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For More Information Contact the Public Information Office:

**Tom Rosenthal
Richard Vespucci
Jon Zlock
609-292-1126**

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Commissioner Librera Releases [2003 Comparative Spending Guide](#)

Commissioner of Education William L. Librera today released the 2003 *Comparative Spending Guide*. The guide is a statistical report that details how local public school districts in New Jersey allocate their financial resources.

"Citizens throughout New Jersey face special challenges this year in providing children with a first class education in a difficult economic time — perhaps the most difficult fiscal situation the state has ever faced," Commissioner Librera said. "We produce the *Comparative Spending Guide* so that parents and taxpayers can determine whether their schools are spending according to their needs, goals and priorities."

Releasing the guide fits the fifth educational theme that Governor McGreevey and Commissioner Librera outlined during the Administration's Educational Summit in September 2002. Specifically, it is an example of engaging the public through communication and accountability.

"We hope the guide will serve as a useful and informative tool to stimulate local discussions about school spending as school boards develop their budgets for the 2002-03 school year," Dr. Librera said.

The *Comparative Spending Guide* provides local educators and interested citizens with information about a school district's annual budget. It ranks similar school districts in 14 of 15 spending categories, or indicators, as well as in four staffing indicators. Each indicator presents costs on a per pupil basis, with three years of data presented; the four staffing indicators contain two years of data.

The total per pupil cost indicator reflects all spending common to school districts and includes total current expense and spending for early childhood education programs, demonstrably effective programs, special education, bilingual education, distance learning, instructional supplement, county vocational schools, and adult and post-secondary education.

Spending areas not included in the guide are pensions, transportation, and tuition expenditures because they can vary widely from district to district.

School districts of similar size are compared with each other in the guide. 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 0-1,800; 1,801-3,500; 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 group. All local school districts were given an opportunity to review the information in the guide.

Commissioner Librera noted that the guide is a statistical document. Parents and taxpayers should also use other resources to get a complete perspective on how their schools invest in education.

"Every school district sets specific goals that may require certain levels of spending," he said. "People need to understand these local goals and why they were set in order to understand their district's spending patterns."

The *Comparative Spending Guide*, along with the School Report Card, informs parents and citizens about local activities to provide students with a thorough and efficient education as required by the state constitution.

The March 2003 Comparative Spending Guide reflects changes to the calculation of the total comparative cost per pupil for all 3 years included in the Guide. Total comparative cost per pupil now excludes transfers to whole school reform that were already counted in districts' school based budgets, and the enrollment now includes preschool students sent out of district to contracted providers.

The guide will be available in libraries and in the 21 county offices of education and can also be reviewed on the

Department of Education's website: www.state.nj.us/education.