in the state are highly qualified, but Trenton had the lowest percentage of highly qualified teachers among the district groupings we examined. Three out of four (76%) Trenton elementary school teachers were highly qualified in at least *one* subject and slightly more than half (53%) were highly qualified in *all* of the core subjects they taught.
- There was a real gap between Trenton and the other district groupings in the percent of *classes* taught by highly qualified teachers. Thirty-nine percent of Trenton’s core elementary school classes were taught by highly qualified teachers, compared to about 90 percent in the other

Abbott districts and even more in the other district groupings. There are two reasons we might see a difference between the percent of highly qualified teachers on the one hand and the percent of classes taught by them on the other. The percent of classes may be lower if highly qualified teachers have lighter courseloads. Also, teachers may be asked to teach subjects other than the ones they are highly qualified for. In Trenton, either the highly qualified teachers teach fewer classes or are being assigned to teach other subjects.

- Fewer than half of Trenton's high school teachers were highly qualified in at least one subject; however, 80 percent of the core academic classes were taught by highly qualified teachers. These findings suggest that the highly qualified teachers taught the majority of core subject area classes in the high schools. The other Abbott districts fared relatively well in comparison with the I and J districts and the state average on the three measures of highly qualified teachers.

Staffing Patterns. Several staffing positions are needed to put the Abbott reforms into action. Some positions are required in all schools, others are specific to elementary or secondary schools.

- All of Trenton's elementary schools had teacher tutors on staff to assist children who have difficulty reading. The schools we visited provided tutoring to students reading behind grade level

FIGURE | 3.8

Percent of Schools with Required Abbott Staff Positions: Trenton and All Other Abbott Districts, 2002-03 to 2003-04

| | Trenton | | All Other Abbott Districts | |
|---|---------|---------|----------------------------|---------|
| | 2002-03 | 2003-04 | 2002-03 | 2003-04 |
| Elementary Schools Staff | | | | |
| Instructional Facilitator | 100.0% | 100.0% | 97.1% | 94.9% |
| Social Worker | 55.6% | 33.3% | 70.5% | 70.8% |
| Teacher Tutor | 100.0% | 100.0% | 20.2% | 36.9% |
| All Positions | 55.6% | 33.3% | 18.3% | 33.7% |
| Middle and High Schools Staff | | | | |
| Attendance/Dropout Prevention Officer | 40.0% | 40.0% | 49.8% | 52.4% |
| Health-Social Service Coordinator | 40.0% | 20.0% | 34.3% | 38.0% |
| All Positions | 30.0% | 0.0% | 25.0% | 26.3% |
| All Schools Staff | | | | |
| Family Liaison (Parent-Community Coordinator) | 54.2% | 83.3% | 69.3% | 70.3% |
| Guidance Counselor | 95.8% | 100.0% | 93.7% | 93.2% |
| Librarian/Media Specialist | 95.8% | 95.8% | 89.1% | 90.8% |
| Nurse/Health Specialist | 95.8% | 95.8% | 97.3% | 97.1% |
| Security Officer | 95.8% | 100.0% | 87.7% | 88.4% |
| Technology Coordinator | 87.5% | 91.7% | 82.1% | 86.0% |
| All Positions | 45.8% | 75.0% | 58.0% | 55.8% |

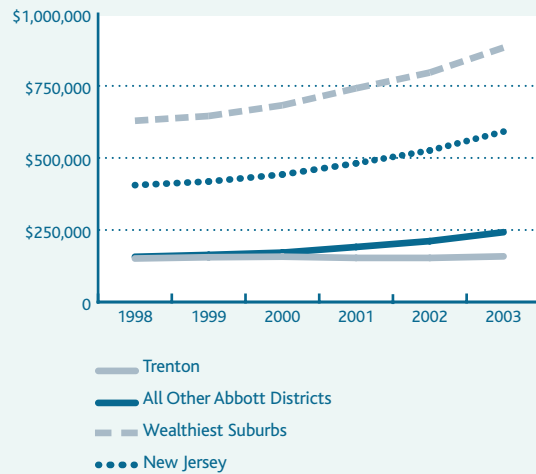
SOURCE | DOENET Abbott School-Based Budget Staffing Tables, 2002-03 to 2003-04

3

K-12 Education

FIGURE 3.9

Average Property Value Per Student by District Grouping, 1998–2003



SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Community Affairs: Office of Local Government Services, 1998–2003

in some, but not all of the elementary grades, however.

- Between 2002–03 and 2003–04, there was some change in the extent to which Trenton schools staffed positions that are required under Abbott. More schools had at least one family liaison, guidance counselor, security officer, and technology coordinator. Fewer elementary schools had at least one social worker. Fewer middle and high schools had a health and social service coordinator.

K-12 Budget

Public education is, of course, an essential service provided by local governments and education costs are higher in school districts with high concentrations of low-income households. Because local taxes are based on property values, property wealth is a good indicator of the availability of money to support education.

- The wealthiest suburbs had five times more property wealth per student than in Trenton in 2003. That same year, the state average was four times higher than Trenton.

General Education Funding.⁷ The basic source of general education funding in New Jersey is the local tax levy. In many school

districts, the local tax levy is supplemented by state aid. Several sources of state aid—available to all New Jersey school districts on a formula basis—come out of the school funding law called the *Comprehensive Educational Improvement and Financing Act of 1996 (CEIFA)*. “Core Curriculum Standards Aid” (CCSA) makes up the difference between what school districts can afford and what the state estimates to be an adequate level of school funding to support a thorough and efficient education. Some districts also receive “Supplemental CCSA” to ease their local tax burdens. “Stabilization Aid” goes to districts that might otherwise lose too much CCSA from year to year because of enrollment changes.

A key feature of Abbott is the requirement that general education funding in the poorest urban school districts be at a level *equal* to what is spent on average in our state’s most successful suburban districts. In recognition of the low property wealth and high tax rates in these districts, the state is required

to provide the funding needed to achieve this equality. Abbott districts have received this funding—called “Abbott Parity Aid”—from the state every year since 1997–98.⁸

➤ On a per student basis, Trenton and the other Abbott districts have as much money as the successful suburban districts to support general education. In fact, there has been equity in funding for general education between the poorest cities and the wealthiest suburbs in New Jersey since 1997 when Abbott parity began.

Supplemental Programs Funding. To be ready and successful learners, the children and youth of Trenton have unique needs for health, nutrition, and social services that must be addressed. There are three sources of money to support supplemental programs in Abbott districts: one comes from the federal government and two from the state. The federal funding is called “Title I” and provides funding for schools serving children from low-income families. The money is intended to improve educational quality and give extra help to struggling students. The second supplemental programs funding source, “Demonstrably Effective Program Aid” (DEPA),

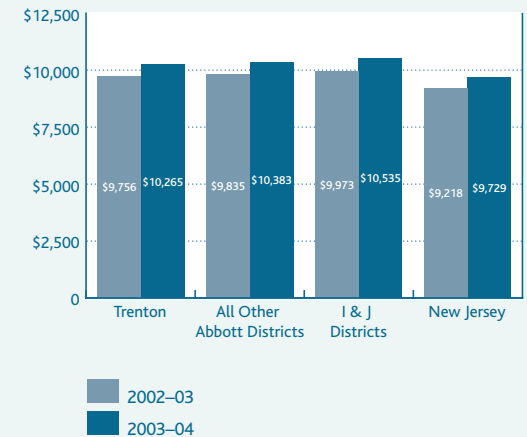
has been provided by the state since CEIFA. It is targeted to school districts serving poor children and calculated on a per student basis. Both Abbott and non-Abbott districts may receive Title I and DEPA funds.

Only Abbott districts receive “Additional Abbott Aid,” the third source of supplemental programs funding. Each Abbott district must apply to the state for Additional Abbott Aid and justify its request with evidence of student need. The New Jersey Department of Education reviews district requests and issues its decisions. The state may fully fund, deny portions, or fund programs at lower levels than requested by the districts. School districts may appeal the state’s decision in court. Not surprisingly, this process has been a source of conflict between the Abbott districts and the New Jersey Department of Education since it began in 1999.

➤ In 2003–04, Trenton received an additional \$2,424 per student in supplemental program aid to support the second half-day of Kindergarten and other programs and services to meet the needs of its students and their families.

FIGURE | 3.10

Per Student General Education Funding by District Grouping, 2002–03 and 2003–04



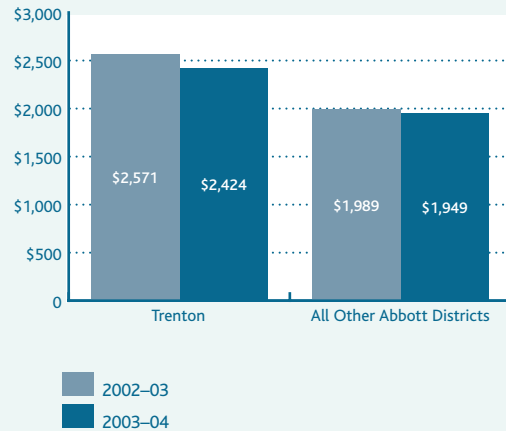
SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education, Office of School Funding, 2002–2004

3

K-12 Education

FIGURE 3.11

Per Student Supplemental Program Aid: Trenton and All Other Abbott Districts, 2002–03 and 2003–04



SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education, Office of School Funding, 2002–2004

K-12 Leadership

School Leadership Councils. State regulations require every school in the Abbott districts to have a School Leadership Council (SLC). The SLC is a group that serves on a volunteer basis to represent school staff and neighborhood residents. Their primary purpose is to help improve teaching and learning. They do this by taking part in program planning and decision-making and encouraging broad participation by school staff and neighborhood stakeholders. SLC members serve at least two years with staggered terms. SLCs should meet at least once a month.

