



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR -- NEWS RELEASE

PO BOX 004

TRENTON, NJ 08625

CONTACT:

Jayne O'Connor
Steffanie Bell
(609) 292-5199

RELEASE:Tuesday
February 6, 2001/td>

*DiFrancesco Announces State Approval of \$2.7 Billion in School Facilities Plans
Approvals Granted for Paterson, Newark, Millville, Phillipsburg, Orange and Neptune
Celebrates Black History Month During Visit to Eastside High with Martin Luther King III*

Acting Gov. Donald T. DiFrancesco today announced that the Department of Education has approved six Abbott district's plans for school facility improvements totaling more than \$2.7 billion. DiFrancesco visited Eastside High School in Paterson today, one of the districts that received approval, for a celebration of Black History month. DiFrancesco was joined at a school assembly by Martin Luther King III. Paterson schools will receive nearly \$734 million for various school construction projects.

DiFrancesco told students that he recognizes the opportunity he has been given as Acting Governor to bring people together in search of common goals. He went on to stress the importance of helping students succeed academically.

"Last year, my fellow legislators and I worked together on school construction legislation to ensure that students have the very best environment in which to learn," DiFrancesco said. "I am pleased to announce that today the Department of Education has approved Paterson's long-range facilities plan and the plans of five other school districts. This means that these school districts will be able to start the work of improving their school buildings so they are safe, secure and sound."

"Today is just the start. I have made it a top priority to get our school construction money invested quickly, efficiently, and properly," said the Acting Gov.

's long-range facility plan addresses needs in its 32 elementary schools and 4 high schools. Eastside High is scheduled to receive an estimated \$38.5 million for projects. More than 2,100 students attend Eastside ranging from grade 9 to 12. Other districts gaining approval include: Newark, Millville, Orange, Phillipsburg and Neptune.

February is Black History Month, a month in which DiFrancesco said we "Remember and honor the history of African-Americans in New Jersey and throughout the country."

"We remember the lives of those who sought to end the horrors of slavery and the injustice of discrimination and those who led the struggle for civil rights," said DiFrancesco. "We learn from the stories of Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass, of Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr."

"New Jersey's history includes the role our state played in the Underground Railroad, which was perhaps the most dramatic protest action against slavery in American history, " DiFrancesco continued. "Our history also includes the New Jersey congressional delegation's unanimous support for the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964."

"I believe our diversity is an asset in which we must invest," DiFrancesco continued. "This means working hard to give everyone the same opportunity to realize their dreams. It means celebrating the historical, cultural, and artistic treasures we share. And it means working together to erase intolerance, which undermines our ability to thrive as a community."

In addition to the approvals announced today, the Department of Education has approved \$657 million in state funds to help finance more than 414 school construction projects in 172 non-Abbott school districts that have already been completed or under construction now. The total cost of these projects is estimated at \$1.9 billion. Under the Educational Facilities Construction and Financing Act, these projects are eligible for state funding covering at least 40 percent of eligible project costs.

Also in addition to today's approvals, Department of Education has given its approval to invest \$260 million in state funds to help finance 71 school improvement projects that are ready to proceed to construction. These projects, which total \$643 million and involve 71 non-Abbott school districts, have already won the approval of local voters in school construction referenda. Under the law, the state will pay for at least 40 percent of the eligible project costs.

In addition, over \$1 billion has been awarded before today for projects in Abbott districts.

###