



NJDOE News

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MEDIA ADVISORY: DOE to Host First-ever Early Literacy Conference; Initiative is Key Ingredient to Governor McGreevey's Education Reform Plan

As part of the McGreevey Administration's continued commitment to literacy for all children in New Jersey, the Department of Education will today begin a two-day conference on Early Childhood Literacy at the Somerset Marriott, Holiday Inn and Ukrainian Culture Center in Somerset, NJ.

"Our children can learn and they can succeed, but they need a foundation to build from," said Commissioner of Education William L. Librera. "That foundation is the ability to read. We cannot stress enough the importance for all children to be able to read at grade level by the third grade. This is Governor McGreevey's vision. We at the Department share this vision and will continue to see it through."

The conference, "Keeping the Promise: Literacy for ALL Children," is divided into three themes: Teaching the English Language Learner; Targeting the Urban At-risk Child; and Including the Special Education Population. It includes four keynote addresses and myriad workshops on early childhood literacy and related topics. More than 700 people are expected to attend.

The conference kicks off tonight (Wednesday, August 6) with a banquet and keynote address, which begins at 7 p.m. with an introduction from Lucille Davy, Governor McGreevey's special counsel for education. Davy is scheduled to introduce the keynote speaker, Dorothy Strickland.

Dr. Strickland, who will give a presentation entitled "Improving Literacy Learning in New Jersey: Challenges and Opportunities," is the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Professor at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. She is additionally a past president of both the International Reading Association and its Reading Hall of Fame.

Dr. Strickland taught for 11 years in New Jersey — six as a classroom teacher and five as a reading consultant and learning disabilities specialist. She holds a bachelor's degree from Newark State College (now Kean University) and her master's and doctoral degree from New York University.

The conference continues Thursday morning (August 7) with an introduction and welcome from Commissioner Librera at 8:30 a.m. The Commissioner is scheduled to introduce Catherine Snow, of Harvard University. Snow holds a doctorate in psychology and has primarily researched children's language development and literacy development.

Dr. Snow's presentation is entitled, "Implications of Reading Research for Teacher Preparation and Professional Development."

"The Department is privileged to have a list of speakers comparable to an all-star team of early literacy educators," Commissioner Librera said. "Their wealth of experience and varying opinions on early childhood literacy will provide excellent resources for all in attendance. We look forward to their presentations and implementing the many good ideas we feel will result from them."

Establishing early childhood literacy is a key component of the Governor's 21-point education reform plan. As recently as July, the Governor accepted 20,000 books from Toys "R" Us Children's Fund to be used in the Governor's Book Club.

"Literacy is the most fundamental element of our children's education," Gov. McGreevey said after receiving the donation from Chris Kay, Toys "R" Us Executive Vice President, at the Totowa Toys "R" Us where they both read to children in the Camp Geoffrey summer activities program.

"Without the ability to read, our children will not be able to reach their full potential," McGreevey said at the time. "While students learn the basic skills in the classroom, the Governor's Book Club gets young children reading - not just in school—but after school, at home and in their local libraries."

This week's conference, which is sponsored by the DOE's offices of Reading First, Urban Literacy and Early Literacy, is planned as an annual event. This year's conference will focus on the first round of professional development for educators who have received Reading First funds.

"This conference underscores New Jersey's commitment that all our children will be able to read at grade level by the time they leave grade three," said Ann Lawrence, the DOE's director of early literacy. "We are convinced this can happen. This conference is one more step — an important one — in achieving Gov. McGreevey's vision."

In addition to Strickland and Snow, the following educators are scheduled to speak during the conference: Dr. Nell Duke, an associate professor at Michigan State University and Dr. Lesley Mandel Morrow, a professor at Rutgers, the State University.

Dr. Duke's work focuses on early literacy development, particularly among children living in poverty. She has received the Reading Association Outstanding Dissertation Award and the National Council of Teachers of English Promising Researcher Award. Her presentation is entitled, "Preventing and Addressing Comprehension Difficulties." She is scheduled to speak at 11:30 a.m. on Thursday.

Dr. Morrow, a professor at Rutgers's Graduate School of Education, is coordinator of the Literacy Cluster and a member of the Early Childhood/Early Literacy Cluster. She began her career as a classroom teacher and later became a reading specialist. She is the president of the International Reading Association for 2003-04 and is the author of articles that have appeared in more than 200 publications.

Dr. Morrow's presentation is entitled, "Organizing and Managing the Language Arts Block: What We Have Learned from Research on Exemplary Practice." She is scheduled to speak at 12:15 p.m. on Thursday.

Teachers of pre-kindergarten through third grade, English as a Second Language/Bilingual education, and special education are scheduled to attend, as are reading and literacy coaches, principals and supervisors and Reading First Coordinators.

The media are also invited and encouraged to attend.

For more information about literacy programs in New Jersey, please visit the following Web Site:

www.nj.gov/njded/readfirst.

For further questions, please contact the Department of Education Public Information Office at (609) 292-1126.