SLCs should take part in a wide variety of activities to carry out their functions, including: reviewing needs assessment and achievement data; reviewing school-based budgets prepared by the central office and making recommendations to amend them; and participating in training provided by the district or New Jersey Department of Education. SLCs that are trained to perform personnel functions may also interview school principal

candidates and recommend candidates to the district's Superintendent.

Along with the other Abbott districts, Trenton used school-based budgeting in the early years of Abbott. These budgets were "zero-based," that is, they specified each and every needed program and staff member from the ground up. In general, SLCs took the lead in school-based planning and budgeting efforts, getting input from a variety of school staff and community members on needed programs and staffing.

In all of the Abbott districts, control over budgeting and planning moved away from the schools and their SLCs and returned to the district office in 2002–03. Since then, the process has begun with the district's business administrator, who sets school budgets based on a state template, previous spending levels, and a cost-of-living increase. The district's business administrator sends a copy of each school's budget to its SLC for review and modification. SLCs may then be asked to support and sign their school's budget before it is

packaged with the district's budget and sent to the New Jersey Department of Education.

- Representation of stakeholder groups on SLCs varies from school to school in Trenton. Typically, they are made up of the required members, although one chair admitted that there has never been parent representation on her committee.
- SLCs in the six schools we visited participated in the budgeting and three-year planning process. Five had the opportunity to vote in support of their schools' plans and budgets as required under Abbott.
- One SLC representative talked about how difficult it has been to find out who is responsible at the district and state level for providing SLCs with professional development. SLC members told us that they needed guidance with budgeting, curriculum, and team building. One chair expressed frustration with the conflicting messages SLCs often receive from district officials about the budgeting process: program staff encourage them to propose needed programs in their plans and budgets, but finance staff tell them that the funding is not available. As a result, most requests for added funding for new staff positions are denied.

Abbott Advisory Council. Each Abbott district should have an "Abbott Advisory Council," a steering committee that represents the district and its community stake-

holders. The primary responsibilities of the Council are to review district policies and procedures to implement the Abbott reforms.

- As of September 2004, Trenton did not have a districtwide Abbott Advisory Council.

K-12 Student Outcomes

As education stakeholders, we need to ensure that educational success is not determined by where a student lives. We need to ensure that the schools provide opportunities for students to learn; staff to teach students, and supports for that staff; financial resources to work with; a sound educational environment; and leadership to guide the whole process. The Abbott remedies were intended to support efforts of schools, districts, parents and advocates to improve these elements of schooling. We cannot understand how schools or districts are doing—or help them to do better—unless we consider all of these elements. We encourage readers to review and consider the student outcomes presented below in light of the material presented up to this point.

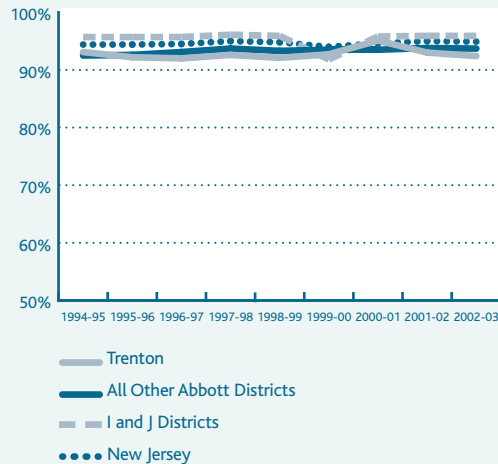
Each Abbott district should have an Abbott Advisory Council to review district policies and procedures and implement the Abbott reforms.

3

K-12 Education

FIGURE | 3.12

Student Attendance by District Grouping: Elementary Schools, 1994–95 to 2002–03



SOURCE | School Report Card, 1994–95 to 2002–03

Student Attendance. Students who feel safe at school and are engaged in their academic work tend to go to school more often. Of course, students also miss school because of other reasons such as poor health and family problems. In general, we think that student attendance is an important indicator that school is a positive experience for children and youth and that the students' families, the district, and the larger community are addressing any obstacles to attendance that may exist. It is presented here as a leading indicator: students can only benefit from opportunities to learn if they attend school regularly.

- Trenton's elementary school student attendance was at 93 percent in 1994–95 and remained at about that level in all years except 2000–01, when it was at about 95 percent. Elementary school attendance across New Jersey was high, at about 95 percent in 1994–95 and stayed just as high right through 2002–03. In most years, about 95 percent of elementary students in the I and J districts attended school on any given day.
- Attendance rates in the high schools were lower than in the elementary schools across the state. Trenton High School attendance varied from year to year: it was at its lowest in 2000–01 with 81 percent of students attend-

ing on an average day; it was at its highest in the following year, with 87 percent attendance. High school attendance was higher in the other Abbott districts and improved from 86 to 89 percent over the years. The high school attendance rate remained at about 92 percent across the state. High school attendance was highest in the wealthiest suburbs at about 95 percent in all years except 1999–00.

Child and Youth Well-Being. Children and youth who are physically, socially, and emotionally healthy are better able to learn at school. Many of Abbott's supplemental programs have as their purpose to improve the well-being of children and youth of New Jersey's cities. School staff either provide direct services to children and their families or help them to link with needed services already provided in the community. Service provision and linkage are essential parts of the jobs of health and social services coordinators, parent-community coordinators, family liaisons, social workers, and guidance counselors, to name a few. As a central public institution of the urban community, schools play a critical role in ensuring the well-being of children and youth. Schools are not alone in their

responsibility—parents, elected officials, and public and private agencies in the city must all play a role. As the African proverb so famously says: “It takes a whole village to raise a child.”

➤ The City of Trenton compares poorly with the state on three indicators of child and youth well-being. There has been some improvement in teen births among young women ages 10 to 14 and ages 15 to 19. The child abuse and neglect rate also decreased. However, these rates are still unacceptably high and much higher than the state average.

School Safety. For many years, federal law has required every school and district to report the violence and vandalism that occur in schools. The New Jersey Department of Education compiles annual counts and reports them publicly. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) specified a standard of safety beyond which schools are defined as “persistently dangerous.” Under the “Unsafe School Choice Option,” the law provides that families of children who are victims of violence or who go to a persistently dangerous school may choose to send their child to another public

school in the district or a charter school in the same city.

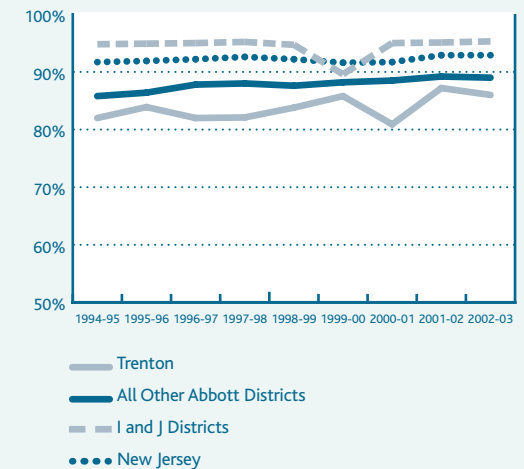
The New Jersey Department of Education considers how many violent and disruptive incidents occur over a three-year period to identify persistently dangerous schools. There are two types of incidents counted. They are:

- 1) *Category A Offenses:* firearm offenses; aggravated assaults on another student; assaults with a weapon on another student; and assaults on a school district staff member.
- 2) *Category B Offenses:* simple assault; weapons possession or sales (other than a firearm); gang fight; robbery or extortion; sex offense; terroristic threat; arson; sales or distribution of drugs; and harassment and bullying.

The persistently dangerous classification has been roundly criticized by many camps and on many grounds. The most important criticisms, for the purposes of this report, are related to reporting accuracy. Our main concern is the likelihood of under-reporting by schools and districts. Principals and superintendents who abide to the letter of the law feel that they are unfairly penalized while schools and districts that “fluff” their reports

FIGURE | 3.13

Student Attendance by District Grouping:
High Schools, 1994–95 to 2002–03



SOURCE | School Report Card, 1994-95 to 2002-03

3

K-12 Education

FIGURE | 3.14

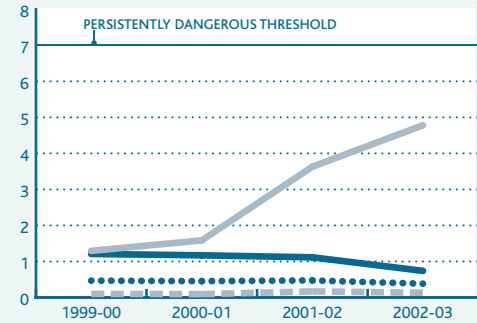
Child and Youth Well-Being Indicators: Trenton and New Jersey, 1998–2002

| Indicator | Time Period | Trenton | | | | New Jersey | |
|-------------------------|-------------|---------|-----------|--------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| | | Time 1 | | Time 2 | | Time 1 | Time 2 |
| | | NUMBER | PER 1,000 | NUMBER | PER 1,000 | PER 1,000 | PER 1,000 |
| Births to Teens (10–14) | 1998–2002 | 12 | 3.7 | 8 | 2.5 | 0.6 | 0.5 |
| Births to Teens (15–19) | 1998–2002 | 329 | 119.4 | 252 | 91.5 | 34.1 | 28.8 |
| Child Abuse and Neglect | 1998–2002 | 275 | 10.4 | 233 | 8.8 | 3.4 | 4.2 |

SOURCE | New Jersey Center for Health Statistics, 1998–2002; 2000 US Census; Annie E. Casey Foundation, *2004 Kids Count*; Association for Children of New Jersey, 1997–2002 Kids Count.

