

**Congratulations on your new job, and welcome to Association membership in this Abbott school district!**

*(Now you're thinking: "What does that mean? What's an Abbott district, and what does it have to do with me?")*

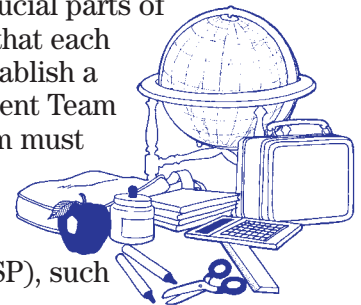


**R**aymond Abbott was a young man from Camden. His name is attached to the most important education case to be decided by the N.J. Supreme Court in the last 20 years. This case is the basis for millions of dollars of extra funding for Camden's schools and for 28 other NJ school districts (the State Legislature later added two more school districts to this list).

A Newark-based group, the Education Law Center, sued the State of New Jersey in 1981. The suit, filed on behalf of Raymond Abbott and students like him all over the state, said that children in poor districts were being cheated by the way the state pays for public schools. In a series of decisions, the Supreme Court agreed. The justices said that the state government would have to make up for this injustice by sending hundreds of millions of dollars into the poorer districts.

The court went much further. It ordered these districts to change the way they operated. The justices ordered that each school in the 30 districts institute a particular type of change called Whole School Reform (WSR). This means that each school had to adopt a model of reform and organize itself differently than ever before.

One of the crucial parts of this change was that each school had to establish a School Management Team (SMT). Each team must include teachers; educational support professionals (ESP), such



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as secretaries and custodial and maintenance employees; parents, and community leaders. The members of the team are elected by their own groups – that is, teachers elected by teachers, ESP by ESP, parents by parents. Members of the community are to be chosen by the building principal AFTER he or she has asked community members to indicate their interest in serving on the team.

**W**hat does all this mean? It means that you may serve on the team in your school, if you are elected. It also means that the team members are supposed to have more influence over the school's budget and planning for the future than ever before. It means that everyone in the school community is supposed to work together for the benefit of the children.

This is a big change in the way we think about schools. Before this, teachers often were isolated in their classrooms and had little input into the larger school's planning efforts. Secretaries did just what tasks they were assigned. Maintenance and custodial employees just did what their narrow job descriptions outlined.

**W**hole School Reform changes all that. WSR is a recognition that schools work best when everyone in the school community works together. More than that, it is a recognition that school employees can do more than what their job descriptions call for; they can make valuable contributions to the overall school building effort.

At its best, WSR encourages people to

think about ways to strengthen schools and then to bring forth those ideas in a group setting.

**T**he Abbott decision makes other changes in how schools operate. The court required all schools in these districts to have preschool programs for three- and four-year-old children. The court also required districts to have smaller class sizes in place by Sept. 2002.



The part of the decision that may have the most far-reaching impact is that which orders the state to pay for building new schools in the Abbott districts, or for renovating existing schools. As a result, the state will pour billions of dollars into Abbott districts for construction and renovation.

**T**he future of public education is at stake here in New Jersey. Parents and taxpayers will expect great results from these reforms. You, as an employee in this school, will have an important part in making the future brighter for our children.

Working in an Abbott district is a great challenge. There may be no other place where you will have the chance to affect as many young lives as in New Jersey's Abbott districts. They are laboratories for change that will be studied by schools all over America and the world.

This may sound overwhelming. However, rest assured you're not alone. NJEA has the resources to help you and your local association make schools work for children and school employees alike. If you ever have questions about working here, your local association can help. Your local association is linked with your county association, NJEA and NEA, the best school employee groups in the world. You see, teamwork in schools was around long before the Abbott decision; NEA, NJEA, and your county and local associations have been working together to make things better for school employees and for children for decades. In fact, NJEA was founded in 1853, making it one of the oldest school employee groups in the United States. This means that NJEA members have been helping children learn for almost 150 years!

**S**o, if you ever have questions about Abbott matters, or need professional assistance in your job, remember: Your local and your county associations, NJEA and NEA are there to help you. You have only to reach out to them.

**Working together, you and your associations can do great things!**

**NJEA stands ready to help you maintain your benefits and improve your status. Do you need advice, information, or NJEA at your side? If so, call the office that serves your county.**

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