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**For Release: October 20, 2003**

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### **New Jersey Schools Set to Observe School Violence Awareness Week *DOE Announces New Safe Schools Web-Site***

As part of its continued support of public schools throughout New Jersey this week as they begin participating in a variety of activities to observe School Violence Awareness Week, the Department of Education (DOE) is proud to announce the creation of its new Safe Schools Web site.

This year marks the second observance of the School Violence Awareness Week, which begins today and was officially designated by a state law adopted in January 2002. The DOE is taking the lead to help educators, parents and teachers observe the week by creating and distributing guidelines and some suggested resources for use in schools throughout the state.

"Maintaining safe schools is a basic and vital ingredient to learning," Gov. James E. McGreevey said. "I applaud all of the people and agencies in our schools and communities who each day demonstrate their commitment to schools to promote learning and instill in their students the value in avoiding violent and disruptive behavior."

"Through School Violence Awareness Week, we have an opportunity to openly discuss issues related to violence prevention," said Commissioner of Education William L. Librera. "I know that schools throughout New Jersey will be encouraging classroom discussions or participating in activities with themes such as student diversity, tolerance, and dealing with anger, and I pledge the continued support and assistance of the Department of Education to assist our schools in creating safe learning environments."

#### **Keeping Our Kids Safe Web Site**

As part of the DOE's ongoing commitment to violence awareness in schools, Commissioner Librera announced this week the creation of a new Web site devoted to safe schools issues, *Keeping Our Kids Safe*.

*Keeping Our Kids Safe*, available today for the first time, is the Department of Education's newest Web site. It can be accessed here:

<http://www.state.nj.us/njded/students/safety/>

The site pulls together a variety of reports, documents and other materials collected under the categories of Safe Schools, Student Health, and Student Behavior.

Visitors will find information on topics such as keeping schools violence-free and drug-free, building positive social and emotional climates, developing and maintaining good health habits, facts about different diseases and health concerns, truancy, dropping out of school and building good character.

The site also has a link to an Emergency Message Center, which will serve as a prominent billboard for emergency announcements issued by the Department of Education as the need arises.

#### **Other Violence Awareness Initiatives**

This fall, the DOE expects to release the latest report detailing the second year of implementation of the Character Education Partnership Initiative. Building positive character traits in students is the central goal of the New Jersey Character Education Partnership (NJCEP) Initiative.

As part of the Character Education Partnership Initiative, every school district and approved charter school, special services school, jointure commission and educational services commission school received 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 1,428 students received additional funds.

This year's report contains a *School Profiles* section, which describes specific actions by school districts to decrease student discipline, improve school performance, develop staff skills, promote positive student self-reports and improve school climate. The report should be available shortly.

A state level project to reduce school violence was launched recently. The Positive Student Discipline Reform Demonstration Project is a joint effort of the New Jersey Department of Education and Violence Institute of New Jersey (VINJ) to explore effective ways to implement student discipline policies, practices, and support programs.

The three-year program is expected to use the experience of three yet-to-be-named pilot districts to develop and implement effective positive student discipline policies and practices at the local level that can serve as models in other school districts.

New Jersey has maintained a special interest in promoting safe school environments for more than 25 years. Since the late 1970s, a state law has required the Commissioner of Education to issue an annual report on the incidents of violence, vandalism and substance abuse in the public schools.

The report has been refined over the years and in 2000 evolved into its current format, known as the Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System (EVVRS). Now in its fourth year, the report contains important trend information used by the state in determining whether specialized programs or training are required in different areas of the state, or on different school safety issues. The most recent annual report can be accessed through the following address: <http://www.nj.gov/njded/schools/vandv/0102/>.

For more information about the DOE's many initiatives designed to assist school districts statewide in implementing safety strategies and addressing violence issues, please contact the Department of Education's Public Information Office at (609) 292-1126.