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Commissioner of Education Proposes Higher Standards for Teachers; Reciprocity for Out-of-State Administrators

Commissioner of Education David Hespe today proposed amendments to the state's Professional Licensure and Standards Code that would raise the grade point average (GPA) for future teachers and make it easier for talented out-of-state administrators to secure positions in New Jersey schools.

The licensure code amendments will allow certified, out-of-state chief school administrators and principals who do not meet the state's requirement of a masters or higher degree in management or leadership to become certified in New Jersey. These administrators will be granted reciprocity if they can officially document five years of successful experience under a comparable out-of-state certificate, satisfy the test requirement and complete a mentoring program focused on New Jersey finance and law.

"This is an important change in our code," said Commissioner Hespe. "We should allow quality school administrators from other states who may not meet every one of our very specific requirements to work here. We must increase the pool of talented candidates, and this is a good way of reaching that goal."

The licensure code amendments also raise the grade point average for teacher candidates. Governor Christie Whitman, in her 1999 State of the State message, proposed requiring a B average of all teacher candidates. Right now a 2.5 (or a "C") average is the requirement on a 4.0 point scale for those teachers trained in collegiate programs. The Commissioner's proposal would raise the GPA requirement to a 2.75 (or a "B"). The 2.75 average would be required of all prospective teacher candidates, including alternate route candidates, as a condition for licensure.

"I believe that a 2.75 average will increase the quality of teacher candidates for New Jersey schools," said Hespe. "In making this recommendation it is important to balance the notion of increased teacher quality with the overall effect such a proposal will have on the supply of available teachers."

"As we implement the state's rigorous academic standards, it is imperative that we ensure that the highest quality teaching force possible is in place to help our children reach those standards," said Hespe. "Raising the grade requirement will be one method of accomplishing this goal."

The Commissioner's proposal has picked up the support of one of the state's college deans of education. "I believe that raising the exit grade point average for future teachers to 2.75 is an important step in the right direction and strikes just the right balance between raising standards and meeting the state's needs for future teachers," said Dr. Nicholas Michelli, Dean of the College of Education and Human Services at Montclair State University.

Commissioner Hespe has also proposed to the State Board of Education that all teachers assigned as swimming instructors in the public schools hold a valid CPR certificate issued by the American Red Cross, a valid lifeguard certificate issued by the Red Cross, and a valid Red Cross water safety certificate. Governor Whitman signed into law a bill requiring establishment of regulations to govern teachers assigned to swimming classes. The legislation was a response to an incident last year where a student almost drowned and the teacher involved lacked appropriate water safety skills to prevent or minimize harm to the student.

"The safety of our children in school is my number one priority," said Hespe. "The regulations I am proposing today will go a long way toward guaranteeing that our children are adequately protected when they take swimming classes."

Finally, the proposed amendments establish requirements for school certification for athletic trainers employed in public school districts. These requirements are a bachelor's degree based upon a four-year curriculum in an accredited college or university and satisfactory completion of the requirements established by the State Board of Medical Examiners for registration as an athletic trainer. These regulations are being proposed pursuant to a law recently enacted by Governor Whitman.

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