



NJDOE News

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Commissioner Hespe Praises Work of Jersey City Transition Team

Commissioner of Education David C. Hespe today applauded the work performed by a 15-member team that has labored since July on a plan to return the Jersey City School District to local control.

"I want to thank chairman Gregg Butterfield and all the members of the transition team for the exemplary work they have done," said Hespe. "Their dedication to the community, their pride in what Jersey City schools have accomplished and their determination to see progress continue are evident. They voluntarily accepted a difficult and challenging assignment, and they performed admirably."

Hespe said he will ask the Jersey City Board of Education to review the proposal and furnish feedback before the Department of Education begins its own analysis. The Commissioner plans on forwarding his recommendations for action to the State Board of Education early next year.

The transition team was created by Hespe and headed by Gregg Butterfield, immediate past president of the Jersey City Board of Education. Members included local residents, parents, students, businessmen, community activists, and municipal, school, higher education and union officials. Its mission was to formulate a specific roadmap for returning the school district to local control. The report was released by Butterfield in Jersey City today.

When the state took over the district in 1989, Jersey City was meeting only 37 percent of the state's monitoring indicators. Now, the district is meeting nearly all indicators. It has demonstrated continued progress towards meeting benchmark goals in student test scores.

With the approval of the State Board of Education, in July of 1999 the commissioner established a framework for the gradual devolution of school governance to the Jersey City Community. The state superintendent overseeing the district agreed to refrain from using his veto power over curriculum and policy matters. This voluntary step essentially gave the Jersey City Board of Education control in these two areas. Based on its performance, this past June -- again with the concurrence of the State Board -- the state superintendent relinquished his veto power over fiscal and budget issues. Hespe then established the 15-member transition team to recommend elements of a final transition plan.

Hespe underscored that a final transition could not be made unless the Legislature approves a bill (A-3030) amending the state-operated school district law. That bill would allow state-operated school districts that are not fully certified to return to local control if they demonstrate continuous progress towards certification and the ability to resume governance. The commissioner said he will review the correlation between the pending legislation and the transition team's recommendations to see if any modifications are necessary or warranted.

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