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Jackson Educator Receives \$25,000 Milken Family Foundation National Educator Award for Excellence in the Classroom; Honored by Governor James E. McGreevey, Commissioner of Education William L. Librera and the Foundation at Surprise Assembly

JACKSON — Governor James E. McGreevey and the Department of Education, in a partnership with the nationally lauded Milken Family Foundation, are pleased to honor Theresa Licitra with a 2002 National Educator Award.

Licitra is a reading specialist at Crawford-Rodriguez Elementary School who holds a bachelor's degree in Psychology from Brooklyn College and a master's degree in Reading from Adelphi University. She is a 12-year educator.

The state of New Jersey and the Milken Family Foundation are in the first-year of a partnership. The state is now one of 46 nationwide to recognize outstanding teachers in the classroom. Founder Lowell Milken, the foundation's chairman, created the award program in 1985.

"Today, the state joins in honoring Theresa Licitra with a 2002 National Educator Award," Governor McGreevey said. "Her abilities in the classroom have not gone unnoticed. In fact, my administration will take each and every opportunity we can to honor such strong abilities in our classrooms. A teacher's success is our children's success."

Since 1985, the Milken National Awards Program, which honors teachers, principals and specialists in public education from Kindergarten through 12th grade, has become the largest teacher recognition program in the United States. By the end of October, the Foundation will have presented nearly \$45 million to more than 1,750 educators nationwide.

At Crawford-Rodriguez Elementary School, Licitra's students have demonstrated exceptional academic growth in all areas. In her two years as a reading specialist, fourth-grade ESPA (Elementary School Proficiency Assessment) scores have increased by 20 points.

Licitra is precisely the type of teacher the McGreevey administration is proud to honor as part of the Milken Foundation national recognition awards. Her excellence in the classroom befits the Governor's 20-point plan for education reform plan. Lauding teachers who continue to provide quality education for students statewide is paramount.

Licitra received the award during a surprise assembly Friday morning at her school. In addition to First Lady Dina Matos McGreevey, Commissioner of Education William L. Librera attended as well.

"Many of our teachers are unsung heroes in the classroom," Commissioner Librera said. "Our mission is to bring some much-needed recognition to them."

Teachers are recommended for the prestigious award without their knowledge by a blue-ribbon panel appointed by a state's Department of Education. Recipients of the Milken Awards are selected based on the following criteria:

- Exceptional educational talent as evidenced by outstanding instructional practices in the classroom, school and profession;
- Outstanding accomplishment and strong, long-range leadership potential for professional and policy leadership; and
- Engaging and inspiring presence that motivates and impacts students, colleagues and the community at-large.

Recipients like Licitra are presented with their \$25,000 award checks at the Milken Family Foundation National

Education Conference, an all-expense paid professional development conference held in Los Angeles. They also join the Milken Educator Network, a coalition of more than 1,700 top educators who have access to a variety of expert resources to help cultivate and expand innovative programs in their classrooms, schools and districts.

For more information about the \$25,000 Milken National Educator Awards, please contact Jon Zlock, a Department of Education spokesman, at (609) 633-9594 or the Milken Family Foundation at (310) 998-3009. Additional information can be found on the Foundation's website, www.mff.org.