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Dear Colleague:

A grant from The Fund for New Jersey and The Schumann Fund for New Jersey has made it possible for us to conduct this study and disseminate this report to you. In the pages that follow, we summarize our findings from field visits to 32 schools in three Abbott districts during the first year of implementation of whole school reform.

It is our hope that this report will lead to a smoother implementation process in the second and third cohorts of Abbott schools by identifying some of the problems and solutions developed in the first cohort schools.

The authors would like to thank the staff and faculty of the schools and districts we visited as well as personnel from the State department of education for their gracious gift of their time. Without their open and candid contribution, this study would not have been possible.

For additional copies of this report, contact Joan Buck at the Center for Government Services at (732) 932-3640, ext. 628 or order the report on-line at <http://www.policy.rutgers.edu/cgs/pubs.htm>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bari Anhalt Erlichson".

Bari Anhalt Erlichson, Ph.D.  
Professor and Principal Investigator

About the Authors

Bari Anhalt Erlichson. Erlichson is assistant professor of public policy in the Department of Public Policy and Center for Government Services in the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University. Erlichson holds a Ph.D. from Stanford University in Political Science and an M.A. from the School of Education at Stanford University in Administration and Policy Analysis. Erlichson has been a consultant on a wide range of projects including a governance study for the National School-to-Work office, in partnership with the Consortium for Policy Research in Education. She also participated in a five-year study of education reform efforts in San Francisco for the Civic Capacity and Urban Education Project, funded by the National Science Foundation. Erlichson's recent publications include a collaboration with Professor Luis Fraga of Stanford University entitled "Consensus Building and School Reform: The Role of the Courts in San Francisco" in Changing Urban Education (1998) edited by Clarence Stone and published by The University of Kansas Press.



Margaret Goertz. Goertz is professor and co-director of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. Prior to joining CPRE, Goertz was the Executive Director of the Education Policy Research Division of Education Testing Service. Her recent publications include From Cashbox to Classroom: The Struggle for Fiscal Reform and Educational Change in New Jersey (1997) with William Firestone and Gary Natriello. She received her Ph.D. in social science from Syracuse University in 1971.

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## Executive Summary



In the last three decades, New Jersey has witnessed 4 trials or hearings, 3 administrative law judges or agency decisions, 4 lower court decisions or reports and 11 State supreme court opinions or orders. Each of these actions aimed at reducing the fiscal disparity between property-poor and property-rich school districts. The most recent decision, *Abbott v. Burke V* was decided in 1998. Among the 1998 directives of the court was that schools in the Abbott districts must implement whole school reform within three years.

This report summarizes year one of our study to evaluate implementation efforts of whole school reform in three districts in New Jersey. Recognizing that New Jersey's experience with whole school reform is in its infancy, we did not intend to try to link models to student achievement outcomes. However, as several model developers have themselves stated, effective implementation is a good predictor of whether the model will succeed in the years to come. Thus, our study sought to determine what leads to effective implementation of various models throughout the State.

We pursued three major avenues of data collection during the course of our study: interviews, a teacher questionnaire, and an examination of school budgets. We conducted field visits to 32 of the first cohort schools in three districts. In all, we spoke directly with over 250 separate individuals. The Teacher Questionnaire provided an opportunity for all teachers and staff members to participate in the study. Completed questionnaires were returned by 617 staff members from our 32 schools. Finally, we examined school-based budgets from 28 of our 32 schools to evaluate allocation patterns.

In the fall of 1998, 72 schools began implementation of whole school reform. Since we were unable to visit all 72 schools in the first cohort, we chose to focus instead on all of the first cohort schools within three districts. In our three districts, we visited 10 Success For All schools, 3 Comer schools, 18 Community for Learning schools, and one Coalition for Essential Schools site.

### General Implementation Findings

*Model Selection.* New Jersey's State Department of Education chose to endorse five models for implementation at the elementary level. They were Success For All, Community for Learning/Adaptive Learning Environments Model, Comer/School Development Program, Modern Red Schoolhouse, and Coalition of Essential Schools. The model selection process in the 32 schools in our three districts was marked by limited information, a lack of significant teacher involvement, and a timeframe that precluded true deliberation. Additionally, schools chose models without an understanding of how those models were connected to the State's Core Curriculum Content Standards, depending instead on the state department's endorsement of models as evidence of such a connection. This is, however, not always the case.

