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Boards of Education of City of Bridgeton,
Burlington City, City of East Orange,
City of Elizabeth, Gloucester City,
Keansburg Borough, City of Passaic,
State-Operated School District of Paterson,
Pemberton Township, City of Perth Amboy,
Town of Phillipsburg and
City of Trenton

RAYMOND ARTHUR ABBOTT, ET AL.,

Plaintiffs

v.

FRED G. BURKE, ET AL.,

Defendants

SUPREME COURT OF NEW JERSEY

DOCKET NO. 42,170

CIVIL ACTION

CERTIFICATION OF RODNEY LOFTON

Rodney Lofton, of full age, hereby certifies as follows:

1. I am the Superintendent of the City of Trenton Public School District ("District"), which is designated an Abbott district under this Court's Abbott rulings. I make this Certification in support of the Motions of the Movants-Intervenors: (1) to intervene in this action in opposition to the State's motion for a Court Order declaring that the School Reform Funding Act of 2008 ("SFRA") is constitutional and that

the Abbott remedial orders are no longer required; and (2) for an immediate Order that the procedural protections established by Abbott v. Burke, 153 N.J. 480, 526-27 (1998), including the right of Abbott districts to seek on appeal additional funding based on a showing of demonstrated or particularized need, shall remain in effect pending a final decision on the State's Motion.

2. I have overall responsibility for implementing the Abbott programs and reforms in the District to enable all students to achieve the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards ("NJCCCS"). This includes the submission of requests in prior years for supplemental funding, based on a demonstration of particularized need, to support existing and supplemental programs, services and positions, as well as additional, demonstrably-needed programs, services and positions. The District has also sought such additional funding through the Abbott V administrative and judicial process when the Department of Education ("DOE") denied needed funding.

3. I am familiar with the demographics of the District and our student population that support the continuation of the Abbott designation, with the features of our schools that are very different from the hypothetical school district that

provides the foundation for the SFRA's formulas, with the supplemental programs and services that have been successful in the districts, with the District's prior experience in requesting supplemental funding and appealing DOE denials of that funding, and with the impact of the SFRA on the education of our students in the coming years.

4. In past years, when the District sought supplemental funding, the District and the DOE worked collaboratively to reach agreement on a supplemental funding amount that would support the District's DOE-approved budget, which included funding for effective and efficient needs-based programs, services and positions. This process enabled the District and the DOE to engage in a constructive dialogue about the educational needs of our students and to discuss specific programs, positions and services that would be needed to help our students achieve the CCCS and to overcome their socio-economic disadvantages.

5. In those few instances when the District and the DOE could not reach agreement on the appropriate amount of supplemental funding, the District had the opportunity to seek review of DOE's decision through the administrative and judicial process established by the Court and by the DOE regulations.

6. The opportunity to discuss with the DOE the need for supplemental funding for specific programs, services and positions needed for our students, and the ability to have full administrative and judicial due process to challenge DOE denials of that needed funding, have been integral to the District's efforts to provide our students with a thorough and efficient education. Supplemental funding has also been essential to meet important needs of our students so that they can overcome the significant impediments to education as a result of their socio-economic disadvantages and benefit from the District's educational programs.

7. Contrary to the DOE's claims in the motion, the administrative and judicial appeals process has successfully worked to facilitate a productive dialogue between the DOE and our District on supplemental funding needs for our students. The mandated funding formula dictated by the SFRA provides no opportunity for the District to seek additional funding based on the demonstrable needs of our students, no matter how substantial or compelling the needs of our students are and no matter how great the obstacles that they must still overcome to benefit from our educational program.

8. Our students will suffer if the formulaic amounts fail to provide the needed funding for programs, services and

positions that are essential for our students' success. If the SFRA will provide the needed funding, as the DOE claims, to continue all of the programs, services and positions to address the special disadvantages of our students, then there would be few, if any appeals. However, if the SFRA fails to provide that funding, then the effect of the statute is to deprive the District and its students of the fundamental right to seek additional funding to meet those needs. I do not perceive any educational justification for a curtailment in the SFRA of the due process right to seek demonstrably needed funding for our students.

