

Radar Screen DLT 1-2-3

Brought to you by the Scotch Plains – Fanwood PTA District Legislative Team (DLT)

Internet Resources

Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District
www.spfk12.org

District Policy Book:
www.spfk12.org/sp-f_policies.htm

Board of Ed. Meeting Schedule:
www.spfk12.org/sp-f_board_mtgs.htm

SPF PTA Council
www.spfk12.org/ptacouncil/

Garden State Coalition of Schools Website:
www.gscschools.org

NJ Dept. of Education
www.state.nj.us/education/

NJ PTA
www.njpta.org

National PTA
www.pta.org

Education Week
www.edweek.org

SPF District Goals 2008-2009
http://spfk12.org/sp-f_plan_priorities.htm#goals

Sign up for the DLT Email Alert Chain

Via the form on PTA Council website at
www.spfk12.org/ptacouncil

OR
 Send an email to
webmaster_council@spfk12.org

DLT1: Local

- **Secondary Education Redesign Policy** presented by Dr. Hayes. [More info on Page 2.](#)
- **Preschool Expansion Program** presented at BOE Regular mtg. [More info on Page 2.](#)

- **Strategic Planning entering next stage.** Action Teams to start work on individual Action plans

DLT2: State

State Supreme Court Issues School Funding Ruling

No final decision as the Court takes the first step on what could be a long road...

On Nov 18, the NJ Supreme Court issued a ruling regarding the **constitutionality of the State's newest school funding formula as it relates to the Abbott Districts**. The Court found that it did not have sufficient facts presented on this matter to issue a final ruling. Therefore, the Court appointed a lower court judge from Bergen County to be a "**special master**," charged with holding **hearings** and **gathering information** about how the funding formula affects the Abbott Districts. These hearings are to be held in an "expedited" manner, although **no timeline was set**. The special master has 60 days after the hearings are completed to issue his report to the Supreme Court.

In the meantime, the **new funding formula remains in effect for NJ public school districts**, and the 2009 funding levels are presumed sufficient for the coming year. However, since the Court's prior decisions regarding Abbott funding also remain in effect, **individual Abbott Districts can seek additional funding from the Court if they can prove that their funding is not adequate**.

How We Got To This Point

The State is required to provide additional money and programs to NJ's 31 poorest school districts as a result of the various "**Abbott**" **court rulings** in a legal matter that goes back to **1981**. However, in the past 27 years it has become increasingly obvious to educators and community activists that at least **half of NJ's poor children live in other public school districts and are not receiving the help** that Abbott students do. In Jan 2008, the State Legislature adopted the Corzine administration's **School Funding Reform Act of 2008 (SFRA)**, which established a new funding formula for NJ public education. The **new formula** gives state **financial aid to school districts based on the number of low-income and special needs students** they have enrolled, not on whether the district has an Abbott designation or not, in effect doing away with the need for Abbott districts. **Abbott districts** immediately **decided the new formula**, stating that they would receive less funding, undermining their ability to continue programs that have had positive educational results. Taking a proactive, strike-first step, **the Corzine administration** quickly **filed a motion** with the NJ Supreme Court to have the **SFRA declared constitutional**. The **Education Law Center**, the non-profit group that is the main advocate for the Abbott Districts, **filed a counter suit** seeking a court order preserving the Abbott designation and funding. The case was heard in Trenton on September 22. The November 18 ruling is the next step in what will most likely be a prolonged process.

What Happens Now?

The **special master will conduct hearings and gather facts** for the Supreme Court. Only the two parties to the suit can call witnesses, as in a court case. It is important to remember that the **only question being answered is whether the SFRA is constitutional as it relates to the Abbotts** and to the requirements regarding them set up by previous Supreme Court decisions. The Court is not looking at how the SFRA impacts on regular operating districts, and no such information will go into the special master's report unless one of the two parties to the case call "amicus," or friends of the court, witnesses to give such testimony, which is unlikely. Such witnesses would take the focus off of the Abbott issue, which neither side would want.

Some observers feel that it will take many **months for the special master to complete his charge** and issue his report and recommendation to the Supreme Court. The Court then will take time to study the report, perhaps call its own witnesses for clarification and issue a ruling. The **complete process could take several years**.

In the meantime, the **SFRA remains in effect for all districts**, but Abbott districts have been invited by the Court to prove that their current-year funding is insufficient and ask for more funding. In these days of economic turmoil, where the State will find the money to fund the SFRA itself is in question, let alone how it will find additional funding requested by Abbott districts.

In responding to the national fiscal crisis, the **Governor** has indicated publicly that **all areas of state spending are vulnerable to budget slashing or total elimination, except for the areas of public safety, help for the most vulnerable, and education**. And even these three areas cannot totally be shielded from cuts or freezes on spending. The Court's ruling can only put even more financial pressure on the Governor and the Legislature to cut spending while waiting for improving revenues – which is unlikely in the immediate future.

Secondary Education Redesign

According to the state, about 40% of incoming freshman in Public Universities need remediation, thus prompting the need for reform. Details of the NJ STEPS proposed graduation requirements and how our district will be impacted were presented by Dr. Hayes.

1. Overall, SPF District is already meeting or exceeding the proposed requirements in most areas.
2. In Language Arts, Science and Math we currently are in alignment with the Core Curriculum Content standards that will be required. Some changes may include
 - Students requiring to take Algebra II and Science courses (currently not required)
 - Some additional US History courses to be introduced
3. Our district exceeds the requirements being proposed for World Languages.
4. Health & PE, Visual and Performing Arts programs are already in line with the proposed requirements.

The other aspect of this proposed Policy is the 'Phased-in Competency Testing' based on assessments being administered when local school systems determine that students have mastered foundational knowledge in each area.

These are proposed changes not yet officially adopted by the state. Details are available at <http://www.state.nj.us/education/ser/>. Proposed Graduation Requirements are given at <http://www.state.nj.us/education/ser/over/1008transforming.pdf>

Proposed Preschool Expansion Program

As required by the State...

- 5-year plan that every NJ school district is required to put together.
- Targeted number of students eligible as per the state formula is around 19 three- & four-year olds.
- State funding for pre-K program comes only with full day program.

Proposed implementation for SPF school district...

- Goal is to enroll 90% eligible at-risk (students eligible for free and reduced lunch) three and four year-old preschoolers by 2013-2014.
- Use existing staffing for this program. Propose to use 2 existing half-day Jump Start teachers as full day teachers and 1 Preschool Disabilities Teacher for 2 half-day Jump Start sessions.
- Make up of the Full Day Preschool Classes will be - 5 At-Risk Students, 5 Preschool Disabilities Students and 5 Tuition-Paying Students
- Creative Curriculum defined as constructive, purposeful play is a vehicle for learning. Social competence is a key focus.
- Program Highlights include
 - Allows children to engage in more focused and complex projects
 - Extended "choice time" for children each day
 - Smoother transitions
 - Encourages conversational skills, and table manners. Breakfast and lunch will be served family style.
 - Child assessments
- Logistics for tuition-paying students not worked out yet.
- The program will assist district in meeting state target of 46% inclusive placements.
- For details, contact Hope Swarts, Supervisor at 908-889-0559

Know the DLT

Have a question or comment – contact your local DLT Rep:

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Join us for our January 2009 meeting at 1:15pm on Jan 12th in the Board Offices!