FIGURE | 3.15

“Category A” Offenses by District Grouping: Elementary Schools, 1999–00 to 2002–03



SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education: Office of Program Support Services, Division of Student Services, 1999–2003

are not. We suspect that such “fluffing” is fairly widespread in New Jersey, considering the critical importance of school safety to parents and children and the attention given to the annual publication of such incidents. Under newly adopted regulations, school districts have the power to penalize any employee who knowingly falsifies incident reports.⁹ The new regulations do not outline what powers the New Jersey Department of Education has to penalize school districts who knowingly falsify reports.

7 None of Trenton’s schools qualified as persistently dangerous under federal law. Although Trenton Central High School was not considered persistently dangerous, it reported well over the number of violent or disruptive incidents—in Categories A and B—to place it in the persistently dangerous range in three *nonconsecutive* years out of the four we reviewed.

Student Achievement. In New Jersey, the fourth grade test is called the ASK₄ (Assessment of Skills and Knowledge). It is essentially the same test as the former ESPA (Elementary School Proficiency Assessment). The 8th grade test is called the GEPA (Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment). The 11th grade test

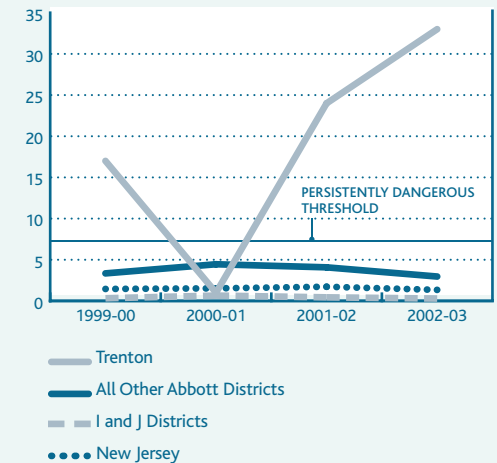
is the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA). Before 2001–02 high school students took a different test called the HSPT (High School Proficiency Test).

There are many ways to examine achievement test results; each way tells a part of the story. *Proficiency percentages* tell us how many students met standards for their grade level, but do not tell us about small or large changes that did not cross the state’s official proficiency cutpoints. *Average test scores* show changes that may not register in a proficiency analysis, but do not tell us how many students met the state’s standards.

Below, we present proficiency percentages and average scale scores for the language arts literacy and math tests at Grades 4, 8, and 11, respectively. We report test results for all available years for each test through 2002–03. (Statewide 2003–04 test results became available too late to be incorporated in this report.) First, we compare average scores over time for general education students in Trenton, all other Abbotts, the wealthiest (I and J) districts in the state, and the state overall.

FIGURE | 3.16

“Category A” Offenses by District Grouping:
High Schools, 1999–00 to 2002–03



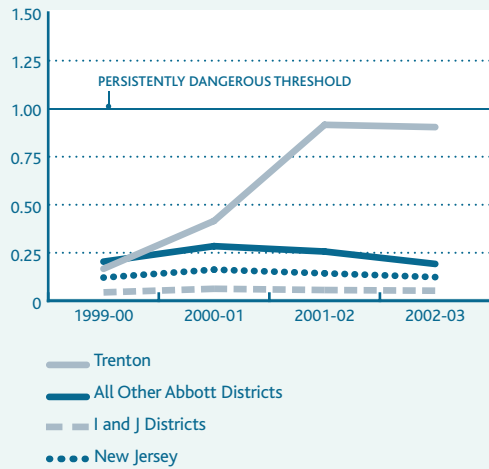
SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education: Office of Program Support Services, Division of Student Services, 1999–2003

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K-12 Education

FIGURE | 3.17

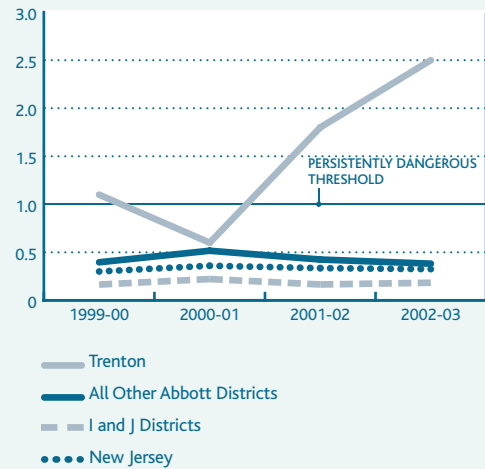
NCLB (Category B) Index by District Grouping: Elementary Schools, 1999-00 to 2002-03



SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education: Office of Program Support Services, Division of Student Services, 1999-2003

FIGURE | 3.18

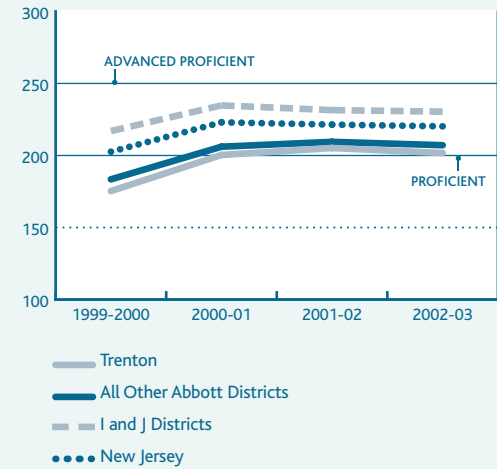
NCLB (Category B) Index by District Grouping: High Schools, 1999-00 to 2002-03



SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education: Office of Program Support Services, Division of Student Services, 1999-2003

FIGURE | 3.19

Grade 4 Language Arts Literacy Average Score by District Grouping, 1999-00 to 2002-03



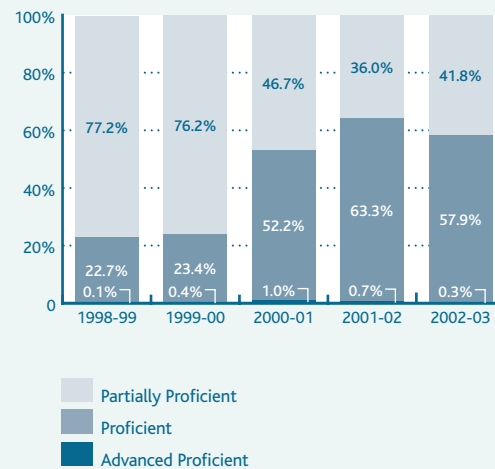
SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education: Office of Assessment and Evaluation, 1999-00 to 2002-03; School Report Card, 1999-00 to 2002-03

Second, we show the percent of Trenton's general education students scoring within the three proficiency categories over time. Finally, in recognition that district averages may mask important differences between schools, we highlight schools that did well on each test in 2002–03 and schools that improved the most over time.¹⁰

- The district's fourth graders have made gains in language arts. Trenton's general education scores rose most dramatically in 2000–01, as did the scores throughout the state, but stayed at about the same level through 2002–03.
- Grade 4 math scores improved over time. Trenton's math scores improved by seven percent from 182 in 1999–00 to 194 in 2002–03. The fourth graders in the other Abbott districts scored slightly higher over time and improved by five percent. Grade 4 math scores throughout the state and in the wealthiest districts were higher, but improved less.
- More and more Trenton fourth graders scored proficient and advanced proficient on the math test with each passing year. Twenty-three percent scored at least proficient in 1998–99, compared to 42 percent in 2002–03.
- There was a great deal of variation among the schools on the 2002–03 Grade 4 language arts literacy test. Washington Elementary was the highest performer with nearly every general education student scoring proficient or bet-

FIGURE | 3.20

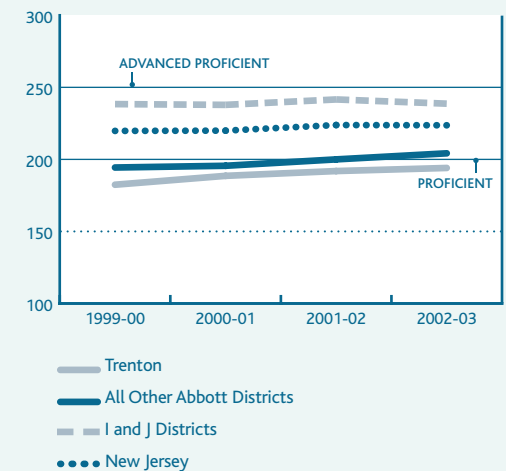
Grade 4 Language Arts Literacy Proficiency:
Trenton, 1998–99 to 2002–03



SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education: Office of Assessment and Evaluation, 1999-00 to 2002-03; School Report Card, 1999-00 to 2002-03

FIGURE | 3.21

Grade 4 Math Average Score by District Grouping 1999–00 to 2002–03



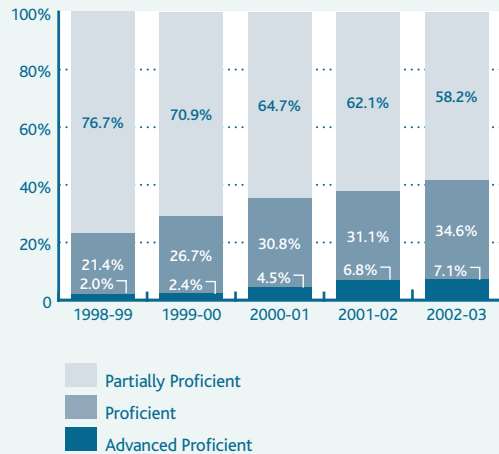
SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education: Office of Assessment and Evaluation, 1999-00 to 2002-03; School Report Card, 1999-00 to 2002-03

