



NJDOE News

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New Abbott Regulations, Based on Public Input, Are Unveiled **- Three Public Testimony Sessions To Be Held Prior to September Adoption**

Commissioner of Education David C. Hespe today released a proposed set of new regulations to improve urban education and facilitate the implementation of education reforms for children in disadvantaged school districts. The revised regulations also fulfill the state's obligation under the New Jersey Supreme Court's 1998 *Abbott v. Burke* decision.

Among the major changes in the proposed new regulations are provisions that would allow qualified schools to implement a "home grown" whole school reform design, improve the structure of school management teams, guarantee comprehensive training for those who serve on them, set the stage for an ambitious school construction and renovation program in the Abbott districts, and pave the way for full day high quality early childhood programs.

"These regulations reflect the best thinking of the Department of Education, the education community and, most importantly, those who live, work and have children who attend school in our 30 special needs districts," Hespe said. "They address many of the concerns raised about the existing regulations during the eight focus groups and two public testimony sessions that were held over the past two months. In all, we heard from more than 170 stakeholders in this process.

"When I took office three months ago, I decided the best course would be to hear what the public had to say about the regulations before moving to readopt or modify them. Not only was it the right way to proceed, the public input we received resulted in a superior product. Still, there is always room for improvement, and undoubtedly these draft regulations will be further modified before adoption. So we will hold three more public testimony sessions around the state to hear what the people think about the regulations and, possibly, how they could be made even better."

Public testimony sessions will be held July 14 at Long Branch High School, July 22 at Holly Heights Elementary School in Millville, and July 27 at Garfield High School. All three sessions will run from 4:30 until 7 p.m. The department will also welcome any written commentary.

Hespe said the proposed regulation would have a profound impact on the educational programs in Abbott districts and ensure the billions of dollars of state aid invested in their schools are well spent. Most of the programs being instituted will break new ground and serve as models for the nation, he noted.

"These regulations will see to it that children from low-income families get the educational, health and social services they need to help them succeed in school and in the workplace," Hespe said.

"Our whole school reform initiative offers the best opportunity for improving the lives of children in the Abbott districts," Hespe added. "It will improve the quality of their education and reduce dropout rates, substance abuse, crime and violence."

The proposed regulations require each elementary school that has not already adopted a whole school reform model to do so by June 2000 and keeps *Success For All - Roots and Wings* as the presumptive model. If an elementary school fails to select a model by the deadline, the commissioner could direct the school to implement the presumptive model.

However, schools that can demonstrate high student achievement levels over the past three years would have the option to apply to the commissioner for approval to use a "home grown" alternative. The alternative design would allow the school to combine recognized elements of whole school reform with successful programs already being implemented in the school. The design would need to be validated by a team of experts. In addition, it would undergo a rigorous departmental approval process to ensure the school will see the benefits of whole school reform.

The regulations also prescribe zero-based budgeting at the school level - a first - and the district level to root out inefficiencies and redirect money to effective programs. "The proposed rules will ensure that the preponderance of public education funds target school level instructional activities and other activities designed to improve student achievement," Hespe said.

Abbott districts would have to provide department-approved training for School Management Teams, and each team member would have to undergo training or face dismissal.

"Proper training is essential if whole school reform is to succeed," Hespe said. "That is why we are putting an emphasis on it and looking to provide substantial departmental resources to make sure it is done right."

Training would include instruction regarding the role, relationships and responsibilities of a School Management Team (SMT), development and implementation of a whole school reform program, curriculum and instruction, and team and consensus building. Members would also have to attend an orientation session on school finance.

A School Management Team could elect to assume responsibility for approving a school-based budget and certain personnel matters. Members of teams that elect to go this route would receive more intensive training in school finance and budgeting in order for them to fulfill these serious duties.

If an SMT does not exercise this option, the school principal will certify the budget and have primary jurisdiction regarding personnel. But the principal still would be required to advise the SMT of actions contemplated in these areas and afford it an opportunity to provide input.

Under the new rules, an SMT would include the school principal, teachers, school level support staff, parents and community members. It may include students. Teachers would be chosen by the teaching staff; school level support members, by the support staff; and so on. No group could constitute more than 50 percent of the membership.

The membership of the SMT would have to be representative of the community's racial and ethnic composition.

The regulations also address the need to move ahead with the facilities planning process in the Abbott districts, pending passage by the Legislature of Governor Christie Whitman's multi-billion-dollar school construction and renovation program.

A long-range facilities plan would have to be approved and then the commissioner, in collaboration with the district, would establish a priority ranking of all school facilities projects based upon critical need. Projects involving the health and safety factors would be assigned the highest priority.

The regulations are consistent with the proposed legislation in terms of minimum area space and cost allowances. Under the proposal, the allowances shall be adjusted to coincide with any statute passed after adoption of the regulations.

Hespe said the draft regulations also embody the recommendations of the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council, which establish a plan to fulfill the promise of full day, high quality early childhood programs.

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(NOTE: [A chart](#) listing the issues most frequently raised by the public regarding the existing Abbott regulations - and the Department of Education's response - is attached along with copies of the [proposed regulations](#) and [executive summary](#). These documents are also posted on the department's web site, www.state.nj.us/education .)