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## NJDOE News

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### **Commissioner Librera: Certification Backlog Addressed, Online Application Now Available**

New Jersey's new, online system for processing teacher certification applications is now operational and the certification backlog – at one point as high as 11,000 applications and up to a year for processing – has been reduced to six to eight weeks, DOE officials told the Senate Education Committee today.

"We were dealing with a licensing system that was 20 years old and had never worked very well," said Commissioner of Education William L. Librera. "Our new internet application and information system was built from the ground up and customized to meet our needs and the needs of the applicants. We've hired new examiners and we have instituted many new operations policies that focus on customer service, accuracy and quick turn-around.

"It has been an extraordinary effort on the part of many people in this department, but it has resulted in a much more efficient and responsive process than DOE has ever had before," he said.

"By the fall, we hope to have the average processing time further reduced to four to six weeks," Commissioner Librera said, noting that expedited applications requested by district superintendents for people to whom they have officially offered jobs are currently being completed in three weeks or less.

The department receives about 45,000 certification applications each year. Approximately 25,000 new licenses are issued annually, along with about 10,000 duplicate certificates, name changes and renewals of temporary certificates. DOE officials expect to issue approximately 10,600 licenses within the next three months in anticipation of the start of the 2005-06 school year.

All PreK-12 education professionals -- including teachers, administrators, superintendents, business administrators, school nurses and guidance counselors – must be licensed by DOE. Middle school and high school teachers must obtain additional certifications in the subjects they teach, and many education professionals hold multiple licenses.

"Many people outside the education community don't realize that obtaining certification in New Jersey is much more complex than registering a car or getting a passport," Commissioner Librera said.

"The license applications are detailed and extensive, and they receive intense scrutiny from highly trained examiners. New Jersey's standards are among the highest in the country, and we won't certify people who can't prove that they meet those standards. There are no rubber stamps here, and the process takes time," he said.

Some of the system improvements and policy changes cited by the Commissioner are:

- A new teacher licensing application system, TCIS (Teacher Credential Information System) that allows people to apply online and pay online by credit card. Online applications are accessible the same day they are filed.
- Mailed documents are guaranteed to be scanned into the system within 48 hours of receipt.
- The number of examiners has been increased to 15. All examiners have been retrained in all areas of certification.
- Telephone access for applicants' questions is now available from 3:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. Monday-Thursday and 3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. Friday.
- The expedite system has been restructured to ensure the accuracy and urgency of emergent requests.
- County education office staffs and County Superintendents have been trained on the new system to allow them to properly assist applicants. Human resources staffs in district offices are also receiving training on the new system.

Commissioner Librera encouraged certification applicants to use TCIS. The online application and its user manual can be accessed via the department's licensing web page at <http://www.nj.gov/njded/educators/license/> .

He said the launch of TCIS, which includes a mirror program used by department staff to review applications, puts New Jersey in the forefront of states nationally in the effort to computerize teacher certification processes.

"It increases the accuracy of the information input, reduces processing time and reduces paperwork for everyone," the Commissioner said. "The feedback we've received from users has been very positive, and while paper applications will still be available, we expect that soon about 75 percent of the New Jersey certification applications will be submitted online."

TCIS also allows applicants to:

- Check the status of their applications
- View current and past credentials
- Check for test scores, such as the Praxis.
- Input work experience and education history