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FIGURE | 3.22

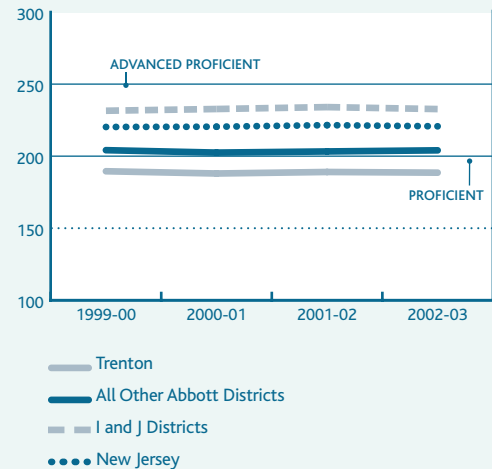
Grade 4 Math Proficiency: Trenton, 1998–99 to 2002–03



SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education: Office of Assessment and Evaluation, 1999-00 to 2002-03; School Report Card, 1999-00 to 2002-03

FIGURE | 3.23

Grade 8 Language Arts Literacy Average Score by District Grouping, 1999–00 to 2002–03



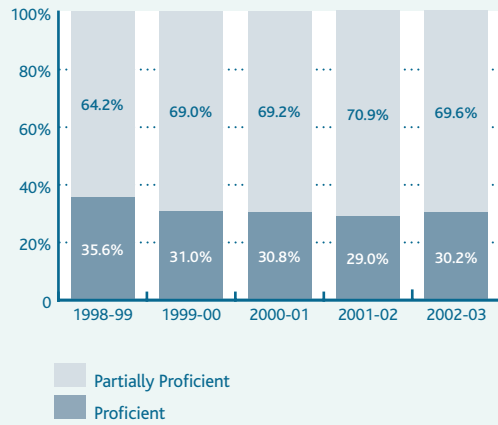
SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education: Office of Assessment and Evaluation, 1999-00 to 2002-03; School Report Card, 1999-00 to 2000-01

ter. Mott, Harrison, and Franklin Elementary Schools were also high performers that year.

- On the other hand, in two schools, fewer than 40 percent of the general education students scored at least proficient on the Grade 4 language arts literacy test: P.J. Hill and Monument Elementary Schools.
- Improvement over time is, of course, an important indicator that a school is moving in the right direction: Stokes, Grant, and Jefferson Elementary Schools showed the biggest gains on the Grade 4 language arts literacy test between 1999–00 and 2002–03.
- Trenton schools also varied widely on the Grade 4 math test. Four schools were high-performers in math: Washington, Grant, Jefferson, and Parker Elementary Schools.
- On the other hand, in three schools, fewer than 33 percent of the general education students scored at least proficient on the Grade 4 math test: P.J. Hill, Gregory, Monument, and Luis Muñoz Rivera Elementary Schools.
- The four schools with most improved Grade 4 math scores were: Grant, Jefferson, Parker, and Stokes.
- When compared to the array of instructional programs and reforms for elementary school students, Abbott has yet to provide for students in the middle and high school grades. Overall, Grade 8 average scores and proficiency percentages have remained stable although lower than the state on average.

FIGURE | 3.24

Grade 8 Language Arts Literacy Proficiency: Trenton, 1998–99 to 2002–03

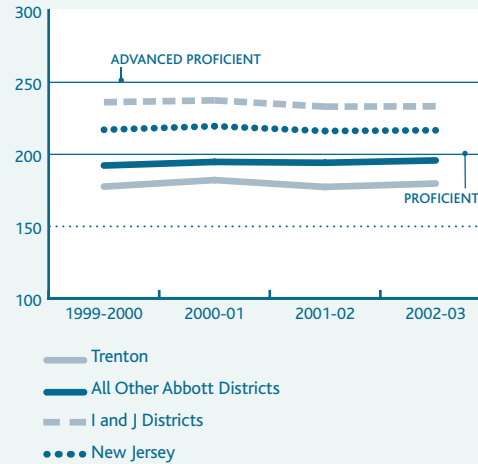


*Advanced Proficient, less than one percent in all years.

SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education: Office of Assessment and Evaluation, 1999-00 to 2002-03; School Report Card, 1999-00 to 2000-01.

FIGURE | 3.25

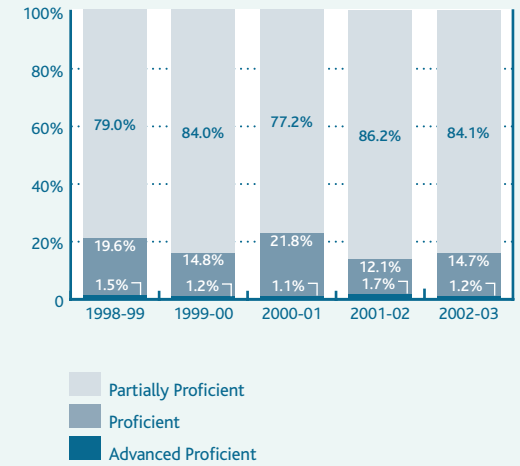
Grade 8 Math Average Score by District Grouping, 1999–00 to 2002–03



SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education: Office of Assessment and Evaluation, 1999-00 to 2002-03; School Report Card 1999-00 to 2000-01

FIGURE | 3.26

Grade 8 Math Proficiency: Trenton, 1998–99 to 2002–03



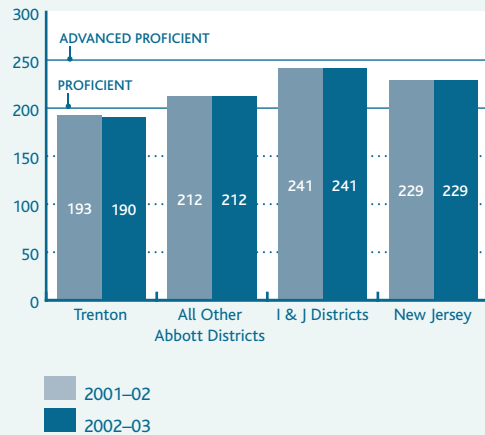
SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education: Office of Assessment and Evaluation, 1999-00 to 2002-03; School Report Card, 1999-00 to 2000-01

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FIGURE | 3.27

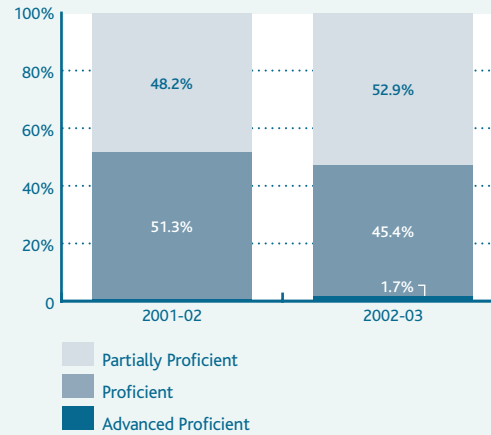
Grade 11 (HSPA) Language Arts Literacy Average Score by District Grouping 2001–02 to 2002–03



SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education Office of Assessment and Evaluation, 2001–02 to 2002–03; School Report Card, 2001–02 to 2002–03

FIGURE | 3.28

Grade 11 (HSPA) Language Arts Literacy Proficiency: Trenton, 2001–02 to 2002–03



SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education Office of Assessment and Evaluation, 2001–02 to 2002–03; School Report Card, 2001–02 to 2002–03

- Performance on the Grade 8 tests varied widely among Trenton’s schools. Columbus Elementary School stood out as a high performer in the district in 2002–03.
- In five schools, fewer than one in three general education students scored proficient or better on the Grade 8 language arts literacy test in 2002–03: Hedgepeth Williams, Grace A. Dunn, Martin Luther King Jr., and Arthur Holland Middle Schools; and Luis Muñoz Marin Elementary School.
- Fewer than one in three general education students at six schools scored at least proficient on the Grade 8 math test that year: Hedgepeth Williams, Grace A. Dunn, Martin Luther King Jr., and Arthur Holland Middle Schools; and Luis Muñoz Marin and Joyce Kilmer Elementary Schools.
- Columbus Elementary School and Grace A. Dunn Middle showed gains in Grade 8 language arts literacy between 1999–00 and 2002–03. The average score of students also improved at Columbus Elementary School and Martin Luther King Jr. and Arthur Holland Middle Schools.
- On average, Trenton’s Grade 11 language arts literacy scores were just under the proficiency level in 2001–02 and 2002–03 with about half of Trenton 11th graders meeting the state proficiency standard. Districtwide, Grade 11 math scores also remained below the proficiency level, with about 21 percent meeting

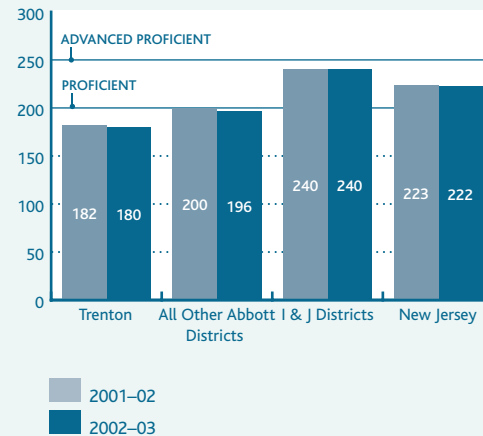
state standards. Like the nationwide stagnation in Grade 11 test scores, this lack of progress is likely the result of the relative lack of attention given to reforming high schools in New Jersey. Until recently, the Abbott remedies have provided less in the way of real instructional reforms at the middle or high school levels when compared to what has been available for younger children.

