



NJDOE News

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DOE Announces Abbott Secondary Education Initiative; Four Districts to Participate in Pilot Program to Improve Teaching and Learning

Commissioner of Education William L. Librera today announced a major new initiative designed to change the organization and structure of middle schools and high schools in New Jersey's most disadvantaged communities. The Abbott Secondary Education Initiative will begin as a pilot project in four of the state's 31 Abbott school districts.

The program is expected to result in greater student achievement and improved quality of instruction in schools that will emphasize personalized instruction.

"Through the Abbott Secondary Education Initiative, we are taking a natural and important step to ensure that students in our neediest districts have every opportunity to succeed," Commissioner Librera said. "Most of our early efforts in the Abbott districts have been targeted to our youngest students, based on research that concludes that gains made in the first years of schooling have reaped maximum benefits.

"Now we plan to use additional research to ensure that these gains in achievement continue, especially in grades six through twelve," Dr. Librera continued. "We are very excited about beginning work immediately with the four districts that have agreed to participate in the pilot."

The following four districts will participate in the Abbott Secondary Education Initiative: **Bridgeton, Elizabeth, Jersey City, and Orange**. The initiative has three primary goals:

- To break up large middle and high schools into smaller schools, or "learning communities;"
- To increase the rigor of instruction and course-taking so that students entering the ninth grade are prepared for college preparatory work and so that high school graduates are ready for university instruction; and
- To ensure that every student receives regular and personalized attention from at least one adult professional.

"We know from our cumulative experience and from the expertise of a work group Commissioner Librera convened two years ago that we have to change the structure and culture of our large middle schools and high schools," said Assistant Commissioner of Education Gordon MacInnes, who leads the Department of Education's Division of Abbott Implementation.

"We need to create ways to carry forward the nurturing environment and personalized instruction we are now giving successfully to our disadvantaged students, beginning in preschool," MacInnes added. "We must create a climate through which every student has regular contact with responsible, caring adults who want them to realize their full potential."

Commissioner Librera established a collaborative work group in 2003, shortly after the State Supreme Court ordered the establishment of guidelines for secondary education in the Abbott districts. The recommendations of the group resulted in the creation of state regulations for secondary education in the Abbott districts, as well as the creation of the Abbott Secondary Education Initiative.

Based on the group's recommendations, the pilot program is expected to meet its three primary goals in the following ways:

Smaller Learning Communities

- 300 or fewer students within existing high schools
- 250 or fewer students within schools serving grades 6-8
- Schools organized around academic or career themes

- Teams of teachers designated for each small learning community
- Transition from middle school to high school
- Evaluation of student achievement data

Increasing Rigor of Instruction

- Fully aligned P-12 curriculum
- College preparatory coursework in high school for all students
- Advanced Placement and honors courses to students who satisfy prerequisites
- Innovative teaching techniques
- Use of technology
- Collaborative Professional Development

Personalization

- Each student and his or her family will be the responsibility of one teacher or other professional staff member. Each staff member will have a group of students for which they are responsible.
- Advocates will meet regularly with assigned students; advocates will meet face-to-face and individually with each family and student at least twice during the school year.
- Advocates will work with the student and family over all the years they are in the smaller learning community.
- Information about school district and school policies and programs will be provided regularly to parents and guardians to acquaint them with the academic expectations for their children and how they can assist at home.

The pilot districts are expected to begin work with Department of Education staff and national consultants the 2005-06 school year to convert their schools to smaller learning communities. This first phase is expected to set standards and procedures for the remaining Abbott districts to follow as they in turn will restructure their schools.

Progress made as a result of the pilot will be determined in several ways, such as: evaluating the impact on student and teacher attendance; determining the number of ninth graders who complete Algebra I in the first year with universal completion by the second year; tracking instructional time and days missed due to disciplinary issues; course failure rates; and the percentage of students who are proficient and advanced proficient and the distribution and trend in scale scores.