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To: Abbott Educators

From: Stan Karp, Director, Secondary Reform Project
David G. Sciarra, Abbott Counsel

Re: Guidance on Abbott Secondary Initiative

As you know, the Department of Education (DOE) has launched a new Abbott Secondary Education Initiative (ASEI) for middle and high schools. The initiative is an outgrowth of Abbott X, and reflects two years of deliberations and recommendations by a Court-initiated workgroup of teachers, parents and educators. The ASEI is now part of the Abbott regulations. (See N.J.A.C. 6A:10A-3.2 Secondary Education Initiatives and Appendix B, Secondary Education Standards.)

This initiative is an ambitious effort to address some of our most urgent educational issues, including raising graduation rates and closing academic achievement gaps. It combines standards-based reform with small school and small learning community strategies designed to improve teaching and learning for both students and staff in middle and high schools. The ASEI requires the DOE to provide support to all Abbott districts to:

- Review secondary curricula and provide college preparatory level courses aligned with the NJ CCCS for all students
- Restructure large high schools and middle schools into smaller learning environments for all, including support and common planning time for teams of teachers to work with groups of students over multiple years
- Implement a system of family support and advocacy to personalize school experience for all students

The October 6, 2005 guidance issued by the DOE Abbott Division directs all

Abbott districts to include planning for implementation of the Secondary Initiative as part of the two-year report on instructional priorities due on November 15. (See <http://www.state.nj.us/njded/abbotts/>) Specifically, districts are asked to report on “the current status of efforts to plan for the conversion of large schools serving students in grades 6-12 to small schools or small learning communities.” DOE Guidance, at page 11.

To prepare for implementation of the Initiative, and to include such preparations in the Two-Year District Report due November 15th, districts should consider resource and staffing issues related to the secondary initiative in preparing their 06-07 budgets. To assist in this process, Education Law Center recommends:

Secondary Planning Committees:

- All districts are required to form representative committees of stakeholders now to begin planning for implementation of the Secondary Initiative by September, 2008. (See 6A:10A-3.2 Secondary Education Initiatives (c)). Districts should report on the status of these committees in their Two-Year Reports.

- Planning committees should send representatives to the periodic network meetings sponsored by the DOE to support implementation of the Secondary Initiative. The first of these meetings is scheduled for Nov. 14. (For registration and program information see <http://education.state.nj.us/events/>)

Planning and Budgeting for FY2007

The Abbott regulations commit the DOE to providing assistance to all districts to support implementation of the Secondary Initiative. This support includes providing technical assistance from national consultants with a record of success in high school improvement and also building the capacity of the DOE staff and its Local Support Teams to help districts implement the reform.

In order to be effective, this technical assistance must be aligned with District planning and resources. Districts should assess the local needs required to implement the secondary regulations and include them in their budget planning. This will vary according to the size of the district, the current status of related secondary reform efforts, and other factors. Districts may redirect available resources, fold related efforts into the secondary reform, or, with appropriate documentation, plan for new expenditures and funding.

It is crucial that districts begin making provision to implement the Secondary Initiative in their budget planning for 06-07. Towards that end, districts should consider resource needs in the following categories:

- The current status of required supplemental programs for Abbott secondary schools. (See especially items #6, 7, & 8 on the required programs chart. http://www.edlawcenter.org/ELCPublic/elcnews_051024_Guidelines.pdf). These resources and personnel are part of the capacity schools need to implement the reform
- Staff needs to meet current and projected class size targets of 24 students per class in grades 6-12
- Existing whole school reform developer contracts that should be folded into or reallocated to support the secondary reform
- Facilitator positions as needed in each school
- Designated central office staff to support the reform
- Staff and resources as needed to provide the common planning time for teams specified in the regulations (See 2006 Abbott regulations, Appendix B, Secondary Education Standards #9)
- Professional development activities to support the reform, including continuation of existing programs, reallocation of resources, and new professional development efforts such as staff access to conferences, professional activities and technical assistance beyond what DOE may provide.
- Support for after school and summer planning activities to plan for and implement the reform.

Districts may find it helpful to consult the websites of the national consultants that the state has engaged to provide technical assistance in implementing the reform. They include:

First Things First, a framework for implementing small learning communities from the Institute for Research and Reform in Education <http://www.irre.org/ftf>

High Schools That Work, a school improvement process for raising academic achievement from the Southern Regional Education Board <http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/hstwindex.asp>

While Districts will have significant flexibility tailoring this assistance to meet their needs and priorities, a familiarity with the types and scope of assistance the consultants can provide may be helpful in District planning.