*Role of the State Department of Education.* In practice, our interviewees felt that the state department's field personnel, also known as the School Reform and Improvement teams (SRI), played a predominantly observa-

tion role, rather than that of technical assistance as specified in the Commissioner's 1998 emergency regulations. Most did fulfill the role of liaison between state department and school. However, the SRI representatives did not have specialized training in the budget process. Therefore, the role of technical assistance was sharply curtailed. Finally, the great majority of schools reported that their SRI representatives had changed during the school year.

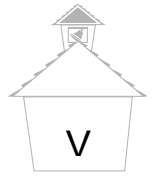
*The Role of the School Management Teams.* A fundamental problem faced by the School Management Teams (SMTs) across the State was how to accomplish the additional functions now placed on them. Most schools had not budgeted extra dollars to pay the members of the SMT during the academic year 1998-1999. Thus, many schools worked to accomplish their tasks during the regular school day, pulling teachers out of the classroom to attend SMT meetings. The SMT's work was complicated by the fact that most SMT chairs and members received little training as to how to accomplish their broadened responsibilities. The end result was a continual process of 'submission and revision' on the part of the school, i.e., the school submitted a plan or a budget and the state department asked for revisions or further explanations.

*The Role of the School District Administration.* The expectations placed on the district also expanded significantly under the regulations. Each district administration had to oversee and coordinate the efforts of the schools implementing whole school reform, often collecting information from the schools and forming larger districtwide plans. However, the districts – like the SMTs – also reported lacking adequate guidance or templates from the state department. So, the districts were also in a position of 'submission and revision' as well. While the expectations placed on districts expanded, the governance structure established by the regulations also impinged on the district-school relationship in many ways. Schools themselves worked to establish relationships with developers, the SRI representatives and even members of the state department directly. Thus, schools – rather than the district – engaged in relationships that traditionally would have been mediated by their district administration.

### Community For Learning/Adaptive Learning Environments Model

*Model Selection.* In nearly every CFL/ALEM school in the State, teachers and administrators alike describe a model selection process that was characterized by a short timeline, limited information, and a process of elimination of other models. In another district, the decision to choose ALEM was driven in large measure by unsuccessful or unsatisfactory experiences with other models. When asked whether teachers and staff agreed or disagreed with the statement, "I feel my opinion was incorporated into the decision of which model was chosen", only 19% of teachers agreed with the statement. Only 26.3% of the teachers and staff agreed with the statement, "I was provided with information on all the models before our school had to make a decision."

*Teacher Training.* The training of teachers in the ALEM model varied from district to district. In one district, teachers were trained by grade level at a central location during the school year. The most frequently re-





ported issue with the training by teachers was the lack of specific examples or guidelines as to how to implement ALEM in the classrooms. In some ways, this is due to the flexibility of the ALEM model which allows teachers to determine how to structure their classrooms.

*Experience with Implementation.* Teachers cited the lack of other materials as a problem. Due in large part to the absence of the first cohort grant money, many of the schools were left without an ability to pay for the materials to implement the model. Teachers also cited some problems with establishing the learning centers. The most often mentioned obstacle was finding the time to set up the centers and gather the necessary materials. Additionally, classroom size was also cited as an obstacle since additional space is necessary for the children to move from center to center.

Teachers and administrators alike commented on the tremendous flexibility that ALEM allowed them in implementing the model. The overwhelming majority of interviewees appreciated and embraced this flexibility. A potential downside to this flexibility is, however, that the implementation of ALEM will be different from school to school.

But perhaps the largest problem faced when implementing the model was simply that teachers felt disconnected from the model selection process and were unaware of the larger court decision directing the implementation of whole school reform. Thus, many felt that this was simply more edict from either the district or the state department that would pass in a few short years.

*External Support.* When evaluating the developer's support and guidance this year, four general comments surfaced. First, almost all schools mentioned that they thought that the developer was overwhelmed this year and hence unable to meet all of the school's needs. Second, most schools commented on the relative inexperience of the developer's field personnel. Third, the flexibility of the model presented additional implementation issues. Finally, nearly all schools liked their individual field personnel assigned to their school.

## Success For All

*Model Selection.* Success For All has a stringent 'buy-in' procedure that schools must follow before SFA will agree to have them as an implementation site. Typically, schools send teams to visit existing SFA sites. Then SFA sends representatives to a school or district to host an awareness session where teachers learn about the program and have an opportunity to ask questions. Then, a secret ballot vote is conducted at the school site. The individual ballots are sealed in an envelope and are counted for the first time by SFA personnel. A school must approve the adoption of the model with an 80% Yes vote from the school personnel.

