



## NJDOE News

Contact: Richard Vespucci  
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### Department of Education Identifies Schools In Need of Improvement to Fulfill Accountability Requirements in Federal Legislation

Acting under the provisions of a new federal Title I law, the New Jersey Department of Education has identified schools in need of improvement. The New Jersey schools were identified through a process linking academic skills with student performance on standardized tests.

"We are joining the other states this year in implementing federal requirements to establish a comprehensive accountability system for Title I schools," said Commissioner of Education William L. Librera. "As we completed the process to identify schools based on their performance levels, we learned that many schools are turning out students who possess the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. However, the identification process also confirmed our perception that students who do not learn the essential knowledge and skills they need in the early grades tend to perform at lower levels throughout their academic careers.

"We plan to use these baseline results as a springboard for future programs and initiatives designed to improve teaching and learning in the primary grades for all of our students," Commissioner Librera said. "We also intend to provide support and assistance to low-performing schools as they struggle to overcome the challenges they will face in the years ahead."

In order to meet the federal requirements, each state had to identify those skills needed to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and how those skills were measured at three benchmark grades. In New Jersey, the skills were identified in the Core Curriculum Content Standards. New Jersey's three achievement tests - the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA), the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA) and the Elementary School Proficiency Assessment (ESPA) -- were identified as the tools to measure student performance.

In the next phase, determinations were made on how well schools were meeting established standards. Schools that failed to meet state standards for two consecutive years, in school years 1998-99 and 1999-2000, were expected to make incremental progress toward attaining standards within seven years. This progress measure is known as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Based on their progress toward achieving state standards, schools were classified into one of six categories:

**Categories V and VI** - Schools in this category have attained state standards one or more years. 1,208 schools, or 63.02 percent, were identified in this category.

**Category IV** - These schools have made adequate yearly progress and are progressing toward meeting the state standards. 233 schools, or 12.15 percent, were identified in this category.

**Category III** - These schools have not met all progress standards, but have made significant progress toward meeting full standards. These schools should continue to monitor their progress. 17 schools, or .089 percent, were identified in this category.

**Category II** - These schools have made some progress but require close monitoring to assure that gains continue. 159 schools, or 8.29 percent, were identified in this category.

**Category I** - These schools have been identified as schools in need of improvement, a designation that must be reported to the federal Department of Education. 300 schools, or 15.65 percent, were identified in this category.

Some schools are listed more than once in the categories above because they administer more than one state test. For example, a school serving grades K-8 would administer both the ESPA and the GEPA to its students, so it may be listed in two categories.

Schools identified as needing improvement must develop improvement plans showing the programs and strategies to be adopted to improve teaching and learning. They must also provide their staffs with professional development to improve their skills. Schools will also have to provide parents of students enrolled in the school in need of improvement with the opportunity to transfer to another school in the district that is not identified for improvement.

Approximately \$3 million in federal funds have been set aside to help Title I schools implement their local improvement efforts. The Department of Education is in the process of determining how best to allocate these funds to assist the schools.

Initiatives announced by Governor James E. McGreevey earlier this year are expected to help local school efforts to improve student performance, especially for young students. In February, he signed an executive order calling for literacy standards for children beginning at the preschool level. The order also created a Literacy Task Force which has been charged with identifying research-based programs, practices, and methods that can be incorporated into a statewide plan to improve early literacy.

To fulfill the objective, the Department of Education is developing the frameworks, good practices and literacy standards for teachers of preschool, kindergarten and first grade and literacy standards for students in grades 2-4. In addition, the Literacy Task Force will identify research-based programs, practices, methods and approaches to improve early literacy and recommend ways to improve professional development in the teaching of reading.

A listing of all schools and their Title I categories is available on the Department of Education web site:

<http://www.state.nj.us/njded/data/title1/>

**SPECIAL NOTE:** The Governor's Conference on Literacy has been scheduled for tomorrow, May 3, 2002 to give representatives from every school district in New Jersey an opportunity to learn about early literacy, as well as federal requirements related to these efforts. The event will be co-sponsored by the Rutgers University Graduate School of Education and will be held on the Piscataway campus.