



NJDOE News

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Back to School 2003 * Note: Beginning today, the Department of Education (DOE) Public Information Office will be issuing news releases over the next week to kick-off the 2003-04 school year and to celebrate the myriad initiatives the DOE is sponsoring to encourage the participation of students, educators and parents and to improve teaching and learning statewide.

[New Jersey Public Schools Fact Sheet 03-04](#) (PDF)

[2003-04 School Year Promises More Alternatives for High School Seniors with the 12th Grade Option Pilot Program; Opportunities Abound for Last Year of School](#)

Department of Education Primed to Begin 2003-04 School Year with a Variety of Initiatives; Places Continued Emphasis on Diverse and Multiple Paths of Success

Working with Governor James E. McGreevey and his vision for a superior education for all students in New Jersey, the Department of Education is excited to begin the 2003-04 school year with myriad important initiatives, many of which focus on flexibility and accountability as the two major themes for New Jersey schools in the year ahead.

The Department of Education plans to work closely with local school officials and partner organizations to develop innovative and effective ways to assess student achievement at all grade levels and provide challenging course offerings for high school students. The Department will also continue to work with school districts in carrying out their responsibilities under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

"We are very pleased to continue the good work and accomplishments done by many educators throughout the state into the new school year," said Commissioner of Education William L. Librera. "We are confident that the many programs and ideas in place for the coming year will benefit our students, parents and educators the best ways possible."

Approximately 1,386,919 public school students will return to class in September to begin the 2003-04 school year. This represents an increase of 25,886 students since September 2002. New Jersey's all-time enrollment high of 1,432,344 students was recorded in 1973-74.

The number of full-time classroom teachers has set a new all-time high with 105,561 teachers, up from 102,723 reported last year.

Along with a range of programs and efforts to improve teaching and learning, the DOE is closely monitoring and supporting two key initiatives: the 12th Grade Pilot Program and the New Jersey Performance Assessment Pilot Project.

"We will stress the importance of two pilot projects this year that I am certain will have a permanent and positive impact on our schools," said Commissioner Librera. "Through a partnership with the Coalition for Responsible Education Assessment, Testing and Evaluation (CREATE) and the Business Coalition for Educational Excellence (BCEE) at the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce, nine districts are exploring ways to effectively assess how well students are meeting the Core Curriculum Content Standards in all content areas.

"Through this experience, we hope to be able to put in place effective ways to measure student performance that go beyond paper and pencil tests," Librera said.

12th Grade Option Pilot Program

Commissioner Librera noted that the second pilot, the 12th Grade Option Pilot Program, is designed to overcome what has been often referred to as "senioritis" or "the senior slide," in which high school students who have passed the High School Proficiency Assessment and completed most of their course requirements often find themselves bored and focused on their plans after graduation.

"Senior year can be such an exciting time, yet its potential is not tapped often enough," Commissioner Librera said. "This year, 85 high schools will be trying out innovative ways to offer high school seniors a variety of courses and experiences both in and out of school to make their last year more meaningful and rewarding. We believe that the pilot will show how the last year of high school can serve as a powerful springboard to propel our young people into the next phases of their lives."

The pilot program encourages high school seniors who have finished all graduation requirements to enroll in college credit courses or seek volunteer opportunities for both personal and intellectual growth.

New Jersey Performance Assessment Pilot Project

Known as the New Jersey Performance Assessment Pilot Project, the partnership formally recognizes that student achievement cannot be fully measured by standardized tests. Examples of performance-based assessments include demonstrations, exhibits, research projects and problem-solving tasks.

The districts selected for participation in the pilot project are: Oaklyn /Camden County Vocational; Cherry Hill, Dumont, Edison, Galloway/Greater Egg Harbor; Mount Olive; New Brunswick; Ridgewood; and Springfield. The five-year pilot began with 200 educators from these districts, who met to reach a consensus on performance assessments in the language arts, math and science. The educators will attend similar meetings to revisit the issue.

The DOE and Governor McGreevey continue to support many other initiatives – all with a continued focus on diverse and multiple paths of success for all students. These efforts include Career Academies, Early Childhood Literacy programs, Reading First, the federal No Child Left Behind Act, and a continued commitment to Abbott school districts.

Career Academies

Two highly successful programs introduced last year are expected to expand in the year ahead.

Career academies, high school level programs built around a content theme, such as medicine or criminal justice, which feature a corporate sponsor that supports the program with a combination of funding and expertise, and a higher education partnership that creates seamless links for students who want to continue their study in the content themes after they graduate from high school.