*New SFA Sites.* All of the new SFA sites in New Jersey reported that such a process was indeed followed. However, the process varied from school to school in terms of the extent to which other models were presented. Schools varied as to the role played by administrators at the school site and central administration. Although the model selection process in these schools was subject to the same type of lack of information discussed in the last section with regard to ALEM and also influence by central ad-

ministrators, the requirement of a formal vote does insure some measure of support for the model.

The reasons for adopting SFA varied as well. However, each school recognized that SFA would dramatically impact the school. The schools expressed a willingness to embrace change, particularly with regard to the reading program. Often the schools felt that their reading programs were especially weak and thus were specifically looking for a strong reading curriculum.

*Legacy SFA Sites.* Even before the court decision in 1998, fourteen schools in New Jersey had implemented SFA. The model selection process outlined above did occur in each of the legacy sites. However, the process occurred when the model was first selected. The process was not repeated during the 1997-1998 academic year. This has led to a situation where many of the current faculty were not offered an opportunity to vote for or against the model, having been hired after the initial adoption of the model. The lack of a formal model selection process or vote was attributed to the perception of the state department's unwillingness to allow legacy sites to switch models.

*Teacher Training.* The training process for SFA was also remarkably consistent across districts. Representatives from SFA conducted on-site training that lasted approximately three days. Teachers learned about the program as a whole and then were broken down into smaller groups to learn about their individual components, such as Roots or Wings. In general, teachers felt that the training was very good and quite beneficial but also felt that it was very intense and suggested that it be extended. Sixty-two percent of the teachers and staff agreed with the statement, "I've had enough training to know how to implement the model in my classroom."

*Experience with Implementation.* The implementation of SFA seems to have occurred relatively smoothly in the six new schools under study. Teachers report understanding the model, understanding what is expected of them, and having the necessary materials to implement the model in their classroom. The largest obstacles experienced include becoming familiar enough with the model to keep on pace in the classroom, and sacrificing some of their personal creativity during the 90 minute reading period. In the new schools, however, many teachers reported that they have personally witnessed achievement growth by their students.

In the legacy sites, the implementation process was more challenging. Many factors might explain this finding. First, as mentioned above, teachers might feel less ownership over the model since there was no formal vote. Another likely explanation is that the legacy sites were treated like new SFA sites. This meant that the entire school staff was retrained, new materials were purchased, and SFA personnel began the process of implementation checks again. Thus, some teachers who had been implementing the model for years felt that things had drastically changed for them. In the past, the implementation process seemed to be more lax, with teachers able to adapt the model in their classroom. Now, the SFA personnel insist on no unapproved modifications, which has led to a backlash among some of the legacy teachers who were used to the 'old' SFA.





Respondents reported that the easiest part of implementing the model was the fact that the program was so well specified. The most often mentioned difficulty was staying on pace with the model. The model required teachers to move swiftly through a series of exercises in order to finish a lesson within a three day time period. Administrators mentioned that their major challenge to implementing the model was simply keeping the model running in terms of finding adequate space for the reading groups and enough staff to lead the reading groups and tutoring sessions.

Unlike Comer and ALEM, SFA has a stringent implementation process and classroom structure. All modifications to the model are carefully screened by the SFA staff. Two types of modifications to the model were prevalent in New Jersey. First, due to the lack of adequate facilities and staff in many of the buildings, schools ran two or three reading periods instead of one as specified in the model. The second type of modification entailed extending the three day lesson cycle for some kids. Often this modification was applied to special education or bilingual students.

### Comer

*Model Selection.* All three Comer schools in our sample have previous experience in implementing the model. Each school began implementing Comer in the early 1990's and each school's participation in implementation lapsed due to a lack of funds from either the State or their district.

*Teacher Training.* Comer has a process whereby it trains the management team of each school. Typically the team includes the principal, the facilitator, a parent, a representative from the support staff, and teachers. Typically after the facilitator is trained, the next step in the Comer training process is for the school facilitator to "turnkey" the training to the rest of the staff. This means that the facilitator holds sessions for the staff back at the school site. However, in two of the schools a representative from Comer also provided two afternoon training sessions in late March. For those schools, that was the first introduction that a majority of the teaching staff had to the Comer model. This was obviously a major delay in implementation.

