



NJDOE News

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Character Education Partnership Successfully Launched in New Jersey

The New Jersey Department of Education has successfully launched a new initiative aimed at helping New Jersey educators adopt character education programs that promote positive social student behaviors and foster a caring, disciplined school climate conducive to learning.

Promoted by Gov. Christie Whitman in her State-of-the-State message this past January and funded through a \$4.75 million appropriation in the Governor's state budget, the New Jersey Character Education Partnership (NJCEP) is enabling public school districts and approved charter schools to develop and implement character education programs during the 2000-2001 school year.

"Ever since we held the kick-off conference for the Character Education Partnership back on May 17, I have been impressed by the feedback we have received from teachers and parents," said Gov. Whitman. "They are clearly committed to implementing or developing high quality programs that promote responsibility, fairness, citizenship, caring, trustworthiness and respect."

Since NJCEP applications were distributed in May, over 314 school districts have submitted applications to create the new programs. According to Commissioner of Education David Hespe, nearly three-quarters of the districts plan to adopt Programs of Merit as recommended by the state.

"This past summer, the department sponsored two vendor showcases, inviting nationally identified character education Programs of Merit to share their curriculum materials and resources with teachers, counselors and administrators to assist in their program selection," said Hespe. "We are particularly encouraged that districts are incorporating special lessons on respect, responsibility and caring into the Core Curriculum Content Standards across the board."

The department reported that 89 school districts received approval to offer alternative programs or to expand existing homegrown character education initiatives.

"There are school districts adapting established programs to the needs of their local communities, while others have already pioneered innovative programs which address the fundamental elements of character education," said Barbara Anderson, Assistant Commissioner for the department's Division of Student Services. "I am awed by how teachers and school districts have successfully developed and launched these programs in just a few months time."

During the first year of the four-year project, every school district and charter school is receiving a minimum of \$4,000 in state aid to implement a character education program in at least one school building. School districts with enrollments greater than 1,358 students will receive additional funds. The aid for these districts is based upon \$2.945 per resident student. The goal is to have character education infused into the curriculum of every school in four years.

The department highlighted some of the innovative programs being implemented in school districts across the state:

Middlesex County: The Edison Township School District's character education goal will be implemented at J.P. Stevens High School. One of three goals established as part of the Middle States Evaluation is: By June 2003, grade 9 to 12 students will be responsible, contributing citizens by demonstrating the fundamental elements of character education--responsibility, fairness, citizenship, caring, trustworthiness, respect--as measured by a 100% improvement in school participation in service related activities and a 20% reduction in discipline referrals. This goal is implemented across the curriculum in every discipline; and current character education materials are made available to teachers in a professional library. Curriculum, such as the Family and Consumer Sciences course-Independent Living-incorporates units that build on the 6 pillars with activities that support the goals. Co-curricular programs including FCCLA (Family, Career and Community Leaders of America) provide opportunities for youth-centered leadership that help students connect character education principles through positive activities like community service, Families First, and STOP the Violence. More than 2,000 students are participating in the program.

Union County: Springfield school district has selected *Quest International* as their *Program of Merit* for character education. Over 500 students in pre-kindergarten through 4th grade will receive instruction in the *Lions-Quest* program designed to include a comprehensive curriculum to encourage positive school climate, family involvement, and community involvement with local Lions Club members for community service activities.

Union County: The Roselle Borough School District's Harrison School is a 340-student K-4 building that is addressing character education as a school-wide objective. Using Character Counts as the framework, the school is targeting language arts this year, aligning character education activities with the Core Curriculum Content Standards. A parent component to the program is also being developed this year, and a videotape of culminating activities from last year's program is available along with samples of student work.

Camden County: Camden County Vo-Tech has chosen an alternative program, the *Renaissance Program*, to develop leadership and life skills in students grades 9 through 12.

Cape May County: Upper Townshipschool district plans to implement its own "homegrown" program titled *MOST, Model of Service and Tolerance*. This pre-K to 8 district will incorporate classroom lessons on respect, responsibility, and caring into the Core Curriculum Content Standards across the board.

Gloucester County: East Greenwich Township, a K-6 district has selected a *Program of Merit, Committee for Children, The Second Step Curriculum* which teaches social skills to students to reduce their risk for engaging in violent, aggressive behavior. The program includes a family component to guide parents to practice and reinforce those pro-social skills in the home.

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