



NJDOE News

For More Information Contact the Public Information Office:

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

For Release: May 12, 2003

Librera Unveils Program for Trained Reading Coaches To Bring Expertise Back to Their Home Districts

[Governor McGreevey's Early Literacy Initiative
Reading Coaches: The First Year](#)

[A Program to Support Literacy Education:
the Reading Coach in the Home District](#)

[Reading Coach Job Description and Expectations](#)

New Brunswick - Education Commissioner William L. Librera announced an innovation in New Jersey's successful Reading Coach program that will enable these highly trained literacy specialists to return to their home districts to continue coaching their peers in effective strategies to teach young children to read.

Under the Home District initiative unveiled at a convocation marking the conclusion of the first year of New Jersey's Reading Coach program, Commissioner Librera said that the Department of Education would pay the full salary and benefits of the returning coach if the school district has one or more schools eligible for the services of a coach. If the district does not have a school eligible for reading coach services, the department will match one-half of the salary and benefits to enable the coach to continue peer training.

"In the span of just one year, a cadre of highly trained teachers left their home districts to share in the mission of training other teachers in the newest and most effective ways to help young children learn how to read," Dr. Librera said.

"We have seen how teachers and students can benefit from hosting reading coaches, but we also recognize that the coaches' home districts are without the services of these talented professionals," the Commissioner continued. "We have developed this initiative to give home districts of our reading coaches the opportunity to benefit from the same resources that the coaches provide to other districts."

During the first year of the Reading Coach program, each coach was assigned to work in three different schools with a total of about 30 teachers in the kindergarten through third grade. It is estimated that the coaches worked directly with nearly 700 teachers and that approximately 25,000 students benefited from the program.

The Reading Coaches initiative was announced in May 2002 as part of Governor James E. McGreevey's Third Grade Literacy Initiative. The major focus of the program is the recruitment, training and use of reading coaches to work with local staff to guide the implementation of research-based best practices as defined by the Early Literacy Task Force, which is co-chaired by Dr. Strickland of Rutgers University and Dr. Robert Copeland, superintendent of Piscataway Schools. Dr. Strickland addressed the Reading Coaches at today's convocation.

The Reading Coach initiative is part of the ambitious goal Governor McGreevey has set to have all children in New Jersey public schools reading at or above grade level by the end of the third grade.

The basic function of reading coaches is to help teachers enhance and refine their skills in teaching young children to become proficient in reading and writing. Both the McGreevey Administration and the Department of Education recognize the abilities and dedication of teachers in classrooms - reading coaches help assist in whatever way they can.

A major factor in the design of the Early Literacy Initiative is that most of the teachers serving as reading coaches have been on leave from their home districts. The design of the program allows the department's Office of Early Literacy to achieve several goals:

- Over a four-year period, a large number of highly trained literacy content specialists with considerable skill in peer coaching will be added to the state's pool of education professionals.
- By drawing coaches from all types of districts throughout the state, not just schools which were eligible for the services of a reading coach, the department is able to extend the reach of the literacy program to more districts than would otherwise be possible.
- Having the coaches work in different schools and districts not only broadens their horizons, but also allows them to develop as professionals in ways that might be inhibited in their home schools.

In a report presented to Governor McGreevey and Commissioner Librera at the convocation, both the Reading Coaches and the schools where they worked said they wanted their efforts to continue beyond the first year. The Home District initiative announced by the Commissioner is in response to this recommendation.

The Department's Office of Early Literacy plans to maintain an on-going professional relationship with Reading Coaches. This summer, they will work with the new coaches entering the program in September. Then throughout the school year, as professional development opportunities arise, the former coaches will be invited to be involved whenever appropriate. Finally, the department will facilitate the coaches' on-going efforts to maintain a collaborative, supportive working relationship with other literacy professionals.

Reading coaches are highly trained educators with extensive experience in literacy education. The average reading coach holds a master's degree and has taught almost 10 years. Many of the coaches have had specialized training in teaching literacy skills. Many are certified as reading specialists or have been trained as Reading Recovery teachers. All have been actively involved in improving their own skills either through formal graduate-level course work or through active involvement in professional development opportunities. They are very familiar with the unique characteristics of teaching literacy skills to primary-level children.

The Reading Coach program is an example of the DOE mission statement: "The New Jersey Department of Education will provide leadership for a superior education by utilizing multiple and diverse paths to success for all children in New Jersey.

In September 2002, the Governor and Commissioner hosted an Educational Summit in Trenton, where they outlined the Administration's 21-point plan for educational reform. The 21-point plan is available on the Department of Education's Web site.

The four key components of the 21-point plan are: involving teachers at all levels of decision-making; creating a more professional environment for teachers; better preparation for teachers and administrators for the challenges they face in their classroom and in their schools and supporting them once they begin their work; and continued emphasis on recognizing and celebrating excellence.

For more information, please contact the Department of Education Public Information Office at (609) 292-1126.