Neither of Trenton’s high schools met the criteria to be called high performers in 2002–03 in language arts literacy or math. Grade 11 students at Daylight/Twilight showed gains on both tests, however.

High School Completion. High school completion is an important event that greatly affects young people’s chances for social and economic improvement. Because of this, and because it is the culmination of a school system’s responsibilities to its community’s residents, graduation as a major indicator of educational success. In New Jersey, there was no official way to estimate graduation rates until recently. We estimated historical graduation rates using a cumulative promotion index.

FIGURE | 3.29

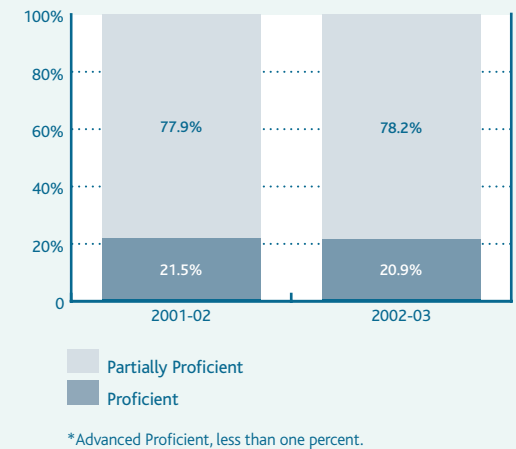
Grade 11 (HSPA) Math Average Score by District Grouping, 2001–02 to 2002–03



SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education Office of Assessment and Evaluation, 2001–02 to 2002–03; School Report Card, 2001–02 to 2002–03

FIGURE | 3.30

Grade 11 (HSPA) Math Proficiency: Trenton, 2001–02 to 2002–03



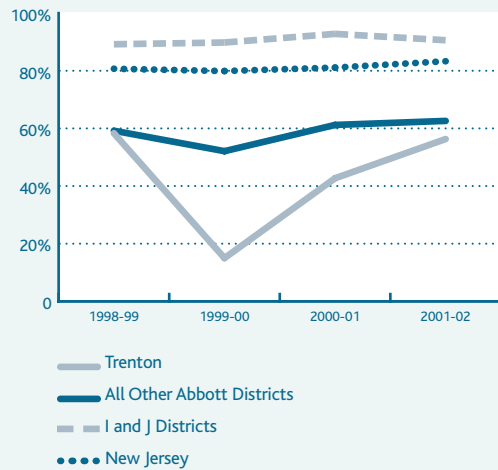
SOURCE | New Jersey Department of Education Office of Assessment and Evaluation, 2001–02 to 2002–03; School Report Card, 2001–02 to 2002–03

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FIGURE | 3.31

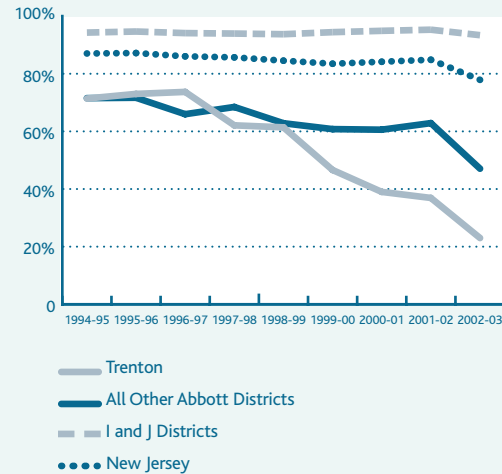
Cumulative Promotion Index by District Grouping, 1998–99 to 2001–02



SOURCE | Trenton Public Schools, 1998–99 to 2002–03

FIGURE | 3.32

Graduation by Traditional Grade 11 Exam by District Grouping, 1994–95 to 2002–03



SOURCE | Trenton Public Schools, 1999–00; School Report Card, 1994–95 to 2002–03

➤ Our estimate suggests that just over half (56%) of Trenton's class of 2001–02 graduated from high school—about the same as the estimated percentage three years earlier in 1998–99 (58%). In the interim years, Trenton's cumulative promotion index was a great deal lower. A close inspection of the underlying information revealed consistent enrollment losses between Grades 9 and 10 in Trenton and enrollment gains in the upper grades. By this measure, high schools across the state have graduated about 80 percent of their students and the wealthiest districts have graduated about 90 percent. The cumulative promotion index in the other Abbott districts was 59 percent in 1998–99 and 63 percent in 2001–02. More needs to be done to assess true graduation rates in New Jersey high schools.

➤ The indicator we present here and in other *Abbott Indicators Reports* estimates how many students graduate from high school in four years. By definition, it does not fully capture increases caused by students who return to school after several years' absence, even if the students go on to graduate. Trenton began its alternative high school program to address its high school dropout rate. The goal of the program is to bring over-age and adult students back to school and help them to earn their diplomas. Indeed, according to district reports, the number of high school graduates has increased in Trenton in each year since

the program began. We have included an Appendix memo from the district containing this information so that Trenton stakeholders can consider both indicators: the cumulative promotion index and the number of graduates from the district's high schools.

Routes to Graduation. High school achievement tests assess if students have mastered the content and skills outlined in New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards. Before 2001–02, it was assumed that graduating general education students mastered the content standards and passed a traditional Grade 11 exam. Since then, New Jersey high school students who fail one or more sections of the traditional exam can still earn a standard, academic diploma if they take and pass the alternative exam, the Special Review Assessment (SRA). People disagree about alternative routes to graduation like the SRA. Critics argue that students must show that they have mastered curriculum standards to graduate from high school. Supporters praise New Jersey's SRA and argue that states with a single, high-stakes graduation test have a

FIGURE 3.33

Summary Table. Abbott K-12 Programs: Benchmark Status In Trenton

| Benchmark | Status |
|---|---|
| Kindergarten–Grade 3 maximum class size: 21 | Met |
| Grades 4 and 5 maximum class size: 23 | Not Met |
| Grades 6 through 12 maximum class size: 24 | Not Met |
| Abbott districts have funding parity with the I & J districts | Met |
| Student to computer ratio is 5 to 1 | Met |
| 2003–04 Grade 4 Achievement Tests*: For a school to make Adequate Yearly Progress, each of 10 demographic subgroups had to have: 1) 95% test participation; 2) 68% percent score at least proficient in language arts literacy; AND 3) 53% score at least proficient in math. | Met in: Cadwalader Jefferson Rivera |
| 2003–04 Grade 8 Achievement Tests: For a school to make Adequate Yearly Progress, each of 10 demographic subgroups had to have: 1) 95% test participation; 2) 58% score at least proficient in language arts literacy; AND 3) 39% score at least proficient in math. | Met in: Joyce Kilmer |
| 2003–04 Grade 11 Achievement Tests: For a school to make Adequate Yearly Progress, each of 10 demographic subgroups had to have: 1) 95% test participation; 2) 73% score at least proficient in language arts literacy; AND 3) 55% score at least proficient in math. | Not Met |
| To avoid being considered "persistently dangerous", schools must have an average of less than 7 or more Category "A" offenses for three consecutive years. | Elementary School: Met Secondary School: Met |
| To avoid being considered "persistently dangerous" schools must have an NCLB Index rating less than 1. | Elementary School: Met Secondary School: Met |

* The New Jersey Department of Education provided 2003–04 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) data several months prior to releasing statewide 2003–04 achievement test scores. Therefore, we include the 2003–04 AYP data to provide readers with the most updated information available, while achievement test score data is only analyzed through 2002–03.

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strong incentive to push the students out of school who cannot pass the test. We believe that the people of New Jersey can do both: maintain high academic standards and make sure that all students have the opportunity to earn academic diplomas.

➤ In Trenton and the other Abbott districts the percentage of students who graduated by passing the traditional Grade 11 exam decreased since 1994–95. In Trenton, 71 percent of the class of 1994–95 graduated after passing the traditional exam. By 2002–03, only about 23 percent graduated this way.

Endnotes

6. Federal law on “highly qualified teachers” applies to teachers in the following “core content areas:” English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, world languages, civics and government, economics, arts (music, theatre, and art), history, and geography. New Jersey’s Core Curriculum Content Standards that align with these content areas are: language arts literacy, science, mathematics, social studies, world languages, and the visual and performing arts.

7. Here, we focus on general education funding as the foundation of a school district’s budget. Most school districts also receive categorical aid from the federal and/or state governments to fund supportive programs and services for students with disabilities, English language learners, and other special needs populations.

8. As of school year 2004–05, Abbott Parity Aid is known as Educational Opportunity Aid (EOA) and Additional Abbott Aid is known as Discretionary Educational Opportunity Aid (DEOA).

9. The newly adopted regulation guiding penalizing school employees who falsify violence and vandalism incident reports is New Jersey Administrative Code 6:16, Section 5.3.

10. Here, a school is identified as a high performer if its general education students met or exceeded the proficiency threshold set by the New Jersey Department of Education in compliance with the “adequate yearly progress” provision of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Many of New Jersey's urban schools are unsafe, overcrowded, and unsuitable for helping students to achieve the Core Curriculum Content Standards. Under Abbott, the state is required to address this situation. In 2000, the legislature enacted the Abbott School Facilities Construction Program, with several key features.



