



NJDOE News

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Department of Education Sets State Aid Allocations For School-Based Character Education Programs

Fulfilling a pledge by Gov. Christie Whitman, the Department of Education has informed school districts how much state aid they are entitled to receive in the coming school year to launch a character education initiative.

"Character education programs have had a positive impact on children and their learning environment, not just in New Jersey but in schools across the nation," noted Commissioner of Education David C. Hespe. "Schools that have incorporated character education into their curriculum have reported fewer disruptive incidents, better attendance, lower drop out rates and improved grades. Teaching children essential life skills, such as how to resolve disputes peacefully, and the importance of values such as respect, responsibility, tolerance and trust helps them be better students and good citizens later in life."

Governor Whitman has made \$4.75 million available in the state budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1 so a character education program can be launched in every school district in New Jersey this fall. New Jersey's character education initiative will be phased in over four years. The goal is to have a character education program in place in every school in the state at the end of that time. However, the program is voluntary. Districts do not have to participate, and those who do must file an application for state aid. Applications forms have already been mailed. Interested districts must return their applications by October 1.

Details about the endeavor, known as the New Jersey Character Education Partnership, were discussed at a statewide conference hosted by the Department of Education at the College of New Jersey today.

School districts were informed last week how much state aid they could receive for character education during the 2000-2001 school year. Each district is entitled to a minimum of \$4,000 the first year to implement a Character Education Program of Merit in at least one school building. Based on cost estimates obtained from national models, \$4,000 will cover the cost of implementing a character education program in an average size school (approximately 500 students.) School districts with enrollments greater than 1,358 students will receive additional funds -- \$2.945 per resident student. By virtue of being the largest district in the state, Newark will get the largest allotment -- \$122,883.

Districts have the option of using this aid to expand an existing character education program or choose other character education program options. The department has compiled a list of Character Education Programs of Merit to help districts find a program best suited to their needs. The list and other helpful information about character education will be placed on the department's website (www.state.nj.us/education) by July 1. In addition, the department will host two vendor showcase events, one on May 30 at the J.P. Stevens High School in Edison and the other May 31 at the department's Program Improvement Regional Center (PIRC) in Sewell.

"During my visits to local school districts and at the annual convention of the New Jersey School Boards Association last fall, I heard a chorus of concern that classroom learning is being hampered by societal factors," Hespe said. "I heard educators, public officials and parents lament that children are not being 'taught' right from wrong or instilled with values such as respect, for one's self and others. Extreme events such as the Columbine tragedy show how neglecting this facet of a child's development can lead to behavioral problems, shattered lives, violence and death."

"The intellectual growth of students is affected by their emotional disposition. The New Jersey Character Education Partnership is a timely and meaningful response to the increased call for leadership from the state. I believe the program that has been set in motion by Governor Whitman will help our schools meet the developmental needs of students by promoting pro-social behavior and creating a caring, disciplined school climate conducive to learning."

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