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### **Commissioner Gagliardi Appoints Special Committee to Address Achievement Gap**

Commissioner of Education Vito A. Gagliardi, Sr. today announced the formation of a special Statewide Advisory Committee for Educational Equity that will explore ways to close the achievement gap that continues to place minority students, especially those from poor school districts, at a disadvantage.

"At a time when public schools are becoming more diverse, there is a need to improve equity and promote equal access and opportunity for all students in all public schools," said Dr. Gagliardi. "We must work to ensure that no child is left behind."

"New Jersey is committed to ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to perform at their highest level, regardless of where they live," Commissioner Gagliardi said. "Our own state assessments confirm that we still have a long way to go to bridge the achievement gap that exists between minority students and other students, as well as between students of relatively wealthy backgrounds and those of relative poverty."

"The Committee I am announcing today brings together well-known theoreticians, leaders of civic organizations and school district officials," Gagliardi said. "The committee is being asked to review the current policies governing educational equity and to identify promising practices and proven strategies that are aimed at closing the achievement gap and providing all children with equal educational opportunities."

The Committee will hold its first meeting today and is expected to issue its recommendations to the Commissioner by the end of the year.

Serving on the Committee are Nida E. Thomas, former director of the Office of Equal Educational Opportunities with the department; Bishop Paul G. Bootkoski, archdiocese of Newark; Joan O. Dawson, director of the Equity Assistance Center at New York University's School of Education; Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, executive director of the Rutgers University's Center for Strategic Urban Leadership; Robert Freda, executive director of the National Conference for Community and Justice; Jeanne Parker-Pryor, Montclair assistant superintendent of schools; Larry Leverett, Plainfield superintendent of schools; Robert A. Previti, Brigantine superintendent of schools; Ella S. Teal, president of the Urban League of Union County; Albert B. Kelly, president of the Tri-County Community Action Agency; and the Reverend Reginald T. Jackson, president of the Black Ministers Council of New Jersey.

"Our racial, ethnic and cultural diversity is rich and growing stronger every year as the number of immigrant families settling in New Jersey increases. We now have more than 200,000 students whose families speak a language other than English at home. Almost 200 languages are spoken by pupils in our schools," Commissioner Gagliardi said. "While the diversity of languages and cultures, as well as our growing minority student population is a source of pride and strength, it presents a unique challenge for our educational system. The work conducted by the Statewide Advisory Committee on Educational Equity will assist the department in meeting the challenge of ensuring that all public schoolchildren in New Jersey receive equitable treatment and educational opportunities."

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