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NEWS RELEASE

Report Issued Tracking Education Progress in Newark; Groups Call for Community Dialog to Support Improvement of Newark Public Schools

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NEWARK, NJ – The Newark Public Schools, the Committee of Advocates for Newark’s Children, Newark Alliance and Education Law Center (ELC) are calling for a broad community dialog about improving public education in New Jersey’s largest city.

These Newark stakeholders are releasing a report to the Newark community to use as a way to take a closer look at what is working in the public schools, and what warrants more attention. The report -*Tracking Progress, Engaging Communities: Newark Abbott Indicators* - was prepared by ELC, the children’s advocacy group spearheading New Jersey’s historic effort to improve public education in its poorest cities. *Tracking Progress, Engaging Communities: Newark Abbott Indicators* will be released to the public at the Newark Advisory Board meeting at **6:00 p.m., May 24, 2005 at Sussex Avenue School, 307 Sussex Avenue, Newark, New Jersey.**

The report is based on interviews with district and school officials, and a wide array of publicly available reports and datasets. *Tracking Progress, Engaging Communities: Newark Abbott Indicators* is believed to be the first report of its kind in the nation intended to support community engagement in school improvement efforts. The data in the report goes beyond student outcomes to examine student opportunities to learn, teacher qualifications and supports, budget, leadership, supports for students and their families, and school facilities. The indicators were developed by ELC with input from an advisory committee of education experts.

“The findings in the Newark Abbott Indicators report will have far-reaching implications for the continuous improvement of education for Newark school children. We hope this information will help create an agenda for action among Newark stakeholders,” said Marion A. Bolden, Superintendent of the Newark Public Schools.

“As representatives of the business community, we look forward to a thorough public discussion of this information as we work together with the district and community to improve Newark schools and meet the needs of Newark’s children,” said Al Koeppel, Chief Executive Officer of the Newark Alliance.

The goals of the *Abbott Indicators Project* are to *inform* everyone with a stake in the public schools; *engage* them in noting accomplishments and identifying where more work is needed; and spark joint school-community *advocacy* and *planning* for continued improvement.

Newark is one of four pilot communities where local Abbott Indicators reports will be issued, along with Camden, Trenton and Union City. The reports for each community will be presented to the public during the week of May 23, 2005.

The following additional background material are attached:

- A summary of key findings from *Tracking Progress, Engaging Communities: Newark Abbott Indicators*
- *Tracking Progress, Engaging Communities: Newark Abbott Indicators Summary Report* (Adobe Acrobat version); and
- Fact sheet containing information about our community partners in Newark, a list of Abbott Indicators Project funders and Advisory Committee members

Tracking Progress, Engaging Communities: Newark Abbott Indicators *Key Findings*

The attached Summary Report contains findings about a wide range of school practices and student outcomes presented in the context of federal and state standards as well as recommended next steps for Newark's education stakeholders. Below, are key findings presented in brief.

About the Community and the Students

- The most successful suburban districts had four times more property wealth per student than Newark in 2003. The state average was almost double Newark's.
- Reflecting the poverty experienced by many Newark families, 70 percent of the children enrolled in Newark's schools are eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch.
- Student mobility is an additional challenge that the district and its children face. Nearly one in three children leaves or enters school in a single school year, presenting a potentially disruptive influence on educational progress.

Progress Has Been Made ...

- Elementary class sizes have decreased since the mid-1990's. Now, average class sizes in all grades are smaller (better) than the Abbott standard.
- ELC estimates that 72 percent of Newark's class of 2001-02 graduated from school. The rate improved from a low of 47 percent in 1994-95.
- Under the federal definition, 94 percent of Newark's high school teachers were highly qualified in all of the subjects they taught.
- Newark's preschool teachers were on their way to meeting state certification and education requirements in time for the state's 2006 deadlines. Nearly all of Newark's preschool teachers earned their four-year college degrees, and all but 29 of the 427 teachers had earned at least provisional certification.
- Newark has made progress enrolling three- and four-year-olds in preschool. In 2003-04, three-quarters of Newark's eligible population was enrolled in the Abbott preschool program only five years after it began.

...And More Work Lies Ahead

- Eighty-one percent of Newark's preschoolers with disabilities were in self-contained classrooms and more than half of K-12 students with disabilities were in self-contained classrooms for a major portion of the day.
- Grade 8 language arts and math scores remained below the proficiency level between 1999-00 and 2002-03; Grade 11 math scores were also below proficient in 2001-02 and 2002-03.
- In each year since 1994-95, fewer Newark students have graduated by passing the traditional Grade 11 exam (HSPT or HSPA) and more have graduated by passing the alternative Special Review Assessment (SRA).
- Even though four out of five Newark elementary school teachers were highly qualified under the federal definition, the district's elementary schools had a lower percentage of highly qualified teachers than the other Abbott districts on average.

Abbott Indicators Project

About the Project Partners, Foundation Support, and Advisory Committee

THE PARTNERS

The Education Law Center (ELC). The Education Law Center 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).

The Newark Alliance. The Newark Alliance is a nonprofit organization that was founded in 1999 by a group of business leaders in New Jersey who are committed to supporting Newark's rebirth as a regional center for business, performing arts, sports and entertainment, and education. The broad mission of the Newark Alliance is to forge partnerships with the public, private and civic sectors to enhance the prosperity of Newark. Member organizations of the Newark Alliance include Essex County College, Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield, IDT, Lucent Technologies, McCarter & English, New Jersey Devils, New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT), NJN, Prudential Financial, Public Service Electric and Gas Company (PSE&G), Rutgers, The State University, Saint Barnabas Health Care System, Seton Hall Law School, The MCJ Foundation, University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ), Verizon, Wachovia. Former Governor Tom Kean is Chairman of the Board, and the Mayor of Newark is an ex-officio member.

The Committee of Advocates for Newark's Children. The Committee is an independent group, composed of corporate, philanthropic, education, social service, nonprofit and advocacy groups in Newark, dedicated to raising awareness about critical district issues and the poor educational outcomes facing Newark's children. Through support from The Prudential Foundation, ACNJ has provided staffing assistance to the Committee since 1998. As the Committee approaches its eighth year of existence, its role as monitor and advocate for the educational needs of children continues to grow. 2005 will serve as a critical year as the members work to identify issues and interest areas to advocate on behalf of Newark's children. For the past five years the Advocates has emerged as a community voice, promoting voting in

the Newark Public Schools' Advisory Board Election by annually sponsoring a Candidates Forum that allows the community to meet and learn about those seeking to be elected.

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