

Presentation for the Our Children/Our Schools Forum on a "new" Cost Report Monday,
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My presentation this morning is based on two factors: I grew up in a Newark housing project with parents who were actively involved in education; and I worked thirty-eight years in Newark schools, five years in a private school and the remaining thirty-three years in a Newark high school. My life has been devoted to learning and also to teaching. I will share some observations that have impacted on the educational process as a result of the Abbott versus Burke decision.

Most notable at this time is that although child poverty advances in New Jersey in its ten largest cities, climbing on average by 18 per cent, the test performance of its fourth grade students has shown significant gains on average of nine per cent from 1999 to 2005.

Some of the following Abbott mandates can be listed here (not in any particular order) as contributing factors:

Improved Teacher quality

This allows school districts to train and retrain staff to meet both the IEP's of children who are classified as well as the demands of the standardized testing programs and Core Curriculum standards of New Jersey,

Smaller Class Size

Prior to this time classes were filled to overflowing in many urban school districts making it almost impossible for teachers to work with students individually or in small groups

Small Learning Communities

If used properly, they can give students a greater sense of belonging especially in a large school building with a large enrollment. They give groups of teachers the opportunity to increase mentoring and monitoring of students.

Before and After School Tutoring

Students from homes of limited resources seldom have tutors who would coach and assist them with difficult subject matter and/or just give opportunities for individual help.

All day kindergarten and Preschool for 3 and 4 year old children

This provides the kinds of learning situations and environments conducive to learning that research shows will advance young learners far above the skills and abilities of children who are not in a structured environment.

Medical and social resources on site

Children and their families take advantage of dental care, medical screenings and professional services that otherwise are not provided in most communities.

Safety and Security

Recent as well as past incidents in urban schools create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation that must be addressed to maintain safe, healthful environments.

Family Support

Single parent and extended families have now replaced the traditional families in urban districts. Single parents and grandparents are the heads of many households bringing a myriad of problems that cause conflict and disruption in the ways that are not productive for young learners. Schools are safe harbors but they are also institutions of learning and extend to adult education. When the parent is exposed to and informed about many issues related to learning, then the child has a better chance at benefiting from educational opportunities and gains support mechanisms.

WHAT HAS NOT BEEN CONTINUED are some child care and child development programs that would house students' children in the same school building allowing the very young parents to attend school regularly without interruption for child care.

Links to pre College Consortia

Children who grow up in homes where parents do not have college degrees sometimes lose their motivation to continue school beyond high school and also have difficulties trying to graduate. The pre-college programs are needed for providing young people greater ways of focusing and planning for future careers. Pre College provides ways to track academic progress more than provided in regular classroom settings.

If funds are not allocated for the purpose of keeping children in post secondary programs the brightest and the best students will likely seek jobs and not attend college although there are county colleges throughout the state.

School to Work

An expansion of school to work programs is highly necessary. Children in poverty can seek (1) orientation to the work world and on the job training (2) information about job entry requirements.

Attendance Monitors and Drop out Counselors

Certainly urban centers have a terrific problem keeping some youth in the school buildings. Monitors patrol reasons for absence and make home visits. Many homes are in dysfunction and there are limited social agencies to work on this issue unless there are problems of abuse and/or neglect.

In cases where children miss many days of school there are problems keeping them on roll. Counselors/Social Workers play a vital role in tracking social problems, making referrals and setting things back on track

Summer School

In recent years there has not been enough money for summer school. There is also the problem of having too many children who fail standardized tests and what to do about it. If there are not enough teachers, obviously retention at the grade level is difficult and may be impossible. If there are too many retained students, the class sizes then mushroom. Summer school then provides remediation time.

I agree with those not in the Abbotts that funds are necessary to provide these and other programs for all students who are not at grade level, for students who are not at poverty levels perhaps but are near poverty. New Jersey must fund all of its students because every child's entitlement is to a thorough and efficient education.