

Association for Children of New Jersey

Action Alert!

May 19, 2004

STATE RETURNS TO SUPREME COURT ON ABBOTT TEACHER EXTENSION: TIME IS STILL OF THE ESSENCE

On Tuesday, May 18, 2004, the Commissioner of Education filed a motion before the Supreme Court of New Jersey seeking relief of the requirement that all teachers in Abbott preschool classrooms have an undergraduate degree and certification by September 2004.

The brief explains that despite diligent efforts, the four-year window for certification was too short for many community-based teachers who attempted to balance working full-time, taking college coursework and addressing family obligations. Head Start teachers experienced other problems because Abbott districts did not begin collaborating with Head Start classrooms until later in the implementation process. Only when Head Start agencies began contracting with Abbott districts did their teachers become eligible to take advantage of the DHS scholarship opportunities.

As of this date, the Supreme Court **HAS NOT** granted the Commissioner's motion for an extension. However, in the event that the Court does grant the motion, the Department of Education has set up two processes for applying for an Extension for P-3 certification: one for community based preschool teachers and one for Head Start teachers.

Eligible teachers are responsible for collecting the following materials and delivering them to their district by **July 1, 2004**:

Community-based teachers:

1. The "Abbott Preschool Teacher Applying for an Extension for P-3 Certification" form (See attached) must be completed by a representative of the college/university the teacher is attending. When completed, the document will demonstrate that the teacher requires 30 credits or less to complete the BA degree, is a student in good standing, has maintained a minimum GPA of 2.75 and has attached a "detailed and feasible plan for completion of the degree by September 2006. **Teachers falling under this category should immediately contact their institution of higher education to ensure that both the attached form and the "plan for completion" are completed and received by the district before the July 1st deadline;**
2. A letter of support from the district; and
3. A letter of support from the center director.

Head Start Teachers:

1. Each Head Start teacher must obtain from his/her center director the first date of contract for the specific classroom in which he/she has continuously taught;
2. The “Abbott Head Start Teacher Applying for an Extension for P-3 Certification” form (See attached) must be completed by a representative of the college/university the teacher is attending. When completed, the document will demonstrate that the teacher works for a Head Start agency that began contracting with an Abbott district for that classroom after September 2000, verify that the teacher will complete the degree within four years of the first date of contract for the classroom in which the teacher has continuously taught (**it is the responsibility of the teacher to supply the higher education representative with this date**); is a student in good standing, has maintained a minimum GPA of 2.75 and has attached a detailed and feasible plan for completion of the degree. **Teachers falling under this category should immediately contact their institution of higher education to ensure that both the attached form and the “plan for completion” are completed and received by the district before the July 1st deadline;**
2. A letter of support from the district; and
3. A letter of support from the center director.

After the July 1st deadline, each Abbott district is responsible for reviewing each teacher’s application for extension and forwarding them to the Department of Education by **July 16, 2004**.

The Department of Education will notify the district, center/agency director and each teacher on or before **August 2, 2004**, whether or not he/she qualifies for the extension.

Teachers Requiring More than 30 Credits to Complete their Degrees

Teachers who need more than 30 credits to complete their degrees are not eligible for the proposed extension. Teachers who fall under this category may be able to obtain a waiver from the Department of Education. The district, on behalf of that teacher, can petition DOE for a waiver of the 2006 deadline. The teacher cannot apply for a waiver on his/her own behalf. The district waiver must include supporting documentation that demonstrates that the teacher experienced unusual difficulties in completing his/her degree.

Teachers falling under this category must immediately contact their district’s early childhood supervisor to discuss the possibility of applying for a waiver. The teachers will also be responsible for collecting the required documentation that demonstrates the types of difficulties he/she experienced.

If there are any questions, please contact Cynthia Rice at crice@acnj.org or at 973-643-3876.