



## **NJDOE News**

**Contact: Richard Vespucci**  
**For Release: November 1, 2000**

---

### **Jersey City Reports Continued Progress in Meeting State Standards**

Jersey City Public Schools continued progress towards meeting benchmark goals in student test scores, attendance and dropout rates during the 1999-2000 school year. The state-operated district's efforts to improve were detailed today in an annual progress report to the State Board of Education.

"Since it became a state-operated school district in 1989, the Jersey City school district has steadily improved its test scores, showing gains that rival many of the state's high-performing suburban districts," said Commissioner of Education David Hespe. "Over the course of state operation, the district has made tremendous strides towards meeting state certification standards."

The Commissioner noted that the district's success in recent years prompted the State Board of Education to begin the gradual process of returning the district to local control. A local transition team chaired by Gregg Butterfield, former president of the Jersey City Board of Education, is preparing recommendations to Hespe regarding the district's transition from state operation to local control.

Dr. Charles Epps, Jersey City's new superintendent of schools, highlighted the district's progress in improving test scores, increasing attendance rates, and decreasing dropout rates in 1999-2000, the last year in which Dr. Richard A. DiPatri served as superintendent. Jersey City is guided by a strategic plan that is designed to ensure that the district concentrates its efforts on meeting state monitoring benchmark standards, a prerequisite for a return to local control.

Dr. Epps released results of student performance on state assessments given to fourth graders, eighth graders and eleventh graders. The percentage of students meeting state standards showed an increase in 1999-2000 from 1998-99 in six of eight areas. Epps noted that the district continues to close the gap between its student performance and state standards, and that local educators, parents and students are working hard to continue the upward trend in student performance.

Last year, Jersey City had a higher average daily student attendance rate than at any time since it became a state-operated school district in October 1989. The 1999-2000 average daily attendance of 93.2 represents a one-year increase of 3.7 percent and it exceeds the state's student attendance standard of 90 percent.

The percentage of dropouts in Jersey City schools was in the single digits for the second consecutive year. The 621 (9.9 percent) dropouts reported in 1999-2000 are nearly 5 percent fewer than the 914 students (14.9 percent) reported in 1996-97.

Epps described 13 different activities Jersey City is performing to improve student performance, including:

- Implementing whole school reform throughout the district with emphasis on school based improvement effort
- Offering extended school day in all schools, as well as a special weekend program called "Super Saturdays"
- Offering summer school opportunities for all students
- Targeting special programs to ensure that students gain the skills and knowledge required in the Core Curriculum Content Standards

Highlights of activities to increase student attendance include:

- Establishing task forces for student attendance and truancy
- Stationing 10 attendance officers in the high schools
- Holding principals accountable for attendance objectives
- Creating a sanction and reward system for student attendance

Highlights of activities to reduce the student dropout rate include:

- Refining dropout reporting procedures
- Establishing two alternative middle school sites
- Establishing Liberty High School, a new alternative school
- Working with community to partners to ensure a free two-year college degree for all public high school students.

Epps said that Jersey City continues to excel in activities to provide quality early childhood instruction, increase parental participation in the schools, strengthen the district's ability to equip its schools with state of the art technology and work with community partners to increase learning opportunities for students and their families.

Jersey City schools have been recognized for many successes, particularly for earning a record 14 Best Practices awards from the Department of Education's Best Practices / Star Schools program. Best Practices / Star Schools helps identify locally developed programs that have proven to be highly successful and worthy of emulation throughout the state.