

SCHOOL BOARD notes

Abbott Tab At \$12.8 Billion

An additional \$12.8 billion would be needed to complete the 300 construction projects on hold in the 31 Abbott districts, state education officials announced last week.

But holding off the projects would allow inflation to take its toll, according to the "Annual Report of the School Facilities Construction Program." Ten years from now, completion of those same projects would cost approximately \$29 billion.

The report was issued by the state Department of Education and the New Jersey Schools Construction Corporation (SCC), the agency created by the McGreevey Administration to manage Abbott school projects. Estimates are based on the districts' 2000 long-range facility plans, and not on 2005 plans.

According to SDOE officials, the estimates would help lawmakers determine how to restore funding for the program, which was created to meet the state Supreme Court's mandate in *Abbott v. Burke*. That decision required the state to pay the full cost of necessary school facility projects in the Abbott, or special needs, districts.

Future Priorities "...it is important to remember that this was one of the most ambitious public works projects ever undertaken in this state, and considerable progress has been made in New Jersey's effort to invest in our children's futures," said acting Commissioner of Education

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BUDGET WATCH



Budget Guidelines, but No Word on Aid

Budget Address: March 21 The Senate and Assembly leadership late last week amended the official legislative calendar to designate Tuesday, March 21, as the date of Governor Corzine's first annual Budget Address. Bills have been moving through the Legislature (A-2288 and S-1253) to authorize postponement of the address, which is normally delivered in February to a joint session of the Legislature.

For local school districts, the date of the budget address is critical since, under statute, state aid figures for the upcoming school year must be announced within two days of the speech.

In years when the governor's budget message has been delayed, the state Department of Education has adjusted the school budget-development calendar and/or indicated anticipated state aid amounts. Four years ago, for instance, the new governor's budget message was postponed until mid-March. By March 1 of that year, the state Department of Education had provided a new budget development schedule for school districts, along with information on state aid assumptions.

Budget Calendar Change? On Tuesday, the state Department of Education released the first set of critical budget development information to school districts, including the "2006-07 Budget Guidelines." The information indicated the 2006-07 spending growth limitation, as well as new regional benchmarks for administrative spending limits. It did not, however, give any indication of state aid for 2006-07.

"At this time, the budget calendar is still under review due to the possible

delay in the Governor's Budget Message," stated Katherine P. Attwood, director, Office of Fiscal Policy & Planning. "We hope to be able to provide final information on the calendar by the end of this week."

A delayed state budget message would conflict with the current local school district budget development process. For example, school districts' preliminary budgets are due to the SDOE's County Offices by March 6. Without revenue figures—including state aid amounts—those preliminary documents cannot be completed. In addition, under the current calendar, public hearings on proposed school budgets would begin one day after the Governor's budget message.

4.04% Cap The SDOE budget information did include information districts could use to begin constructing the "expenditure-side" of the budgets, such as the 2006-07 spending growth limitation, or budget cap.

Noting that current statute sets the spending growth limit at the greater of 2.5% or the Consumer Price Index, the Budget Guidelines go on to state, "For use in 2006-07, CPI is 4.04%."

Assembly Budget Committee With the state facing a possible \$4-6 billion revenue shortfall next year, the Legislature has been seeking input on ways to promote cost efficiency at all levels of government. Yesterday, NJSBA representatives were scheduled to appear before the Assembly Budget Committee to offer insight on how the Legislature could assist districts by promoting shared services and eliminating mandates.



Executive Committee to Meet with State Board

In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, notice is hereby provided of a meeting of the New Jersey School Boards Association's Executive Committee with members of the State Board of Education. The meeting will be held at NJSBA Headquarters, 413 West State Street, Trenton, on Wednesday, March 1, 2006, 4:30 p.m.

The meeting is open to the public.

The purpose of the meeting is to discuss educational issues of mutual concern.

For further information, contact Mary Alice Durham at (609) 278-5206.

New Date for Executive Committee Meeting

In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, notice is hereby served that the meeting of the New Jersey School Boards Association Executive Committee, originally scheduled for Wednesday, March 8, 2006, has been changed to Wednesday, March 1, 2006. The meeting will be held at NJSBA Headquarters, 413 West State Street, Trenton, New Jersey and will begin at 6 p.m.

The meeting is open to the public.

The agenda, to the extent known at this time, will include discussion of the minutes of January 4, 2006; ratification of officers' vouchers; approval of vouchers past 60 days; debriefing of the joint meeting with members of the State Board of Education; Executive Committee accountability-self assessment; ad hoc Facilities Plant Needs Committee report and recommendation; 2006 NSBA Federal Relations Network Conference debriefing; 2006 NSBA Executive Directors' Winter Institute debriefing; 2006 NSBA Annual Conference update; Officer travel regulation, GO/8260R; Leadership for Educational Excellence (LEE Group) funding document; proposed Board of Directors agenda for the March 17, 2006 meeting; and an Association update.

