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Back-to-School 2002 New Offices, Initiatives Greet Start of New School Year

An estimated 1,367,431 public school students in New Jersey are expected to return to class this week as a new school year begins. The projected enrollment represents an increase of nearly 31,000 public school students since September 2001. New Jersey's all-time enrollment high of 1,432,344 students in grades K-12 was recorded in 1973-74.

"Education is the No. 1 issue for New Jersey residents and it is the cornerstone of the administration of Governor James E. McGreevey," said Education Commissioner William L. Librera. "Our goal is educational excellence. Starting today, and continuing over the next four years, our emphasis will be on teacher quality and raising student achievement."

"While we take the necessary steps in our schools and our classrooms, I am asking that parents become more involved in their children's schools and school work," the Commissioner said. "When parents are involved in their children's education, the children do better."

"As New Jersey's student population continues to expand, we will work closely with the Department of Education to ensure that all students are provided with a quality education," said State Board of Education President Maud Dahme. "We expect to adopt revised Core Curriculum Content Standards in all content areas during this school year. The standards describe the knowledge and skills that all students must possess in order to be successful.

"We also plan to continue to work with the department to ensure that our regulations governing teacher requirements will continue to attract a pool of talented teachers to New Jersey," she continued. "This should be an exciting and eventful year."

The number of full-time classroom teachers in New Jersey this year exceeded 100,000 for the first time. The 102,723 full-time classroom teachers this year is an increase from 98,072 classroom teachers reported last year.

Most of New Jersey's expanding student enrollment is coming from new students entering the schools in the early grades. For example, in 2001-02, New Jersey counted 72,341 twelfth-grade students and 100,669 first-grade students.

These newest students are the focus of major initiatives launched by Governor McGreevey and Commissioner Librera. They are also a group targeted for special attention under the new federal education law, known as the No Child Left Behind Act.

McGreevey earlier this year announced an Early Literacy Initiative that has set a goal of having all third grade students reading at or above grade level. The initiative is based on the premise that learning reading and writing at a young age is a prerequisite to successful learning of other subjects throughout a student's career. To support this goal, the Governor has directed the Department of Education to assist local school districts.

Beginning this fall, the Department of Education is hiring reading coaches and assigning them to train teachers in low-performing schools in the latest and most effective methods of teaching students how to read. Commissioner Librera has established an Office of Early Education to implement the reading coach project as well as to help implement new program standards developed by the Governor's Task Force for Early Literacy, and other projects, such as the Governor's Reading Club, which will debut in the new school year.

The Governor's Early Literacy Initiative underscores similar goals stated in the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The law requires states to assess students in their language arts literacy and mathematics scores in grades 3 through 8 inclusive, and again at the 11th grade. Science will be added to the tests for 4th, 8th, and 11th graders. As a result, the Department of Education is expecting to award a contract in October for development of new state tests for third and fourth graders. If work is completed in time, the new tests could be administered for

the first time in spring 2003.

The NCLB also includes requirements for the states to identify low-performing schools based on student performance on standardized tests, and to offer transfer or tutoring options to students enrolled in low-performing schools. The Department of Education is assisting local school districts in fulfilling their responsibilities under these new provisions in the law.

Three- and four-year-old children attending public preschool in New Jersey's 30 Abbott school districts are projected to increase again this year. Local officials from the districts expect to enroll 39,392 three- and four-year-olds in 2002-03, compared with 29,824 students served in 2001-02.

The State Board of Education is currently reviewing revised Core Curriculum Content Standards for social studies, visual and performing arts, world languages, health and physical education, early childhood education programs and workplace readiness. The standards, which describe knowledge and skills that all students need by the time they graduate from high school, are scheduled for adoption in November. The state board previously adopted standards for language arts literacy, mathematics, and science. The standards were first adopted in 1996 and by regulation are subject to five-year reviews.

Commissioner Librera is also expected to seek legislative support this year for his plan to change New Jersey's school takeover law. The Commissioner is seeing new legislation that will enable the state's three largest school districts - Newark, Jersey City and Paterson - to return to local control. Dr. Librera wants to redirect the Department of Education's efforts toward assisting local school officials to build their capacity to increase student achievement and better manage their affairs.

In the interest in keeping the public and New Jersey's education community informed, the Department of Education has renewed its invitation for members of the news media, educators and the general public to subscribe to its free news service, the Governor's Education News Service, or gens. Subscriptions are available from the Department of Education's Web site:

www.state.nj.us/education

[Attached is a fact sheet on New Jersey's public schools.](#)