Under the Governor's initiative, Career Academies now exist in Cherry Hill, Englewood, Morristown and Trenton, with the help of partners such as Commerce Bank, Pfizer Pharmaceuticals, and PSEG, and higher education support from community colleges in Camden, Mercer and Morris counties. At least four additional academies may open this year.

The Department continues to actively support the highly successful academies that are already in place.

Early Childhood Literacy

Following a precedent-setting initiative launched by Governor James E. McGreevey to bolster reading and writing skills of young students, the Department of Education will build upon the inaugural year of the Early Literacy Initiative. Governor McGreevey has set a goal to have all New Jersey students reading at grade level by the end of third grade.

The initiative is based on a body of educational research that supports the view that children are more successful in school and in life when they are proficient in the language arts in the early grades.

To help accomplish this goal, the Department of Education last year hired more than three dozen reading coaches. The coaches were assigned to train staff in low performing schools in the latest and most effective techniques in helping young students learn to read. The Department of Education has nearly doubled the number of reading coaches (to a total of 63) who will be assigned to train school staff in 2003-04.

In addition, more schools are expected to join Governor McGreevey's Book Club in the coming year. Last year, more than 65,000 students from more than 2,000 elementary schools participated in the program. Through the club, children in kindergarten to third grade read selected books each month. Each month, Governor McGreevey announced four selections, one each for kindergarten through third grade.

Students can become members of the club through its Web site: <http://www.state.nj.us/bookclub/>. Teachers can sign up for a newsletter that will give them useful tips and activities related to the book club.

Reading First

As the 2003-04 school year begins, the DOE continues its commitment alongside Governor McGreevey for the Reading First program, one that supports the Governor's ambitious goal of having every child reading at or above

grade level by the end of 3rd grade. The Reading First grant will fund initiatives similar to the Governor's Reading Coach program now operating in 80 schools around the state.

In January of this year, Commissioner Librera announced that New Jersey received an \$18.4 million federal grant for the current school year to help teachers improve their students' reading achievement in kindergarten through the 3rd grade in selected school districts starting next school year. The funds are the first installment of a six-year \$120 million federal Reading First grant

The annual Reading First grant award, which will increase to \$20.4 million for each of the next five years, will provide support to schools to implement proven methods of early reading instruction in K-3 classrooms and comprehensive reading programs grounded in scientifically based reading research in order to make substantial improvements in student achievement, particularly in New Jersey's lowest performing, high-poverty schools.

NCLB Act

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), has far-reaching impact into school districts throughout the nation. New Jersey is responding to the many requirements under the law in order to assist students to improve academically. Among them are efforts to improve school performance, enhance the learning environment through safer schools and to assist schools in their efforts to improve.

In accordance with another NCLB requirement, the Department of Education is planning to expand the statewide assessment system with new state achievement tests for students in grades five, six and seven. Once the proposed tests are added to existing state tests for third, fourth and eighth grade students over the next several years, they will meet the federal mandate of testing all students in grades three through twelve, inclusive.

Accompanying all of these mandates are requirements for the state to report student achievement, performance and progress to both parents and the general public.

Commitment to Abbott School Districts

The Department of Education is reinforcing its commitment to quality education in its special needs districts by conducting special program and budget reviews. The reviews are designed to earmark expenditures in the 30 Abbott districts for programs that work. In the last year, the DOE has petitioned the State Supreme Court to allow individual Abbott schools to choose another whole school reform model, if they feel that the one that they originally selected has been ineffective.

The court ordered the agreement with the plaintiff's attorney in Abbott to permit nearly half of Abbott schools to drop whole school reform models that were ineffective. The court also approved the department's request to maintain funding of the core instructional programs of Abbott schools for a second year. This assures a sharp focus on improved teaching and learning during fiscally austere times.

The department has underscored its funding commitment to Abbott school districts by providing \$407,896,114 million in state aid for approved preschool plan budgets for 2003-04. This level of support is nearly double the \$215,597,612 provided for those programs in the 2001-02 school year.

Governor McGreevey's 21-point Plan for Education

The Department of Education's mission is based largely on Governor McGreevey's 21-point plan for educational excellence. To view the Governor's plan, click on the following link:

<http://www.state.nj.us/njded/genfo/21point.htm>

For more information about any of the programs and initiatives contained in this press release, please do not hesitate to call the DOE Public Information Office at (609) 292-1126.