In addition, the Executive Committee may enter into closed session to discuss personnel issues.

For further information, contact Mary Alice Durham at (609) 278-5206.

NJSBA Seeks Anti-Harassment, Anti-Bullying Policies

NJSBA Policy Service is seeking your district's policy and regulation language on harassment and bullying, in particular, specific language describing your school's action on –

- Specific disciplinary procedures or consequences for bullying behavior
- Remedial actions of any kind
- Broad system approaches aimed at prevention (required staff training, in-service programs, and educational programs for students)
- Broad system approaches aimed at intervention (approaches to reduce or eliminate emerging or existing problems)

Please fax or e-mail samples to Jean Harkness at jharkness@njsba.org, or fax to 609-695-0413.

NJSBA Seeks Entries for School Leader Award

Are your students mastering curriculum with a digital camera and technology? Is that book club for parents helping with your students' reading level? Are your ESL students learning English more readily through the arts? These and other excellent programs are winners of last year's School Leader Award. If you have a unique and exciting activity in your school that deserves recognition, let us know about it.

NJSBA is seeking entries for the 2006 School Leader Award program that describe innovative methods of helping children to learn in the classroom. Winners will be honored at their county school boards association meeting with an engraved plaque. In addition, each winning program will be featured in the *School Leader* magazine.

Entries must be postmarked no later than March 17. For more information, go to www.njsba.org and scroll down to *Award Programs*.

New NJSBA Training for Board Leaders

NJSBA is offering two courses – *Communicating Effectively* and *Parliamentary Procedure* – in its Certified Board Leader (CBL) curriculum in March and April. These courses will not be available again until the fall.

Communicating Effectively provides board presidents, vice presidents, and other members with the necessary tools and techniques for improving communications. Learn how to have board meetings with clear two-way communication, active listening, effective giving and receiving of feedback, and tools for resolving conflict without playing the "blame game." *Communicating Effectively* will take place on March 4, from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. (continental breakfast at 9 a.m.), at the Eisenhower Middle School in Succasunna. The cost is \$50.

Parliamentary Procedure shows you how to have meetings that are effective and efficient, and leave everyone feeling a part of the decision-making process. You will be able to define the role of the meeting leader; apply *Robert's Rules of Order*; discuss how the standard order of business relates to your agenda; explain how motions are introduced, debated, and disposed of; describe the hierarchical relationship of motions and the critical differences among similar sounding motions; and discuss variations of Robert's Rules for board of education meetings. *Parliamentary Procedure* will be held on April 8, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. (continental breakfast at 8:30 a.m.), at the Raritan Valley Academy of the Middlesex Regional ESC in Piscataway. The cost is \$95.

The courses will be banked for you if you are not yet eligible for the CBL designation. To register, contact Charlene Hendrix at 1-888-886-5722, extension 5232. For further information, contact Walter Meyer at 1-888-886-5722, extension 5236. 🍓

Abbott Construction Tab
continued

Lucille E. Davy.

Going forward, Davy said that the priority for Abbott projects should be placed on adequate preschool facilities, followed by eliminating overcrowded classrooms and upgrading inadequate facilities.

Depletion of Fund The Educational Facilities Construction and Financing Act of 2000 created an \$8.6 billion construction program, with \$6 billion devoted to meeting the court's construction mandate in the Abbott districts. The Abbott money has been spent or has been allocated, leaving 300 Abbott projects on hold. (The other \$2.6 billion was set aside for up-front grants to offset bonding costs in non-Abbott districts. Those funds also expired this year.)

The rapid depletion of EFCFA funds and concerns about the SCC's management of Abbott projects led to an investigation by the state's Inspector General, who recommended numerous structural reforms at the agency. In addition, two weeks ago, Governor Corzine named a special counsel to monitor the SCC.

Last week's report from the state Department of Education attributed the

depletion of funds, in part, to outdated and incomplete cost estimates.

"When [EFCFA] was approved, the construction estimates were already too low because they were based on 1997 per-square-foot costs," reads a department of education press statement. "Also, the estimates did not include costs for land acquisition and remediation, demolition, the relocation of homeowners, tenants and businesses, historic preservation, temporary classrooms and 'swing space,' and the creation of an additional Abbott district."

