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Commissioner Hespe Presents Nationally Recognized Schools to State Board of Education

Commissioner of Education David Hespe today introduced New Jersey's 10 Blue Ribbon Schools for 1999-2000 to the State Board of Education. New Jersey continues to surpass the national average of public schools selected for the program, an initiative of the United States Department of Education to recognize outstanding schools.

"The excellence of each Blue Ribbon School brings honor to the entire community," Commissioner Hespe said. "I congratulate you and commend you for your commitment to quality education for all children."

Nationally, approximately half of the schools nominated received site visits and were selected as national schools of excellence. New Jersey surpassed the national average, with approximately 80 percent of the department's nominees receiving site visits and Blue Ribbon status.

Of the 198 middle, junior high and secondary schools selected by the United States Department of Education, the following 10 are from New Jersey:

- Bridgewater-Raritan Regional High School, Bridgewater, Somerset County
- Conackamack Middle School, Piscataway, Middlesex County
- Montgomery Middle School, Skillman, Somerset County
- Moorestown High School, Moorestown, Burlington County
- North Brunswick Township High School, North Brunswick, Middlesex County
- Round Valley Middle School, Lebanon, Hunterdon County
- Rutherford High School, Rutherford, Bergen County
- Schuyler-Colfax Middle School, Wayne, Passaic County
- Academy of the Holy Angels, Demarest, Bergen County
- The Montclair Kimberley Academy, Montclair, Essex County

Ellen Schechter, assistant commissioner for the Department of Education's Division of Academic and Career Standards, described the rigorous, multi-step process used to identify the schools for recognition in the program. State reviews of prospective nominees are conducted by veteran educators who make recommendations to the New Jersey Department of Education. Each prospective school is also scrutinized by the appropriate county office of education to ensure compliance with state and federal laws and regulations.

The State Department of Education considers the reviews and recommendations for nominating schools for the national competition. At that level, nominees are screened and recommendations are made for site visits to verify the accuracy of the information the school has provided and to gather any additional information the national panel has requested. Site visits are conducted by experienced educators, who visit and observe the schools for two days and submit written reports. The panel considers the reports and makes recommendations to Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley for final recognition.

Blue Ribbon schools share the following common attributes:

- Strong leadership
- A sense of shared purpose among faculty, students, parents and the community
- A school climate conducive to effective teaching
- Programs that challenge all students
- An environment that promotes and believes the message that "all students can learn"

Established in 1982, the Blue Ribbon Schools Program honors elementary and secondary schools in alternate years. Since its inception, nearly 3,800 schools have been recognized.