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## NJDOE News

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For Release: September 1, 1999

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### Commissioner Hespe Proposes New Certificate for Teachers of Young Children

Commissioner of Education David Hespe today proposed to the State Board of Education a new preschool through grade three teaching endorsement. The endorsement will ensure that professional teaching staff working with New Jersey's youngest public school children are specially trained in giving them a strong introduction to learning.

"Young children have special needs," said Commissioner Hespe. "There is a compelling body of developmental brain research that emphasizes the substantial level of brain development which occurs during this age span. Intensive high quality preschool programs have been proven to increase the ability of children to demonstrate early educational gains resulting in school success and appropriate social behavior.

"This research leads to our commitment to create a new pool of classroom specialists who are highly skilled and dedicated to serving the educational needs of our youngest children," Hespe said.

The proposal for the new preschool through Grade 3 endorsement is a direct outgrowth of Governor Christie Whitman's commitment to quality preschool education. Eight months ago, the Governor outlined her vision for implementing a solid and comprehensive preschool program in accordance with the May 1999 New Jersey Supreme Court decision in the *Abbott v. Burke* case.

This past spring, Whitman established the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Committee and charged it with reviewing issues related to implementing half-day preschool for three- and four-year-olds in all Abbott School Districts by this month. One issue considered by the committee was whether a special endorsement for teachers of students in preschool through third grade should be created.

After hearing testimony about brain research and early childhood development, the committee recommended that the Governor support a separate teaching endorsement for preschool to third grade. The Governor accepted the recommendation and requested the Department of Education to propose the new credential to the state board.

Proposed today is a preparation program that, beginning in September 2001, would require new teaching candidates for preschool through grade 3 to major in the liberal arts and sciences; complete a specialized body of knowledge either through 13 college credits or through 200 clock hours of formal training; and complete a practicum in a preschool through grade three setting. This traditional course of study was recommended by a group representing colleges, early child care practitioners and public school educators. The pedagogy would include child development and learning, understanding family and community, and curriculum and assessment.

If approved by the State Board of Education, effective September 1, 2001, the existing certification structure would be one in which three endorsements would exist - preschool through grade 3, kindergarten through grade 8, and kindergarten through grade 12.

The proposed licensing code changes include certain timelines specific to the 30 Abbott school districts. The timelines are as follows:

- Effective September 2001, all newly hired teachers of students in preschool through grade 3 in the Abbott districts who hold a bachelor's degree will be required to obtain the new preschool through grade 3 endorsement.
- By the year 2004, newly hired teachers in the Department of Human Services-licensed community-based child care centers, who hold an associate's degree in early childhood education, will be required to enroll in a bachelor's degree program and obtain the new preschool through grade 3 endorsement.
- By the year 2007, current classroom teachers in child care centers under contract to the Abbott school districts, who do not hold an associate's degree, will be required to possess the preschool through grade 3 endorsement.

The proposed new credential will now undergo a public review process that will include additional state board discussion, publication in the *New Jersey Register*, and at least one public hearing.