Further Investigation Sought Meanwhile, three members of the Assembly Education Committee called on Governor Corzine to appoint a special prosecutor to identify any illegal activity that might have taken place at the SCC. Such action is necessary before any additional funding is provided for the construction program, according to Assemblymen Joseph Malone (R-30), David Wolfe (R-10) and Bill Baroni (R-14).

The lawmakers also said they plan to introduce legislation to authorize an investigation into the agency, a newspaper article reported.

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CONFERENCE NOTES



2006 NJSBA Legislative Conference

Sponsored by NJSBA, Monday, March 6, War Memorial and New Jersey State House, Trenton, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Registration begins at 8 a.m.

This year's two-part conference, "A Call to Action," will give NJSBA members a chance to participate in the legislative process. In the morning session, participants will discuss key education legislation and NJSBA's legislative agenda and will work together in small groups to prepare for the afternoon at the State House. Governor Jon S. Corzine has been invited to speak.

Legislators from all 40 districts are scheduled to be in the State House that day, and several have been contacted to set up small personal meetings. Attendees will have the opportunity to advocate for New Jersey's children by discussing the impact that legislative decisions have at the local level.

For more information, or to register for the conference, visit www.njsba.org, or contact Kristen Gucker at 1-888-886-5722, extension 5271, or by email at kgucker@njsba.org.

Emergency Management Forum for Business and Local Government

Sponsored by the Somerset County Business Partnership, March 9, 7:30 – 10 a.m., Ortho Clinical Diagnostics, Route 202, Raritan.

A panel representing the New Jersey State Police Office of Emergency Management, the state's Business Executives for National Security, and Allstate New Jersey Insurance Company will discuss the planning, resources and alliances needed to protect against catastrophe.

Registration is \$35 for members of the Somerset County Business Partnership and other local Chambers of Commerce, and \$60 for non-members. To register, go to www.SCBP.org or send e-mail to event@SCBP.org.

Cape May SBA Hears Students

The Cape May County School Boards Association's annual Eighth Grade Dialogue Program gave board members the opportunity to hear students discuss their middle school experiences and their expectations for high school. Over 100 guests attended the event in Avalon last month and heard the students' viewpoints on school safety, testing, peer pressure, the qualities of teachers and technology.



Shown are Thomas Ottaviano, Cape May County SBA president (far left), and Glenn Douglas, Cape May County SBA secretary/treasurer (second from right) with the eighth grade students -- Matthew Carrachio, Woodbine; Amanda Catanoso, Upper Township; Allison DiDonato, Dennis Township; Jacklyn Fazio, Lower Cape May Regional; Jeri Anne Gerace, Wildwood Crest; Brandon Hand, Stone Harbor; Jordan Ippolito, Ocean City; Valerie Lang, Sea Isle City; Jormarie Maldonado, Cape May County Special Services; Joseph Rogowski, North Wildwood; Shaniqua Roper, Wildwood; and Logan Sykes, Avalon.

Stronger Safeguards Assembly speaker Joe Roberts, meanwhile, stressed that placing controls on the program would ensure its fiscal integrity in the future.

“High-quality classroom facilities are critical if all New Jersey children are to receive the best education possible,” he said. “It will be difficult to provide a new wave of construction funding until efforts are undertaken to account for previous expenditures and stronger safeguards are put in place to ensure that future construction dollars are not wasted.”

“The Annual Report of the School Facilities Construction Program” can be accessed on the state Department of Education’s Web site, www.nj.gov/education.

C A L E N D A R



February 25

- ✓ School Finance Committee Meeting, NJSBA Headquarters, Trenton, 8:30 a.m.

February 28

Middlesex General Membership Meeting, Victorian Manor, Edison, 6:30 p.m.

March 1

- ✓ Executive Committee Meeting with State Board Members, NJSBA Headquarters, Trenton, 4:30 p.m.
 - ✓ Executive Committee Meeting, NJSBA Headquarters, Trenton, 6:00 p.m.
- Atlantic General Membership Meeting, Mullica Township, 6:30 p.m.

March 2


Cumberland General Membership Meeting, Hopewell Township School, Bridgeton, 6:30 p.m.

Hunterdon General Membership Meeting, Holiday Inn Select, Clinton, 6:30 p.m.

March 4

- ✓ New Board Member Orientation, Eisenhower Middle School, Succasunna, registration 8:30 a.m.
- ✓ Communicating Effectively Conference, Eisenhower Middle School, Succasunna, registration 9 a.m.
- ✓ Legislative Committee, Ramada Inn, East Windsor, 8:30 a.m.

For more information on county school boards association activities, log on to www.njsba.org and click on the appropriate county association.

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SCHOOL BOARD NOTES

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