WHEREAS, current data clearly indicates that many children throughout the State of New Jersey, from the suburbs to the cities, are not successfully reaching acceptable literacy levels by the end of third grade; and

WHEREAS, research clearly indicates that children who fail to reach literacy levels by the end of third grade will have greater difficulty learning in the years that follow and that few of them will ever reach their full potential as a result; and

WHEREAS, the State of New Jersey has a compelling interest to take the necessary steps to ensure that every third grader in New Jersey can read at or above grade level; and

WHEREAS, although the State of New Jersey adopted Language Arts core curriculum content standards in 1996, the state failed to include any literacy standards prior to grade four; and

WHEREAS, teachers and parents throughout this State need guidance as to the expectations for early literacy so that such expectations can be achieved; and

WHEREAS, the State of New Jersey has a compelling interest to provide such expectations through a series of early literacy frameworks and standards for teachers of preschool, kindergarten and first grade children and literacy standards for second and third grade students; and

WHEREAS, the State of New Jersey recognizes that literacy efforts must include a broad base of support particularly from parents and the community; and

WHEREAS, the State of New Jersey has a compelling interest to engage the talent and expertise of literacy experts throughout the state to help achieve these goals; and

WHEREAS, the federal government, under the recently enacted Elementary and Secondary Education Act, requires states to address the issue of early literacy; and

WHEREAS, the State of New Jersey has a compelling interest to begin work immediately on achieving the federal standards for literacy and to prepare its children for success in the 21st century.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, JAMES E. MCGREEVEY, Governor of the State of New Jersey, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and by the Statutes of this State, do hereby ORDER and DIRECT:

1. The Commissioner of Education shall develop:
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2. The Commissioner of Education shall form an Early Literacy Task Force to be led by Dr. Dorothy Strickland of the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, and Robert Copeland, Superintendent of the Piscataway School District.

3. The Early Literacy Task Force shall be charged with the following:

   a. Identify research-based programs, practices, methods and approaches that can be incorporated into a statewide plan to improve early literacy by June 30, 2002.
   b. Recommend ways to improve teacher professional development in the teaching of reading including implementation of reading coaches in elementary schools by June 30, 2002.

4. The Governor's Conference on Literacy shall be held on May 3, 2002, at which time representatives from every school district in the State will be invited to learn about the State's plans to improve early literacy, as well as the federal government requirements related to these efforts.

5. Dr. Dorothy Strickland shall work with the New Jersey Department of Education to facilitate efforts to meet the literacy requirements delineated in the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

6. This Order shall take effect immediately.

   GIVEN, under my hand and seal this 25th day of February In the Year of our Lord Two Thousand and Two, and the Independence of the United States, the Two Hundred and Twenty-Sixth.

   /s/ James E. McGreevey