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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Whitman Announces Early Childhood Education Initiatives for State's Most Disadvantaged Children

Gov. Christie Whitman today outlined her vision for improving early childhood education for three- and four-year-olds who are most at risk of falling behind their peers.

"Investing in quality early childhood programs is without question one of the most critical things we are doing for the future of our children and our state," Gov. Whitman said.

The child care plan, which will spend approximately \$8,000 per student, improves class size standards, sets minimum educational standards for child care workers, increases salaries for teachers, and provides scholarship funds for teachers and staff.

The state Supreme Court, in its Abbott vs. Burke decision last year, defined constitutional standards for pre-school education for children living in the state's 28 most disadvantaged districts. Those guidelines include providing half-day care for three- and four-year-olds as well as full-day kindergarten for children. The standards also dictate student-to-staff ratios.

"I am happy to report that our implementation plan goes well beyond the Supreme Court's blueprint for early childhood programs," Gov. Whitman said. "We will become the first state in the nation to blend both education and social service funding and educational/developmental programs together to serve three- and four-year-olds."

Gov. Whitman's plan includes the following enhancements to the court decision:

- Provides full-day learning for all three- and four-year-old children in Abbott districts over the next three years.
- Exceeds the court-approved student-to-staff ratio by providing one group teacher with a child development associate credential, plus two assistant teachers for each class of 20 children. The court-approved standard was one teacher and one aid for every 15 students.
- Requiring programming developed specifically for younger students to promote cognitive and social development.
- Encourages greater parental involvement by including one family worker for every 40 children.
- Ensures accountability by including Master Teachers to assist urban superintendents in overseeing program implementation.
- Promotes professional development through requiring early childhood group teachers to possess the Childhood Development Associate credential within the next three years.

The Governor's plan will be implemented through a combination of Early Childhood Program Aid and state and federal funds. In addition, the Governor announced a total of \$12 million in federal block grant funding to support several initiatives

designed to implement her vision. The initiatives are:

- \$8 million in assistance to help centers expand or make minor renovations
- \$2 million for curriculum enhancements that will upgrade and modernize current equipment and materials
- \$1 million for an Early Childhood Scholarship Program to help existing and new teachers in the Abbott districts attain the Child Development Associate credential, as well as another \$1 million for a similar program for the 108 school districts on next level of disadvantaged districts.

Gov. Whitman said investing in child care workers will result in children who are better prepared when they enter kindergarten.

"What children need most at this age is nurturing, stimulating, creative adults who interact with them in an age-appropriate way. They'll do educational and developmental activities, but a large part of that is play. We know that young children are working and learning when they play," Gov. Whitman said.

Finally, the Governor unveiled the creation of the Early Childhood Education Advisory Committee which will include early childhood educators and administrators, child advocates, members of the business community, parents, and child care providers. The committee will assist with the implementation of the Governor's early childhood education plan.