



## NJDOE News

Contact: Richard Vespucci  
Janet Thompson  
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### Commissioner Announces New Efforts to Help Children With Autism

In recognition of National Autism Awareness Month, Education Commissioner Vito A. Gagliardi, Sr. today announced that the department is enhancing its efforts to assist children with this complex developmental disability.

The new initiatives the department is taking to improve educational opportunities for children with autism include:

- Forming a special Committee on Autism, as part of the State Special Education Advisory Council, to explore ways to improve educational services for autistic children.
- Working with professionals who provide services to autistic children in order to increase the capacity of schools to provide one-on-one services.
- Conducting a study into the need for certifying or testing professionals who provide Applied Behavior Analysis or Discrete Trial services to children.

In addition, Dr. Gagliardi announced that First Lady Diane DiFrancesco and his wife, Marie Gagliardi, will be visiting schools throughout the state that have special programs to educate autistic children.

"An increasing number of New Jersey children are being diagnosed with autism. These special children deserve our special attention," said Acting Governor Donald T. DiFrancesco. "We are committed to providing autistic children with the best possible education in the least restrictive setting."

"Over the past six years, the number of school-age children who have been classified as autistic has almost tripled to 2,940 students," Dr. Gagliardi said. "The department is responding to that challenge. We are committed to working with parents and professionals to help identify children with autism at an early age so that they can begin receiving special education services. Early identification and intervention can be pivotal in helping children with autism reach their full potential."

"Autism poses special challenges for educators and parents, as well as for the children," said State Board of Education President Maud Dahme. "The State Board of Education will be working closely with the Commissioner to promote effective new intervention strategies and services for children with autism in our public schools."

Autism is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three months of life. It is caused by a neurological disorder that affects the functioning of the brain in the areas of social interaction and communication skills. Over half a million people in the United State have autism or some form of pervasive developmental disorder.

Dr. Gagliardi said that the department and the Committee on Autism will be exploring a number of issues affecting children with autism. Specifically, they will be making recommendations on how to assist school districts in identifying effective special education programs, expanding the pool of skilled professionals available to teach autistic children, and developing regionally based programs to serve children with autism.

"The department is determined to do everything in its power to help children with autism and their parents," Gagliardi said.