4

School Facilities Construction

The LRF process was a unique chance for school districts to assess their existing schools, and where needed, plan to build better ones to accommodate children's needs and improved instructional practice.

The key features include:

- Priority to health and safety repairs;
- Long range plans developed by districts with community partners;
- More classrooms to eliminate overcrowding;
- Space to provide preschool to all eligible three- and four-year-olds;
- 100 percent state-financed for approved costs; and
- Schools to accommodate state-of-the-art teaching and learning.

The First-Round Long-Range Facilities Plans

The first step of the Abbott school facilities construction program was to develop a districtwide Long-Range Facilities Plan (LRF). The New Jersey Department of Education issued guidelines in September 1998 to help school districts develop them. Districts' final plans were due to the state just six months later in March 1999. LRF development involved several procedures, including:

- Projecting future enrollments;
- Determining deficiencies in every building;
- Assessing the safety and educational adequacy of current schools;

- Planning future educational needs, with a set minimum standards as a guideline;
- Engaging parents and other community members in the process; and
- Planning for "swing space" while construction is under way.

The LRF process was a unique chance for school districts to assess their existing schools and, where needed, plan to build better ones to accommodate children's needs and improved instructional practices. The development of the first-round LRFs did not go very smoothly for a number of reasons. Most districts did not have enough time to assess their current educational programs. They also did not have the expertise to translate educational practices into new building designs.

- Trenton's first-round long-range plan included a total of 24 projects. Ten of the original projects were to be new schools; the remaining projects were renovations or additions to existing schools. The district's first-round long-range plan was approved by the New Jersey Department of Education.

Leadership

Facilities Advisory Board. Each Abbott district was required by the New Jersey Department of Education's guidelines to assemble a facilities advisory board (FAB) to guide the development of the LRFP. The board was to include parents, teachers, principals, community representatives, an architect, an engineer, and a staff person from the New Jersey Department of Education. The FAB's role was to review and refine the recommendations made by an educational facilities specialist and architect and recommend the plan for adoption by the school board. The Education Law Center has recommended that FABs continue to meet until plans are fully implemented to seek input and guide the districtwide planning, design, and construction of school facilities.

- Trenton's Facilities Advisory Board is one of the very few in the Abbott districts that continues to meet and function.

Progress and Challenges

Progress. The first LRFPs in the state were approved by the New Jersey Department of Education in 2000; the most pressing health and safety projects got seriously underway after Governor McGreevey created a new state agency, the New Jersey Schools Construction Corporation (SCC), to oversee the whole process in 2002.^{11,12}

For Abbott districts, LRFPs were developed and approved by their school boards, and then submitted to and approved by the New Jersey Department of Education. Once LRFPs are approved, districts prioritize projects and submit them one by one to the New Jersey Department of Education. The Department of Education checks each project for compliance with the approved LRFP and the FES, and estimates project costs.

From the outset, all parties acknowledged that the Abbott school construction program would be a vast undertaking. As with any effort this size, it will take a long time. Many schools operate year-round and the district must have the space to provide an adequate

FIGURE | 4.1

Trenton's First-Round Facilities Plan Overview

| | PROJECTS | |
|-----------------|-----------|---------------|
| | Number | Percent |
| New Schools | 10 | 41.7% |
| Rehab/Additions | 9 | 37.5% |
| Conversion | 5 | 20.8% |
| Total | 24 | 100.0% |

SOURCE | Education Law Center communications with New Jersey Schools Construction Corporation, New Jersey Department of Education, and individual districts.

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School Facilities Construction

FIGURE | 4.2

Overview of Trenton's Current Projects

| School | Type | Estimated Completion |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Daylight/Twilight | New Demonstration Project | Unknown |
| King/Jeff Pre-K-8 | New School | April 2005 |
| Roebing Pre-K-8 | New School | June 2007 |
| Kilmer Pre-K-8 | New School | November 2005 |
| Columbus Pre-K-8 | New School | November 2005 |
| Mott Pre-K-8 | Addition | September 2004 |
| Parker Pre-K-8 | Addition | August 2005 |
| PJ Hill Pre-K-8 | Rehab | November 2005 |
| Gregory Pre-K-8 | Addition/Rehab | June 2004 |
| Trenton H.S. (1st phase) | Addition/Rehab | June 2009 |

SOURCE | Education Law Center communications with New Jersey Schools Construction Corporation, New Jersey Department of Education, and individual districts.

FIGURE | 4.3

Status of Facilities Projects: Trenton & All Other Abbott Districts*

| | Trenton | | All Other Abbott Districts |
|-------------------------------|-----------|---------------|----------------------------|
| | NUMBER | PERCENT | PERCENT |
| To Be Submitted to NJDOE | 14 | 58.3% | 61.3% |
| Pre-Development | 0 | 0.0% | 19.7% |
| In Design | 3 | 12.5% | 7.5% |
| Construction Contract Awarded | 7 | 29.2% | 9.2% |
| Completed | 0 | 0.0% | 2.3% |
| Total | 24 | 100.0% | 100.0% |

SOURCE | Education Law Center communications with New Jersey Schools Construction Corporation, New Jersey Department of Education, and individual districts

* As of September 2004

educational program while facilities projects proceed. Even though the state finances and oversees the process, the district must take great care in pacing the submission of its projects and moving them through the pipeline to completion.

- As of September 2004, 10 out of Trenton's 24 school construction projects were in the pipeline toward completion: three were in design and seven already under construction.
- The progress made in Trenton in moving school construction projects forward is marked by good efforts at eliciting community input and cooperation between the district and the city government. Both factors have helped the district to move their projects through the pipeline more quickly.

Challenges. There are many ways for a school construction project to get hung up on its way to completion. The New Jersey Department of Education and the district may disagree about spaces, forcing a prolonged series of negotiations. The SCC may determine, as a result of its own review, that the district should build a new school rather than renovate the existing one. The school district may have difficulty getting the land needed to build new schools or the land may need

to be remediated to ensure that it is safe for students and teachers.

- The Trenton Public Schools had some difficulty acquiring land for a few projects, particularly in securing adjacent lands for outdoor play areas and parking lots. The city assisted the district at one school site when it sold the land for a parking lot for a nominal amount. For another project, the district mistakenly did not include a playground and parking lot in its original submission. The New Jersey Department of Education considered these stand-alone projects and did not approve them.
- Community reviewers also noted that one of the district's most promising new projects—to be built on the former site of the Roebling steel cable factory—will need remediation by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection before it is suitable for school construction. Although the standards for passing inspection are as high as for residential occupancy, some parents in the district remain concerned and will need to be convinced of the site's safety.

Endnotes

11. Abbott districts were required to address emergency school facilities defects which would directly affect the "health and safety" of children in these buildings. Health and safety projects include: roof repairs, window replacement, boiler repair, and asbestos removal.

12. The SCG is a quasi-public agency housed within the New Jersey Economic Development Authority.

Next Steps for Education Stakeholders

Next Steps For Education Stakeholders

- **Read the report.** Try to make the time to read the whole technical report: it contains a lot of useful context and information. If you cannot, read the summary report. Both are available on the Education Law Center website: www.edlawcenter.org.
- **Talk about what you learned.** Discuss what you read with your friends, family, congregation members, and work colleagues.
- **Dig deeper.** Ask why and how. If you read about something that pleases or concerns you, learn more about why and how it came to be that way. Ask about quality. The indicators may tell you that a program or practice exists but not how well it is being implemented.
- **Look at other sources of information.** The Abbott Indicators are comprehensive, but not exhaustive. Other sources of information will be needed to get a clear idea of what the schools are doing. For example, low-performing schools undergo an external review process called Collaborative Assessment and Planning for Achievement (CAPA). If your school had a CAPA review, you can read the resulting report.
- **Look for meeting announcements.** Look for events and meetings where other people in your community will be discussing this report in particular or school improvement in general. You can find out about them on local television stations and in local newspapers.
- **Take part.** Attend local meetings and engage in conversations about what you learned with your neighbors, school and district staff, and your school board members.
- **Push for solutions.** Remember the goal is to support school improvement. It is not enough to identify strengths and weaknesses. Once you talk about the findings with your neighbors, decide what needs to be done and help make sure that it happens.
- **Stay involved.** School improvement is a multi-year investment. It will take your continued commitment.

Abbott Indicators List

Many of New Jersey’s urban schools are un-safe, overcrowded, and unsuitable for helping students to achieve the Core Curriculum Content Standards. Under Abbott, the state is required to address this situation. In 2000, the legislature enacted the Abbott School Facilities Construction Program, with several key features.

The Community and Students

What conditions of living and learning in the community served by the district might affect children’s and youth’s readiness to learn?

- **Female-headed households with children**
- **Adult educational attainment**
- **Labor force participation**
- **Unemployment rate**
- **Median household income**
- **People living below poverty level**
- **Children living below poverty level**
- **Foreign-born population**
- **Rent-income ratio**
- **Vacant housing**
- **Violent crimes**

What student characteristics might affect the nature and extent of services offered by the district?

- **Eligibility free-/reduced-price lunch**
- **Race/ethnicity**
- **English language learners**
- **Students with disabilities**
- **Immigrant students**
- **Homelessness**
- **Student mobility rate**

The Preschool Program

Opportunities for Students to Learn

How close is the district to achieving universal enrollment for all three- and four- year-olds?

- **Percent of preschool universe served (Census/ASSA)**
- **Total preschool population served**
- **Number of providers by type**
- **Waiting list**
- **Head Start inclusion**
- **Outreach activities**
- **Identification of unserved families**

Is the district providing a “high-quality” preschool education to all eligible children?