*Experience with Implementation.* At this point, it is too early to assess the experience of the three schools with implementation since two of the three schools received their first training in March 1999. However, the process of re-implementation of Comer was not necessarily a smooth one. In all the schools, teachers and administrators mentioned addressing some problems that were remnants of the first implementation of the model.

### The Budget Process

An integral part of the whole school reform effort in New Jersey is the delegation of resource allocation decisions to the school level. Under the *Abbott V* decision and subsequent state regulations, schools are granted greater authority over both programmatic and budgeting decisions. Yet, while schools are asked to prepare zero-based budgets based on their whole school reform models and specific needs, the state expects schools and districts to meet these needs with existing resources.

Although the stated intention of school-based decisionmaking in the Abbott schools is to rebuild schools from the “ground-up,” the State has increasingly micro-managed the development and content of school-based budgets. This micro-management, in turn, limits the flexibility of schools to allocate resources in ways that the school community may feel is necessary to meet the needs of its students. The growing state role also raises longer term questions about who is, and who should be, responsible for making fiscal decisions—schools, districts or the State.



State implementation of school-based budgeting took place in two phases: (1) development of initial school budgets (August through November 1998); and (2) review and revision of school budgets (December 1, 1998 through late February 1999) and review and approval of district budgets (generally March 1999).

### Phase One

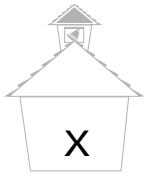
The NJSDE provided initial guidance to the Cohort 1 schools through a series of memoranda to the Abbott districts and principals of the first cohort schools, technical assistance seminars and budget worksheets. Because it was operating under a tight timeline and with limited human resources, the Department designed the process as schools and districts struggled to implement it. This resulted in considerable confusion about the role of schools, districts and developers in the process and in the content of the final budgets. In addition, the State was unable to provide the much needed training and technical assistance. The NJSDE had expected to place fiscal experts on the SRI teams, but were unable to hire many staff by November 1998.

The schools were left largely on their own to develop their initial zero-based budgets. The district staff expected the State and the developers to provide technical support to the schools; neither did. The State, in turn, expected the districts and the developers to assist the schools, in collaboration with state fiscal experts who were not hired in time for the budgeting process.

Looking across the three districts, it appears that there was minimal teacher input into the budget process outside of the SMT. A few schools surveyed teachers as part of their needs assessment, but only 20 percent of the teachers responding to our survey felt they had influence in how their school spends money to implement their WSR model.

### Phase Two

The State’s second, and more prescriptive phase of activity, was their review of the school budgets. This took place in January and February of 1999. By the time the NJSDE began its review process, it had developed the promised “illustrative budgets” for each model in both elementary and middle school grades. Although these documents had not been available to schools (other than those with SFA models) during the budget preparation process, they were used by the State to identify positions and costs considered to be in excess of the model and other Abbott requirements. The State, at this time, also added tutors to the non-SFA models, a programmatic decision made by the NJSDE.



The department-prepared illustrative budgets were nearly identical across models. They all included the same number of teachers, special-ists, tutors and support staff. The state did add a footnote to the tutors line, however, stating that schools should budget for “up to five tutors de-pending upon the developer’s strategy for helping students who need ad-ditional time and support for learning.” The only differences in the bud-gets appear in the facilitator line and in the budgets for curriculum con-sultants and professional development. Success for All calls for two, rather than one, facilitator, while Coalition for Essential Schools (CES) requires only 0.2 FTE of a facilitator. Several of the models include the time of a district coach or, in the case of CFL, a district project coordinator. Success for All and CES have much higher professional development costs than the other models, particularly Accelerated Schools and CFL. Coalition for Essential Schools also requires more money for curriculum consultants and additional funds for a CES coach.

The bottom line is that the number of personnel required by the mod-els has a small range: from 55.35 to 57 for elementary schools, and from 63.85 to 64.75 for middle schools. Even with the differences in Instruc-tional: Non-Salary Costs, the models cost approximately the same amount of money, holding grade span constant. The most expensive elementary model, SFA, costs only \$137,000 or 4 percent more than the least expen-sive model, Accelerated Schools. The price range for the middle school models is only \$151,000, or a 3.5 percent difference.

