

New state council for young children established

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Governor Jon S. Corzine last week signed an executive order establishing a state council for young children.

The New Jersey Council for Young Children was formed to ensure collaboration and coordination among early childhood programs in the state and to maintain compliance with federal guidelines.

Establishment of this statewide council is required under the federal Head Start statute.

"The foundation of New Jersey's future begins with early childhood education," said Corzine. "Without question, the work of the New Jersey Council for Young Children will help to ensure the educational needs of our young learners are met and exceeded by making quality early childhood programs available to all of our students."

Recently, the federal government announced the availability of federal funding for the council, allocating \$1.6 million for its activities.

In addition, the creation of the Advisory Council is necessary for New Jersey to apply for the Early Learning Challenge Fund, a pending new federal funding opportunity designed to help states better coordinate and more comprehensively implement early childhood programs.

As a separate entity "in but not of" the New Jersey Department of Education, the Advisory Council has the following key responsibilities:

- * Conducting a periodic statewide needs assessment concerning the quality and availability of early childhood education and development programs and services for children from birth to school entry
- * Identifying opportunities for, and barriers to, collaboration and coordination among federally-funded and state-funded child development, child care and early childhood education programs and services
- * Developing recommendations for increasing the overall participation of children in existing federal, state and local child care, as well as early childhood education programs, including outreach to underrepresented and special populations;
- * Assessing the capacity and effectiveness of two- and four-year public and private institutions of higher education in the state to support the development of early childhood educators
- * Recommending improvements in state early learning standards and undertaking efforts to develop high-quality comprehensive early learning standards, as appropriate.

The 25-member council will be chaired by Ellen Wolock, who holds a doctorate in education and is director of the New Jersey Department of Education's Office of Preschool Education.

A statewide strategic report is to be submitted by the council to the Governor and the state director of Head Start Collaboration addressing its assessments and recommendations.