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State Board of Education Approves Early Childhood Teachers Certificate *Commissioner Moves Ahead on Governor Whitman's Plans for Early Childhood Education*

The State Board of Education today approved a new preschool through grade three teaching certificate. In accordance with Gov. Christie Whitman's goal to provide quality pre-school programs, Commissioner of Education David Hespe last September proposed the new certificate to the board to ensure that the teachers who work with New Jersey's youngest school children are specially trained to provide a strong foundation for learning.

"Our very youngest children begin preschool carrying all of our hopes for the future," said Governor Whitman.

"Providing a high quality preschool experience for these children has been and will continue to be one of the highest priorities of my administration. Last summer I announced my intention to call for the creation of this certificate program because well-trained teachers, who are equipped to work with the unique way very young children learn, will help us provide these youngsters with the foundation they need for the best possible education," Whitman added.

"Since the 1997-98 school year, the administration has provided more than \$1 billion to disadvantaged school districts for full-day kindergarten and part and full-day preschool programs," said Commissioner Hespe. "In addition, we are providing intensive full-day preschool programs for the children in our 30 special needs districts, called Abbott districts, within the next 18 months. I am also considering early childhood expectations, or standards, that are being developed by a task force that I appointed last fall."

"With today's action we have either implemented or are in the process of implementing many of the recommendations made by the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Committee."

"This is wonderful news for early childhood education in New Jersey," said Ciro Scalera, the Executive Director of the Association for Children of New Jersey and the Chairperson of the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Committee. "One of the most important challenges we have is to ensure that early childhood programs are of high quality. The board action today is an important step to ensuring this."

"We are moving forward on many fronts to ensure that our children get the quality preschool education they need in order to enter kindergarten prepared to meet our rigorous academic standards," said Margretta Reid Fairweather, Assistant Commissioner of Early Childhood Education.

"This new certificate fulfills our goal to have certified teachers in preschool classrooms," added Ellen Schechter, Assistant Commissioner of Academic and Career Standards.

The program approved today by the board requires new teaching candidates for preschool through grade 3 to major in the liberal arts and sciences; complete a specialized body of knowledge either through 13 college credits or through 200 clock hours of formal training; and complete a practicum in a preschool through grade three setting. This course of study will include child development and learning, understanding family and community and curriculum and assessment.

The proposed licensing code changes include certain timelines specific to the 30 Abbott school districts. The timelines are as follows:

- Effective September 2001, all newly hired teachers of students in preschool through grade three in the Abbott districts who hold a bachelor's degree will be required to obtain the new preschool through grade 3 endorsement.
- By the year 2004, those currently employed as teachers in the Department of Human Services-licensed community-based child care centers contracting with Abbott districts, who hold an associate's degree in early childhood education, will be required to enroll in a bachelor's degree program and obtain the new preschool through grade three endorsement.
- By the year 2007, current classroom teachers in child care centers under contract to Abbott districts, who do not hold an associate's degree, will be required to possess the preschool through grade three endorsement.

