



## OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR -- NEWS RELEASE

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### **Gov. Whitman Signs Executive Order Establishing Abbott Implementation Advisory Council**

Gov. Christie Whitman today signed an Executive Order establishing an Abbott Implementation Advisory Council that will facilitate educational improvement in the state's most disadvantaged communities.

"By bringing expertise and resources to bear on problems in a collaborative way, we can strengthen public confidence that the programs implemented in the Abbott districts and the tax dollars spent on them are effective," Gov. Whitman said.

"The Governor's action will have a positive and lasting impact on children in school districts that are among the most challenged in New Jersey," said Commissioner of Education David C. Hespe. "The Governor's leadership will set in motion a new dynamic that will change for the better our ability to work with all involved to successfully implement urban education reform."

In her executive order, Gov. Whitman noted that in order to provide meaningful educational opportunities in our urban districts, there must be a coordinated statewide effort that brings together individuals and organizations with a stake in the process so they can focus on achieving common goals and objectives.

The Abbott Implementation Advisory Council will consist of 17 members:

- The commissioners of education, human services, and health and senior services, and the Attorney General, or their designees, will serve as ex-officio members.
- There will be nine public members chosen from among local government officials, business and community leaders, the education community and advocates of education and children. Seven will be appointed by the Governor, one by the Senate President and one by the Assembly Speaker. They will serve two-year terms.
- Four members of the Legislature will also serve on the panel. Two each will be appointed by the Senate President and Assembly Speaker, one from each political party. They will serve during the two-year legislative session in which the appointment is made.

The council will be operational by July 1. The Governor will appoint its chair and vice chair. She will also designate an executive director, who can not be a member of the council. The panel will:

- Review and evaluate urban educational reform efforts at the state and local level and relevant research and recommend policy and operational changes to achieve more meaningful results;
- Monitor and evaluate urban educational reform activities at the state and local level and recommend changes in implementation strategies, and
- Assess the degree of coordination of governmental services, higher education and related community services in achieving urban educational reform and recommend ways to improve coordination.

"In addition to recommending policy changes at the state and local level, the council will have the capacity to

affect change in the Abbott districts," Whitman said.

Hespe explained that the council will be given the responsibility of creating an Abbott Leadership Academy, which will focus on ensuring that critical personnel have the administrative, organizational and interpersonal skills necessary to implement urban education reform successfully. The academy will operate in partnership with institutions of higher education in the northern, central and southern parts of the state.

"We need to find the best qualified individuals, train them properly and provide realistic expectations and guidance so they can reach their highest potential," the commissioner said.

The training provided by the academy will supplement current training received as part of the state's whole school reform initiatives. Training will be available to school board members, central office staff, principals, teachers, members of school management teams (SMTs) and department staff.

The council will also establish a Distinguished Educator Corps. These distinguished educators, chosen on the basis of their knowledge and experience in school administration and policy, will work with school boards, central office staff, principals, teachers, SMTs and Department of Education personnel to develop strategies to implement urban education reform more effectively.

"Members of the corps will help stakeholders work through areas of disagreement, facilitate communication and forge consensus with local government and community groups," Gov. Whitman said.

Candidates for these positions will be asked to formally apply to the council and submit a portfolio of their accomplishments. Approximately 20 candidates will be selected and asked to take a leave of absence from their current positions for two years. If the district in which they are employed grants the leave request, the state would reimburse the district for the cost of the employee's compensation and benefits.

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