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GOVERNOR ACCEPTS HESPE RESIGNATION

Governor Christie Whitman today accepted the resignation of Education Commissioner David C. Hespe. The resignation becomes effective March 2.

Hespe, who has served as commissioner since April 1999, will become a visiting professor in the college of education at Rowan University.

"Dave Hespe has helped this administration improve the quality of public education in school districts across the state," said Whitman. "For generations to come, children will reap the benefit of new school facilities and a strong curriculum that will prepare them to succeed regardless of their future career path. Thanks to Dave's diligence and collaborative efforts with all education stakeholders, especially parents, this administration will leave a public education system that is strongly positioned to help all students achieve their goals.

"Dave oversaw the implementation of whole school reform and the establishment of quality preschool programs in our urban districts. Teachers will be better prepared in the classroom thanks to higher certification standards, continuing professional development and mentoring programs. Schools in every district in the state are offering state-funded character education programs. Students have greater accessibility to computers, the Internet and distance learning. And our charter schools and new interdistrict school choice program are strong and growing. I believe students, parents and teachers are more energized and involved because of Dave's compassion, commitment and continuing outreach efforts."

"It has been a privilege to serve Governor Whitman as commissioner of education," said Hespe. "When I arrived, most of the major initiatives that will be remembered as the hallmark of the governor's education agenda were already authorized. My goal as commissioner was to see that they were effectively implemented. I believe my goal has been accomplished."

During his tenure as commissioner, Hespe has visited more than 200 schools to talk to educators, students and parents on a one-to-one basis. "I wanted to further the department's relationship with school districts," Hespe said. "I wanted them to know that we are on the same team and that we are willing to listen to, and act on, their concerns. We ask a lot of our schools. I wanted them to know we are also willing to give a lot. We don't have all the answers. But we can, and we have, learned a lot by listening. We all want the same thing -- what's best for the children."

Prior to being named commissioner, Hespe, 40, of Belle Mead, served the Whitman administration as first assistant attorney general, an assistant education commissioner, and the Governor's assistant counsel for education and higher education issues. A lawyer, Hespe left private practice in 1989 to work for the Office of Legislative Services, the nonpartisan arm of the state Legislature, as associate counsel in the education section. He joined the Governor's team as assistant counsel in February of 1994.

The Department of Education administers state and federal aid programs affecting more than 1.4 million public and non-public school children. It has approximately 1,000 employees, a \$49.8 million budget and will distribute \$6.5 billion in state aid during the current fiscal year.

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