



Education Law Center

60 Park Place, Suite 300
Newark, New Jersey 07102

(973) 624-1815

TTY (973) 624-4618

Fax (973) 624-7339

elc@edlawcenter.org <http://www.edlawcenter.org>

NEWS RELEASE

Report Issued Tracking Education Progress in Union City; Partners Call for Community Dialog to Support Continued Improvement of Union City Public Schools

For more information:

David Sciarra, Education Law Center
(973) 624-1815 x16 or dsciarra@edlawcenter.org

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UNION CITY, NJ – The Union City Board of Education (UCBOE) and Education Law Center (ELC) are calling for a community dialog about improving public education in Union City.

These Union City stakeholders are releasing a report to the Union City 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: Union City Abbott Indicators* -- was prepared by ELC, the advocacy group spearheading New Jersey's historic effort to improve public education in its poorest cities.

Tracking Progress, Engaging Communities: Union City Abbott Indicators will be released to the public at the Union City School Board meeting at **4:30 p.m., May 26, 2005** at the Union City Board of Education Complex, 3912 Bergen Turnpike, Union City, NJ.

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: Union City 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.

"We're very pleased and proud with the results of this report. It shows that if given the proper resources, urban students, even those born in another country, can excel in school. It also shows that Union City schools are now achieving on a par with suburban districts around the state," said Superintendent of Schools Stanley Sanger.

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.

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

Attached are:

- A summary of the key findings from *Tracking Progress, Engaging Communities: Union City Abbott Indicators*
- *Tracking Progress, Engaging Communities: Union City Abbott Indicators Summary Report* (Adobe Acrobat version); and
- Fact sheet containing a list of Abbott Indicators Project funders and Advisory Committee members

Tracking Progress, Engaging Communities: Union City 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 Union City's education stakeholders. Below, are key findings presented in brief.

About the Community and the Students

- Reflecting the poverty experienced by many Union City families, more than 90 percent of the children enrolled in Union City's schools are eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch, compared to about one in four statewide.
- Fifteen percent of the student enrollment recently immigrated to the United States and almost half did not speak or write English fluently.
- Student mobility is an additional challenge that the district and its children face. Nearly one in five students leave or enter school in a single school year, presenting a potentially disruptive influence on educational progress.

Progress Has Been Made ...

- Union City's fourth graders have made gains in language arts since 1998. Union City's general education scores rose most dramatically in 2000-01, as did the scores in many districts throughout the state. In 1998-99, 45 percent of Union City students met state standards, compared to 86 percent in 2002-03.
- Grade 8 language arts and math scores remained above the proficient level between 1999-00 and 2002-03. Ninety percent of eighth graders scored proficient or better in language arts literacy in 2002-03.
- Under the federal definition, almost all of Union City's elementary and high school teachers were highly qualified. Union City compared well with the wealthiest suburban districts in the number of highly qualified teachers.
- Union City'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 Union City's preschool teachers earned their four-year college degrees, and all but five had earned at least provisional certification.
- In 2003-04, 90 percent of Union City's eligible population was enrolled in the Abbott preschool program, two years in advance of the state deadline.

...And More Work Lies Ahead

- Grade 11 math scores remained below the proficiency level between 2001-02 and 2002-03, with less than half of students scoring proficient or better.
- It is estimated that about half of Union City's class of 2001-02 graduated from school. This number decreased from 61 percent in 1994-95.
- In each year since 1994-95, fewer Union City students have graduated by passing the traditional Grade 11 exam and more have graduated by passing the alternative Special Review Assessment (SRA).
- Most of Union City's 43 preschoolers with disabilities were in self-contained classrooms or received special education services outside of the preschool classroom for up to three hours per day.

Abbott Indicators Project

About 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).

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STATEWIDE PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE

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