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For Release: March 19, 2008

Commissioner Davy Announces Release of 2008 Comparative Spending Guide; Calls on Public to Participate in Budget Development Process

Commissioner of Education Lucille E. Davy today released the 2008 *Comparative Spending Guide*, an annual statistical report that details local school spending patterns and ranks similar school districts under a variety of spending categories.

"For the past decade, we have produced the *Comparative Spending Guide* to show the public how their school tax dollars are spent," said Commissioner Davy. "We release the guide at this time of year to stimulate local discussions as school boards present their proposed budgets for public review and comment.

"We hope the guide will again prove to be a useful tool at the local level to determine spending priorities," she said.

The *Comparative Spending Guide* can be found online at:

<http://www.nj.gov/education/guide/2008/>

The guide provides school personnel and the public with information about a school district's annual budget. It ranks school districts in 14 of 15 spending categories, such as total classroom instruction or total support services; and in four staffing indicators, such as student-teacher ratios and ratios of faculty to administrative staff.

Each indicator shows cost data for three years on a per pupil basis. Each staffing indicator contains two years of data. The total per pupil cost indicator reflects all spending common to school districts and includes total current expense spending for early childhood education programs, demonstrably effective programs, special education, bilingual education, supplemental instruction, county vocational schools and adult and post-secondary education.

Instances in which spending can differ significantly from one district to the next are not included in the guide. Examples of such instances are transportation, capital and tuition expenditures. In addition, the guide measures the costs to a district of providing regular and special education programs, as well as supplemental programs such as at-risk and limited English proficient (LEP) programs to all students on roll in the district. These costs are not based on resident counts. Please refer to the Introduction and Description section in the guide for a discussion of the specific costs included.

The following are highlights from the new guide:

- Total budgeted comparative costs for all grade levels for regular and special education on-roll students as well as the additional costs for the provision of LEP and at-risk on-roll programs and services statewide average is \$12,720 in the current school year, up 4.8 percent from the previous year.
- Classroom instruction costs are \$7,490 per pupil, representing 58.9 percent of the total budgeted comparative cost per pupil and up \$343, or 4.8 percent, from the previous year.
- Support services, such as guidance and nursing services, account for \$1,960, or 15.4 percent of the total comparative cost per pupil, an increase of 6.6 percent from the previous year's actual cost.

The *Comparative Spending Guide* compares school districts of similar size with each other. The groups are: K-6; K-8 (with subgroupings of enrollments from 0-399; 400-750; and more than 750); K-12 (with subgroupings of enrollments from 0-1,799; 1,800 to 3,500; and more than 3,500); grades 7-12 and 9-12; county special services; county vocational schools; and charter schools.

Districts are listed alphabetically and are ranked low to high in spending for each of three years, within their subgroups.