9. I was quite surprised to learn that the DOE viewed the supplemental funding process as fostering an "adversarial relationship." I had always viewed the process as an opportunity for collaboration to determine the programs, services and positions required to meet the needs of our disadvantaged students. I am not aware of anything during this process that has impeded the ability of the District and the DOE to work together on a variety of issues to increase the opportunity for our students to receive a thorough and efficient education and to facilitate the ability of the District to operate in an efficient and fiscally responsible manner.

10. Although the State claims changes in the Abbott districts, the District remains in District Factor Group ("DFG") A, based on 2000 data, which is the same DFG the District was in at the time of the original Abbott designation. The District's poverty concentration, according to the DOE still exceeds 40% (it is approximately 62.1%), and, as Professor Goertz explains in her Certification, the District still possesses the requisite demographic, economic and educational characteristics for Abbott designation.

11. I am not aware of any State Board, DOE or legislative study or analysis of the criteria for Abbott designation that would justify the elimination of the District from the list of poorer urban districts designated as Abbott districts. I am also not aware of any State Board, DOE or legislative study that would support the ability of the local taxpayers in this District to provide the local fair share contemplated by the SFRA without resulting in municipal overburden.

12. I examined the single model district -- the large K-12 district -- that the DOE utilized to develop the SFRA base cost amount, as well as the at-risk funding "weight." The model district that served as the basis for SFRA's adequacy budget is not representative of the actual size and configuration of the schools in the District. There are

several assumptions about the hypothetical school district that do not match the reality of our school district: The district's grade configuration for elementary schools is different than the model. The district has 8 elementary schools serving grades K-5 and 10 elementary schools serving grades K-8.

13. The major differences between the SFRA model district and the District are in the student enrollment and the number of elementary, middle, and high schools within this District. These differences are as follows:

- (a) The SFRA model district assumes a total student enrollment of 5,240 students for the district. The District's total regular education student enrollment is 12,048.
- (b) The SFRA model district has six elementary schools of 400 students each; the district has 18 elementary schools, at least 9 of which exceed the population in the model.
- (c) The two middle schools of 600 students each in the SFRA model district are not reflective of the District's one middle school serving 871 students.

(d) The SFRA model district's one high school with 1,640 students does not resemble Trenton Central High, which serves approximately 2500 students.

14. Although the DOE claims that the resources in its SFRA formulaic model exceed the resources necessary for a district to implement the Abbott V Chart of Supplemental Programs and Services, there are programs and services that are not identified as inputs in the SFRA model, but that are currently in place in the District. For example, the DOE failed to input early literacy reading blocks and assessment in determining the cost of providing a thorough and efficient education for at-risk students. These early literacy reading programs have been instrumental in boosting our achievement scores in the elementary grades. In the District, early literacy 90-minute reading blocks are implemented in all 18 elementary schools and this program has resource requirements, which are not accounted for in the SFRA formula. In 2008-09, the district will begin implementing DIBELS and DRA assessments throughout the district, and we will need to provide a significant amount of professional development to support their successful implementation.

15. The SFRA "at risk" inputs also fail to include, among others, the following positions that the District needs to

serve at-risk children: community services coordinators in middle and high school; school-to-work and college transition counselor(s)/program in the high school; and an enriched nutrition program for breakfast and lunch to enable our students to be ready to learn.

16. The SFRA formulaic inputs also fails to include adequate funding for the "exemplary programs" for art, music and special education in the District, which were identified by the Court in Abbott V as requiring special protection. Nor do the SFRA inputs provide funding for the technology positions and other technology needs and enhancements to help our students master the CCCS and compete with their peers in the wealthier districts.

17. The SFRA model district only allocates one social worker to an elementary, middle and high school, respectively, while the District has and needs 25 social workers in the elementary schools, 2 social workers in the middle school, and 6 school-based social workers in the high school. The district also needs 2 social workers at the alternative school, 1 at the Trenton High Medical Arts Campus and 3 at Trenton High West.

18. The SFRA at-risk weight is based on an input of one parent liaison at the elementary, and no resources for parent involvement in middle and high schools. In the District,

parent involvement is critical for recruiting parents to join parent participation programs, fostering parenting skills and career development, and increasing parental education to support student learning at home. There are currently 20 parent liaisons at the elementary level, 1 parent liaison at the middle school, and 5 parent liaisons at the high school.

