



HISPANIC DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION
of NEW JERSEY

Building Bridges to a Better Life

Post Office Box 25 New Brunswick, New Jersey 08903-0025

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
DANIEL SANTO PIETRO
E-mail: info@hdanj.org

PHONE # (732) 828-7606
FAX # (732) 828-7526
WEBSITE: WWW.HISPANICDIRECTORS.ORG

**Testimony at School Funding Formula Hearing
7-9:30 PM, December 18, 2006
at Kean University**

Good Evening.

The Hispanic Directors Association (HDANJ) serves nearly 700,000 low income families through its 33 member organizations in all parts of New Jersey. We are proud of the effectiveness of our network to communicate with the Hispanic community, the fastest growing segment of New Jersey's population, and to give voice to the over a million and a half Hispanics, many of whom are immigrants to this country. All our agencies work closely with school districts to deliver programs to youth and thirteen provide preschool education to 1,500 children under district contracts. We are particularly proud of our efforts at the inception of the preschool program to carry out an extensive outreach campaign, which enrolled over 10,000 children in preschool. The four year campaign was key to reach the level of 40,000 enrolled today.

HDANJ is also a member of *Our Children Our Schools Campaign*. We fully support the OCOS critique of the "Report on the Cost of Education", and we urge the Department of Education to play a leadership role to assure the flaws of the study do not result in a hasty and equally flawed school funding formula reform legislation in 2007.

HDANJ is following these developments closely and we are continuing to formulate our position on any legislation. Let me state three areas where I believe there is a consensus in our community on school funding reform that is critical to the future of our community, and all of New Jersey's children.

1. **Keep the Abbott designation** and the commitment it engenders for districts that have significant numbers of children living in concentrated poverty. We are particularly concerned with the category of "Supplemental costs" that includes preschool and after school programs that have proved impact on the educational outcomes of our children. While we seem to have a consensus about spreading preschool to more districts to reach all children living in poverty, we must remember we still have at least 30% of the children in Abbott districts to enroll in preschool. If we are to keep costs rational as we

expand preschool we have to extend the principle used in Abbott of school districts using community resources whenever practical. It is unfortunate the Study is silent on the issue of preschool and its costs since it will have a direct relation to K-12 costs.

2. **Use school funding reform to improve accountability** to get the job done—which is to educate children to meet agreed upon standards. The Cost Study seems to suggest the elimination of Abbott “accountability” measures that target funds to proved programs and reforms, and ensure funds are “effectively and efficiently” used to enable students to achieve state academic standards. What we need to do is strengthen the implementation of accountability in Abbott. Then, since we must also assist other districts with children living in poverty, we can carry over these accountability principles. This Cost Study appears to ignore this reality.

3. Finally, **the school funding formula must meet the particular challenge of educating a large number of English Learners** or LEP students. It cannot be reduced to a simple add-on. Last February Commissioner Davy commenting on the 2005 report card data pointed out that Hispanic enrollment increased by 45,000 in the last five years. She stated, “This means there is an even greater demand for quality bilingual and ESL programs in our state, in our suburban schools as well.” I cannot determine if the Cost Study formula provides sufficient funds—it appears not. I do know that unless there is a significant increase of money and accountability in a new funding formula that will require focus and innovation in this area from all school districts, our ability to educate our children to standards will have a serious flaw.

I urge the Department to take leadership and help us educate our legislators in the right way to get the job done.

Presented by Daniel Santo Pietro, HDANJ Executive Director