- **Programs for children with disabilities**
 - Preschool Child Study Team (CST)
- **Curriculum development**
 - **Curricula used**
 - People involved
 - Considerations/inputs to adoption
 - Review frequency
 - Alignment to *Expectations*
- **Transition activities (into preschool and Kindergarten)**
- **Health and social services**
 - Direct services offered
 - Methods for assessment
 - Referral methods
 - Transportation services
- **ECERS-R quality scores**

Preschool Teacher Qualifications and Supports

Are preschool programs adequately staffed and are staff adequately supported?

- Number of teachers
- Educational attainment of preschool teachers
- Preschool teacher certification
- Preschool teacher experience
- Preschool teacher salary
- Performance evaluation
- Professional development opportunities
 - Criteria
 - Methods
 - Joint preschool-Kindergarten professional development

Adequate Resources

Are the preschool programs adequately funded?

- Preschool budget

Informed and Inclusive Leadership

To what extent does the district's ECEAC represent its stakeholders and participate in the district's early childhood program planning and decision-making?

- Early Childhood Education Advisory Council (ECEAC)
 - Representation
 - Training
 - Frequency of meetings
 - Involvement in program planning, budgeting, and facilities planning
 - Other activities

Student Outcomes

Have preschool students developed the skills they will need to continue to learn and develop in Kindergarten?

- Assessment methods used
- PPVT-III or ELAS scores

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Opportunities for Student Learning

Do our schools provide high-quality instruction in a range of content areas adequate to ensure that students can meet content standards?

- Whole School Reform
 - Model chosen
 - Approval of model
 - Year adopted
 - Reason for adoption
 - Adoption procedures
- Class size
- Programs for children with disabilities
- Curriculum development
 - Curricula used
 - People involved
 - Considerations/inputs to adoption
 - Review frequency
 - Method for ensuring alignment across grade levels
- College preparatory course
 - AP courses
 - AP course eligibility
 - Availability of college preparatory sequence (math and science)

Abbott Indicators List

Student and Family Supports

Is the school providing programs and services to support students' well-being and academic performance in accordance with demonstrated need?

- Full day Kindergarten
 - Class size
- Early literacy
 - 90-minute reading blocks
 - Small group/one-on-one tutoring
- Health and social services
 - Referral and coordination
 - On-site services
- Nutrition program
- Access to technology
- Student-computer ratio
- Alternative education program
- College and work transition programs
- After-school programs
- Summer programs
- Art and Music programs

Are strategies in place to ensure effective parent outreach and involvement?

- Parent involvement policies and practices

K-12 Teacher Qualifications and Supports

Are our schools adequately staffed and supported?

- Student-teacher ratio
- Faculty attendance
- Highly qualified teachers
- Abbott staffing patterns
- Professional development
 - Description of instructionally-linked, curriculum-specific training
 - Inputs to selecting professional development opportunities
- Performance evaluation criteria and methods
- Frequency of teacher networking and collaboration
- Other teacher supports

Adequate Resources

Are our schools adequately funded?

- Property wealth
- Local tax rates
 - Average tax rates
 - School tax rates
- General education budget
- Supplemental programs budget
- Additional Abbott Aid application process

Informed and Inclusive Leadership

Do our schools and does our district have adequate and representative leadership?

- School Leadership Councils
 - Representation of stakeholder groups
 - Training in roles and responsibilities
 - Frequency of meetings
 - Involvement in planning and budgeting
 - Other activities
- Abbott Advisory Council
 - Representation of stakeholder groups
 - Frequency of meetings
 - Involvement in planning and budgeting
 - Other activities

K-12 Student Outcomes

How physically, socially, and emotionally healthy are our children?

- Child death
- Teen death
- Teen births
- Substantiated abuse and neglect cases
- School violence and vandalism rates

Are all students in Kindergarten to grade 12 learning according to statewide standards?

➤ **Student attendance**

➤ Suspension rates

➤ **Grade 4 Language Arts Literacy and Math Assessments**

- Mean scores
- Proficiency percentages
- AYP status

➤ **Grade 8 Language Arts Literacy and Math Assessments**

- Mean scores
- Proficiency percentages
- AYP status

➤ **Grade 11 Language Arts Literacy and Math Assessments**

- Mean scores
- Proficiency percentages
- AYP status

➤ **High and low performing schools**

➤ Kindergarten through grade 2

- Early Language Assessment System scores
- Terra Nova Edition 2, where available

➤ **Graduation**

- Estimated rates (cumulative promotion index)
- Graduation via HSPA
- Graduation via SRA

➤ **College Entrance**

- SAT participation
- Verbal and math mean scores

School Facilities Construction

Healthy, Safe and Educationally Adequate Schools

What are the district's long-range facilities plans?

➤ **LRFP approval status**

➤ **Number and type of planned projects**

➤ **Process of development**

How much progress has been made toward completing educational facilities projects in the districts?

➤ **Plans to upgrade preschool facilities**

➤ **Status of projects (complete, construction, design, predevelopment, not yet submitted)**

➤ **Estimated completion dates**

➤ **Cooperation with municipal partners**

➤ **Community input**

➤ **Barriers to progress**

To what extent is there adequate, representative leadership that encourages meaningful public participation for school facilities planning and project implementation?

➤ **Facilities Advisory Board**

- Representation of stakeholder groups
- Frequency of meeting (beyond LRFP submission)
- Involvement in plan development
- Transparency to public
- Other activities

District and Community Reviewer Letters

TRENTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
 Central Services Building
 108 North Clinton Avenue
 Trenton, New Jersey 08609



James H. Lytle, Ed.D.
 Superintendent of Schools
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March 7, 2005

Lesley Hirsch, Project Co-Director
 Erain Applewhite-Coney, Psy.D., Project Co-Director
 Education Law Center
 60 Park Place, Suite 300
 Newark, New Jersey 07102

RE: Draft Trenton Abbott Indicators Report

Dear Dr. Hirsch and Dr. Applewhite-Coney:

I very much appreciate the extraordinary work undertaken by your team and the Law Center in attempting to evaluate the impact of the Abbott Urban Education Reform effort in New Jersey. Given the enormous investment the people of New Jersey are making in improving opportunities for students in urban districts and the fact that this effort is nationally significant, I have long been concerned that the New Jersey Department of Education has not conducted a systematic evaluation of Abbott programs since their inception in 1998-99.

I have given the Trenton Abbott indicators report a careful review and have three sets of reservations. The first relates to the policy framework under which the Trenton Public Schools have operated during the six and one half years that we have been implementing Abbott programs. The second relates to the absence of an Abbott secondary school reform policy and the third to specific elements of the report in terms of our work in Trenton and the question whether the tenor and data in the report adequately reflect the progress we have made.

In terms of the policy framework, I think the report and its companion reports need a clear and direct preface that discusses not just the history of Abbott, and particularly of the 1998 decision, but also the components of that decision as they relate to the strategies that New Jersey urban districts were required to implement. Some of those strategies, most particularly the preschool programs for all three and four-year olds, have a very strong research base and are likely to have a long-term, consistent effect on improving the life chances of those children who participate in them. On the other hand, there were required elements of the program, and most particularly the Whole School Reform (or Comprehensive School Reform) element, that have proven over time to be ineffective. The Rand Corporation has recently completed an exhaustive study of over 30 WSR-CSR models and has determined that only one of them, America's Choice, has established a sufficient evidence-base to demonstrate that it makes a consistent difference for students in urban districts. (It should be noted that when Abbott was initially implemented in the Fall of 1998, America's Choice was not among the models from which districts could select.)

In Trenton schools chose from among the several models the State recommended, depending on which the school management team felt would best address the needs of its students. Over the course of the past six years our evaluation of each of the programs suggests that some of them have been effective in some schools, but none of them have been effective in all of the schools which implemented it. Nevertheless, we were following mandated State policy and regulation, as well as the requirements of a settlement to which the Law Center, but not the districts, was party. My point is that both NJDOE and the Law Center need to accept responsibility in the Abbott Indicators Report for requiring districts to implement strategies which subsequently proved ineffective. We in Trenton are not willing to accept full responsibility for failed strategies when our district did not have the right of determination relative to how schools would go about improving student achievement.

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March 7, 2005
 Erain Applewhite-Coney, Psy.D., Project Co-Director
 page 2

The second problem with the NJDOE and Law Center approach to Abbott urban school reform from 1998 forward is that there has been no strategy or regulation relating to secondary schools, either middle or high schools. Districts and schools have been left on their own because no one could decide what a "research-based" approach might be. This situation has finally been addressed in the Abbott regulations for the 2005-2006 school year. Meanwhile, Trenton has instituted secondary school reforms, including small learning communities and a drop-out recovery program (Daylight/Twilight), that have been extremely effective in increasing high school completion rates.

A related consideration is that in the initial Abbott Regulations, the State, with the Law Center's concurrence, excluded boards of education and central offices from exercising any direct control over the implementation of mandated Abbott programs. Instead, the State Department of Education negotiated directly with schools and their School Management Teams regarding program improvement, school plan preparation and review, and school budgets. Trenton's central office made every effort to assist schools and Department representatives in going through this process, but ultimately the determination as to whether a plan and budget were satisfactory was made by NJDOE, not by the Trenton Public Schools. Again my point is that NJDOE and the Law Center need to accept that where there have been problems regarding improving student achievement, both organizations own a significant part of the responsibility because they were so directly involved in designing the implementation process.

