



[NJDOE News](#)

For More Information Contact the Public Information Office:

**Tom Rosenthal
Richard Vespucci
Jon Zlock
609-292-1126**

For Release: October 10, 2002

New Jersey Department of Education Receives \$120 Million Six-Year Reading First Grant To Improve Literacy in Kindergarten through Third Grade *Federal Grant Supports Governor McGreevey's Literacy Initiatives*

TRENTON - Education Commissioner William L. Librera today announced that New Jersey has received an \$18.4 million federal grant for the current school year to help teachers improve their students' reading achievement in kindergarten through the 3rd grade in selected school districts starting next school year.

The funds are the first installment of a six-year \$120 million federal Reading First grant and will support Governor James E. McGreevey's statewide literacy initiatives, which include the ambitious goal of having every child reading at or above grade level by the end of 3rd grade. The Reading First grant will fund initiatives similar to the Governor's Reading Coach program now operating in 80 schools around the state.

"This is the ideal complement to the Governor's early literacy initiatives because it extends the support for literacy to the high-poverty, low-performing school districts," said Commissioner Librera. "The Reading First grants target that population."

The yearly Reading First grant award, which will increase to \$20.4 million for each of the next five years, will provide support to schools to implement proven methods of early reading instruction in K-3 classrooms and comprehensive reading programs grounded in scientifically based reading research in order to make substantial improvements in student achievement, particularly in New Jersey's lowest performing, high-poverty schools.

The Reading First program for elementary schools, which is the largest and most focused early reading initiative ever undertaken, will ensure that every child in K-3 receives high-quality instruction that is explicit and systematic and focuses on the five components of effective, early reading instruction:

- o phonemic awareness;
- o phonics instruction;
- o fluency;
- o comprehension strategies;
- o vocabulary development.

In addition, Reading First emphasizes the importance of using screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based assessments to inform classroom practices that will ultimately improve student performance and close the achievement gap. Ongoing professional development experiences, grounded in reading research and adult learning theory, will enable and empower teachers to improve the quality of classroom instruction for all students.

A key feature of the Reading First grant is that the Department of Education will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of all Reading First schools during the six-year grant implementation. At the mid-point of year three of grant implementation, schools are required to show reading gains in order to continue receiving Reading First funding.

New Jersey passed a rigorous review by the U.S. Department of Education that evaluated the state's proposed plan against 25 major educational criteria in order to receive the federal funds.

The state DOE has identified 147 high-poverty, low-performing school districts eligible to receive the federal money. These are districts with a high percentage or a high number of students who scored below the basic level of reading proficiency on the 2001 ESPA administered to 4th graders.

Competitive subgrants will be made available to eligible school districts through the Notification of Grant

Opportunity (NGO). The department plans to award only 35-45 grant proposals of the highest quality, capacity, and sustainability. The NGO will be available on the Department of Education's website. School district's proposals are due to the DOE in February 2003 and awards will take place in April 2003.