The State, thus, began its budget reviews with a generic set of resource requirements for the schools, a kind of CEIFA Plus resource model that allows for little flexibility across models. Rather than having programs drive budgets, it appears that budgets, or at least the State’s budgets, will drive programming in the schools. The State also applied the following decision rules to its reviews:

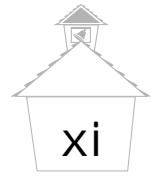
- The State approved the larger of a school’s prior year budget or the State’s illustrative budget for the school’s model. Thus, a school could exceed the model requirements if it stayed within last year’s spending.
- Although the written guidelines and illustrative budgets called for schools to reallocate all categorical funds, the State did not require schools to reallocate special education or bilingual education staff this year. Schools could build their school reforms on top of existing special education programs. Similarly, schools could retain the structure of bilingual programs that had been approved by the NJSDE.
- Schools could retain excess positions and costs if their districts paid for them with local revenues.

### Examining Allocation and Funding Patterns

Our analysis shows that the schools both reallocated resources and added new resources to their budgets. Schools in both districts added large numbers of social workers, family liaison coordinators and technology co-ordinators. Middle schools added attendance/dropout prevention staff. Schools made these additions across the board, regardless of the WSR

model they implemented. This reflects the State's interpretation of Abbott requirements as much as requirements of WSR.

Holding school size constant, it appears that the schools, on average, budgeted more staff than their models required. As a result, the average student/teacher ratio ranges from 7.7 to 9.1 in the elementary schools compared to a State ratio of about 10.2:1 in the elementary school models. Similarly, the middle school models, as implemented, have ratios of around 8:1 compared to the State model of 10.5:1. At the elementary level, there is more variation in student/teacher ratios across districts than there is across models.



## Conclusions

Implementing whole school reform is not an easy task under most circumstances. In New Jersey, the task was complicated even further due to the enormous pressures of a short timeline for model selection and implementation, the increased demands of the state department with a short timeframe for completion, and the introduction of school based budgeting. Many of our interviewees expressed frustration with the absence of details and guidance from the State department in terms of preparing plans and budgets. However, schools were most frustrated by the department's inability to deliver on its promise of \$50,000 for each new implementation site. The department awarded the implementation grant to each of the first cohort schools who filed a grant application in August 1998. Schools planned to use the money for training and materials related to the model as well as simply to pay the model developers. As of June 1999, when we finished our last site visit, schools had yet to receive the grant money.

The first year implementation of CFL/ALEM in the schools in our study was a difficult process. The model selection process was marked by limited information about the model and its impact on the classroom as well as a lack of true teacher participation in the selection. The teacher training was too limited and lacked the concrete examples necessary for some teachers. There is also tremendous variation in the implementation across schools and districts. Implementation of CFL/ALEM will likely begin to get easier in the years to come as teachers become more familiar with the model and the necessary resources arrive at the school site. However, it will continue to be difficult to convince the 'reluctant' teachers of the model's value.

The first year of implementation of SFA appeared to go relatively smoothly in most schools. The legacy sites did retain some bitterness about not being afforded an opportunity to re-vote for the model. However, respondents felt that the teacher training, the materials, and the support were sufficient and enabled them to implement the model. Most respondents were willing to sacrifice some of their creativity in the classroom for the results that they experienced with SFA.

It is too early to render an opinion about the implementation of Comer due to the late start the Comer schools experienced in implementing the model. A fundamental challenge in implementing Comer as a whole school reform model is that the model itself is only a process of affecting change.



It denotes a process of governing the school rather than a solution. Perhaps the starkest difference between Comer and SFA or ALEM is that Comer does not proscribe a particular curriculum as SFA does or a classroom management plan as ALEM does. Thus, to affect change in the classroom, Comer depends heavily on the capacity of building personnel. The school itself is responsible for diagnosing its problems and prescribing a solution for those problems. This process is dependent on strong and effective leadership at the school site as well as collegial and close working relationships among all school personnel and involved community members. Developing the leadership capacity and positive relationships at the school site can be significant challenges in and of themselves, but they are a necessary condition for the Comer process of school improvement.

Finally, the school-based budgeting process in the Cohort 1 schools was an ill-informed, somewhat chaotic, and very frustrating experience for school and district participants. Seemingly distrustful of district leadership, the State constrained the role of district administrators in the development of school budgets. The NJSDE was unable to fill this void due to a short timeline and limited resources. As a result, schools were left to devise budgets without guidance from the State, districts or developers. When the State did step forward, during its budget review process, it imposed a generic resource template on all of the school budgets, creating further confusion and even greater frustration. The resulting budgets, however, do conform to the State's model, with little variation in staffing patterns across WSR models.