My concerns about the report as it relates specifically to Trenton begin from the failure of the report to acknowledge that Trenton Public Schools have consistently been early implementers in all of the Abbott programs and regulations, ranging from preschool to facilities. For five successive years the district spent a great deal of its central office strategic resource in litigation with NJDOE attempting to get the department to fulfill its obligations under Abbott. The fact that funding was consistently unpredictable and often not determined until shortly before the beginning of the school year meant that even with the best of intentions the district was continually confronted with unpredictable resources and program support. This condition was clearest in Spring in 2003 when NJDOE reduced funding for the district by almost \$25 million dollars leading, to layoffs, transfers, program reductions, and other problems which not only diverted central office energy, but also negatively affected employee morale, causing a set of problems that lingered well into the following school year. Despite these circumstances Trenton Public Schools have had sustained improvement in elementary and high school student achievement.

Certainly the Law Center has supported the Trenton Public Schools in its litigation, but unless the Indicators Report discusses the shifting policy frameworks and the organizational contexts dictated by NJDOE, pertinent information is absent from the report.

Within the next few weeks we expect to convene a meeting or meetings with those who attended the preview on February 9 so we can discuss the specific dimensions of the report regarding the Trenton district. Based on those discussions we will send you a more detailed critique.

Sincerely,

 James H. Lytle, Ed.D.
 Superintendent of Schools

JHL/jpw

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Kelly L. Creque
 Director
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MEMORANDUM

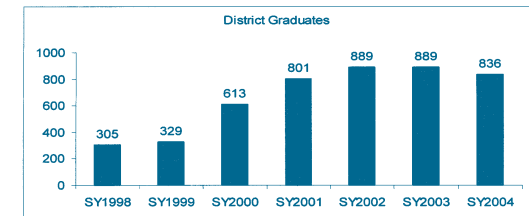
TO: Lesley Hirsch
 Co-Director, Abbott Indicators Project

FROM: Kelly L. Creque
 Director, Assessment and Accountability

DATE: May 23, 2005

SUBJECT: Graduation Data for Trenton Public Schools for ELC Indicators Report

The chart below reflects the number of graduates that we have reported for each year since 1997-98.



We are proud of the accomplishment of increasing the number of graduates by more than twice the number that graduated in 1998. This summer, the district graduation lists from each year will be reviewed to determine, with finality, the characteristics of each graduating class. I realize that this information could not be included in the Indicators report, but I expect that it will assist the conversations that will follow the release of the report in Trenton.

Copy to: James H. Lytle, Superintendent

The Abbott Indicators Reports were created through the efforts of a great many contributors. We list those contributors below, with apologies to the inevitable few whom we inadvertently left out.

This report was written by Lesley Hirsch and Erain Applewhite-Coney, Psy.D, Co-Directors of the Abbott Indicators Project at the Education Law Center. Letitia Logan of the Education Law Center also made significant contributions to the writing.

Project consultant Alex Schuh, Ph.D. and project co-directors, Erain Applewhite-Coney, Psy.D. and Lesley Hirsch conducted the Trenton interviews. Lesley Hirsch and Letitia Logan collected and analyzed all data with guidance and assistance from Judith Pollack and Michael Weiss, of Educational Testing Services, Inc.

Design

The Abbott Indicator Reports were designed and produced by Kinetik, Inc. of Washington, DC.

Foundation Support

The Abbott Indicators Project is funded by The Rockefeller Foundation, The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, The Prudential Foundation, The William Penn Foundation, The Victoria Foundation, and The Fund for New Jersey.

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School District Information, Interviews, and Access

We wish to extend special thanks to the many individuals at the Trenton Public Schools without whose assistance and support this report would not have come together. Individuals who provided access to critical information were:

Kelly Creque, Director, Assessment and Accountability

Everene Downing, Director, Teaching and Learning

Monique Harvey, Homeless Liaison

Margaret Herbert, Supervisor, Early Childhood Education

Prudence Hope-Wade, Coordinator, School Information Management

Kathryn Howard, Data Specialist

James H. Lytle, Ph.D., Superintendent

Lillian Occhipinti, Director, Bilingual Education

Melvin Wyns, Business Administrator

Acknowledgements

Our appreciation also goes to the following individuals who were generous with their time and information in granting interviews to project staff:

Everett Collins, Facilities Manager

Kelly Creque, Director, Assessment and Accountability

Everene Downing, Director, Teaching and Learning

Margaret Herbert, Supervisor, Early Childhood Education

James H. Lytle, Ph.D., Superintendent

Dwayne Mosley, Director, Abbott Facilities Construction

Melvin Wynn, Business Administrator

We also wish to thank the principals and SLC chairs of the following schools who provided access to their schools and spoke with us about their ongoing school reform efforts:

Gregory School: Judy Steele and Doris Mottley

Martin Luther King Middle School: Marzene Bennett and Judith Cartwright

Parker School: Willie Solomon and Kathy Flowers

Rivera School: Joseph Marazzo and Jeanne Ter-nowchek

Trenton Central High School: Priscilla Dawson and Janice Williams

Washington School: Gail Cropper and Mary Ann Delate

State Data Sources

We must express our appreciation for the patient support and cooperation of the many individuals who supplied a lion's share of the information presented in this report. Thanks go to Dennis Smeltzer of the Commission on Business Efficiency in the Public Schools; Nancy Parello and Cecilia Traini of the Association for Children of New Jersey.

Special appreciation goes to the following individuals at the New Jersey Department of Education:

Division of Abbott Implementation

Program Planning and Design: Annette Castiglione, Marlene Lebak, Peter Noehrenberg

Early Childhood Education: Karin Garver

Fiscal Review and Improvement: Glenn Forney and Pete Genovese

Division of Finance

School Funding: Alan Dupree and Garry Everson

Division of Educational Programs and Assessment Evaluation and Assessment: Timothy Peters

Division of Student Services

Special Education: Stacey Pellegrino and Andrew Samson

Title I Program Planning and Accountability: John R. Ingersoll, Ph.D.

Program Support Services: Thomas Collins, Ph.D.

Deputy Commissioner

Public Information: Barbara Molnar, Faith Sarafin, and Quansheng Shen

Report Reviewers

Finally, several individuals have reviewed and given input to this Indicators Report. The report underwent internal review by Education Law Center subject-matter experts, Ellen Boylan, Ruth Lowenkron, and Joan Ponessa; project advisory committee members Cynthia Lamy, Ed.D., Bari Erlichson, Ph.D., Margaret Goertz, Ph.D., and Cynthia Savo; and our colleague at The Rockefeller Foundation, Fred Frelow. Education Law Center Executive Director, David Sciarra, and Assistant Managing Director, Theresa Luhm tirelessly reviewed all of the reports and gave their support and advice throughout their development.

At each pilot site, we provided district staff with the draft report for review and assembled an all-volunteer community review team. All reviewers were invited to recommend changes. We incorporated some of their changes, and invited reviewers to include any other changes in a letter. If submitted, these letters are included in an Appendix to this report. In Trenton, the community-based review team members were as follows:

Ana Berdecia, Thomas Edison State College

Kelly Creque, Director, Assessment and Accountability, Trenton Public Schools

Tyrone Gaskins, Trenton NAACP

Coreen Grooms, President, Parent Action Awareness Resource Center

Mary Ann Jandoli, Associate Director of Research and Economic Services, New Jersey Education Association

Karin McBride, Parent, Kilmer Elementary School

Denise Millington, Liaison Committee of the Trenton PTA/PTO and SLC Member

Chris Ritter, Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory

Joe Santo, Vice President, Trenton Education Association

Emerson Simmons, Parent Activist and SLC Member, P.J. Hill Elementary School

The comprehensiveness and usefulness of this report is a testament to the many contributions listed here. Any errors or omissions are, of course, the full responsibility of the primary authors.

About the Education Law Center

The Education Law Center (ELC) was established in 1973 to advocate on behalf of New Jersey’s public school children for access to an equal and adequate education under state and federal laws. ELC works to improve educational opportunities for low-income students and students with disabilities through public education, policy initiatives, research, communications and, when necessary, legal action.

ELC serves as counsel to the plaintiffs in the *Abbott v. Burke* case—more than 300,000 preschool and school-age children in 31 urban school districts throughout New Jersey. Through the *Abbott* decisions, the New Jersey Supreme Court has established an unprecedented legal framework of remedial measures to assure the rights of urban public school children to an adequate education. The remedies ordered by the Court include standards-based education and reform supported

by foundational funding equal to New Jersey’s most affluent suburbs; supplemental funding for programs that address the social and health needs of students, whole school reform; school based management; high quality preschool for all three and four year olds; and safe and educationally adequate school facilities. ELC’s successes in *Abbott* have resulted in an additional \$800 million in foundational state aid each year for the *Abbott* districts and schools, \$300 million in preschool aid, and \$6 billion in school construction funds. The *New York Times* editorialized that *Abbott* represents “the most important equal education ruling since *Brown v. Board of Education*” (April 30, 2002).

ELC also operates the Student Rights Project (SRP) to protect the educational rights of all students, focusing on students with disabilities. SRP is the only non-profit, legal assistance program in New Jersey that specializes in education law and provides free legal representation to income-eligible parents, guardians and caregivers of students

in disputes involving K-12 public education. Because demand for SRP’s services far exceeds attorney resources, SRP gives priority to low-income students who attend school in poor urban or rural districts.

Please direct any questions about this report or the *Abbott* Indicators Project to:

Lesley Hirsch or
Erain Applewhite-Coney, Psy.D.

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