19. The SFRA model does not include any of the additional resources or costs related to elementary Whole School Reform ("WSR") or to the mandated Secondary Education Initiative ("SEI") in middle and high schools. Elementary WSR requires implementation of a model program or alternative design, and SEI consists of establishing smaller learning communities within schools; providing ongoing support to students and their families; and increasing the academic rigor of curriculum and instruction. In the District, the elementary schools have implemented whole school reform models. The SEI is implemented in both the middle and high schools in my district. However, there is no input in the SFRA for the additional costs relating to these educational programs.

20. The implementation of required Abbott programs and reforms has already resulted in progress in the District. For example, in Grade 4 math standardized tests, the gap between the district's overall passage rate and the statewide pass rate

has closed by nearly 10 percentage points. The gap within the district between the passage rates of White students and African-American students and also been reduced by 10 percentage points. The number of schools in the district that have made adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act increased from 2 in 2006 to 6 in 2007. The standardized scores in math for Grades 3 and 8 also have improved from 2004-2007.

21. Despite this progress, the District still requires the Abbott remedies and adequate funding to meet the special needs of our students and to overcome their severe disadvantages.

22. In addition, improvements in the more advanced grades are just beginning. The DOE, in response to the Abbott X, mediation agreement, only just established the SEI in 2005 and its implementation in middle and high schools in Abbott districts is starting to have a positive educational impact at these levels.

23. There are other programs, services and positions in the Chart of Supplemental Programs that are demonstrably needed by our students, which the District will have to eliminate or reduce in the 2008-09 school year and in future school years under the SFRA's formulaic approach.

24. Under the SFRA, the cuts in the District's overall budget will be even more drastic in the next two school years, 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. As a result, more and more current approved foundational and supplemental programs, services, and positions will need to be cut.

25. I am also concerned that because our classification rate for special education students (17.1%) is above the Statewide average of 14.69% used in SFRA and because the District will be unable to raise sufficient local fair share to meet the additional special education expenses, the District will be compelled to reallocate regular education funding, at-risk funding and other SFRA revenues from our already strapped budgets to satisfy the federal and state mandates for special education. In the past, the District could seek supplemental funding to address those special education needs and to avoid reallocations from the budgets for regular education and supplemental programs, services and positions. That opportunity is no longer available to the District under the SFRA.

26. Without the ability to demonstrate the need for Abbott supplemental funding, the District will likely have no alternative but to reduce and/or eliminate needed programs, services and positions/staff in 2008-09, 2009-2010 and 2010-

2011 in order to address budget shortfalls under the SFRA. As the transitional "adjustment aid" decreases or is not appropriated (since there is no assurance of such aid), reliance on local fair share increases, and budget shortfalls grow, the District faces the realistic prospect of eliminating all the Abbott remedial positions, programs and services and losing all the gains in educational programs, services, positions and progress obtained under the Abbott remedial mandates.

27. Since the implementation of the Abbott mandates, the DOE has never analyzed or assessed in the District the implementation, effectiveness or costs of foundational and supplemental programs, services, and positions required and demonstrably needed for our students. Therefore, I do not understand how the DOE, without actual data on the needs and realities in the Abbott districts, could have arrived at a formulaic base amount for regular education or at the formulaic weight for providing those additional programs, services and positions needed to meet our students' disadvantages with sufficient accuracy to deprive us of any right to appeal for additional, needed funding.

28. In sum, the SFRA formulaic approach requires the District to make severe and drastic cuts in programs services

and positions that will prevent us from implementing the Abbott mandates, requires the abandonment or reduction of current programs, services and positions to implement the Abbott mandates, threatens the progress we have made in this District under the Abbott decisions, and precludes the District from seeking supplemental funding for demonstrably needed programs and services for our students beyond what the SFRA formulas allow.

I hereby certify that the foregoing statements made by me are true. I am aware that if any of the foregoing statements are willfully false, I am subject to punishment.



Rodney Lofton

Dated: May 13, 2008