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Whitman Endorses Early Childhood Teacher Recommendations

Gov. Christie Whitman today announced a number of new requirements for early childhood education teachers in the state's special needs school districts, including a specialized certificate for teachers of students in nursery school through grade three. An advisory committee of experts in early childhood education recommended the new requirements.

"I'm very pleased that the committee's recommendations have recognized the distinct challenges faced by teachers responsible for the social and educational development of young children," Gov. Whitman said.

"A separate teaching certificate focused on the special needs of young children is essential to successful early childhood education. I have directed Education Commissioner Hespe to begin immediately to work with the State Board of Education to develop this new credential," said the Governor.

Ciro Scalera, the chair of the advisory committee and executive director of the Association for Children of New Jersey, said "Gov. Whitman promised in January to look at improving pre-school education in New Jersey and we're pleased that she has accepted the committee's recommendations."

The Governor proposed last January, as a first step towards assuring teacher quality in pre-school education, that pre-school teachers be required to obtain a child development (CDA) certificate, a nationally-recognized pre-school credential. At that time, she also announced the formation of an advisory committee of early childhood education experts and practitioners, whose first task was to develop recommendations for additional steps to assure teacher quality in Abbott district pre-school programs.

The Governor noted that the new requirements allow existing teachers to continue teaching and provide time and funding to help them obtain the new credentials.

"For years, caring professionals have provided a valuable service to our pre-school children. I want to see this continue," she said.

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"The advisory committee, comprised of experts in early childhood education, clearly recognizes the importance of providing quality pre-school programs," Commissioner Hespe said. "Children in this age bracket need special attention from professionals with special training. The new N-3 certification will see that this need is met."

The committee recommended that **newly hired teachers** this September be required to meet one of three qualification options:

- They must have a bachelor's degree, enroll in the Department of Education's alternate route to teacher certification to obtain appropriate early childhood education courses, and obtain N-3 teacher certification by 2001;
- They must have an associate's degree in early childhood education and enroll in a bachelor's degree program that would lead to teacher certification in early childhood education by 2004; or
- They must have a K-8 teacher's certificate, enroll in early childhood courses now and seek the proposed N-3 endorsement as soon as it becomes available.

The committee recommended two options for **existing teachers** in child care centers:

- Those with CDA or CCP credentials would be expected to work toward a bachelor's degree and an N-3 certificate within six years; or
- Those without a CDA/CCP or any degree would be expected to enroll in CDA/CCP, attain CDA/CCP within two years and work toward an associate's degree in early childhood education and a bachelor's degree and an N-3 certification certificate within six years.

Governor Whitman announced in January that she has set aside more than \$1 million to finance scholarships for new and existing teachers and their assistants working in the Abbott pre-school programs to help them obtain the credentials required under this new policy. These funds are part of the \$12 million Bright Beginnings program previously announced by the Governor to provide for facility expansion and improvement and for educational materials and supplies for community-based pre-school programs.

"The policy announced today, together with the \$12 million Bright Beginnings initiative, will allow New Jersey to provide high quality pre-school programs by building upon the strong commitment and experience to the state's poorest children already provided through Head Start and child care centers in these 28 communities," said the Governor.

The Governor noted that her office has already begun meeting with college presidents and deans of education to develop the higher education programs needed to meet the new teacher certification requirements.

Scalera said the committee realizes that local districts and childcare centers may not be able to find persons with the recommended credentials in time for the beginning of the new school year in September.

"We have capacity issues at our institutions of higher education, particularly the lack of teaching staff for early childhood education," Scalera said. "So the committee recommends allowing centers to hire a child development associate (CDA) or a certified childcare professional (CCP) teacher when a teacher with a BA or AA in early childhood education is not available."

"I want to commend Chairman Ciro Scalera and all the members of the committee for their hard work and commitment to improving the education of children in our special needs schools. These children will be the beneficiaries of their work for generations to come," said Gov. Whitman.