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New School Demonstration Project Breaks Ground in Camden

Will Anchor Revitalization Efforts in East Camden Neighborhood

(CAMDEN) – Acting Governor Richard J. Codey today joined with school officials and community leaders for a groundbreaking ceremony marking the start of construction on the new Octavius V. Catto Community School and the Boys & Girls Club of Camden County – key components of a state demonstration project designed to anchor revitalization efforts in the city’s east Camden neighborhood. The Catto School is one of six state-approved demonstration projects where schools are designed to act as catalysts for community development to attract new housing and retail opportunities.

“Today we are not only renovating a school, we are building upon Camden’s revitalization,” said Codey. “This school will be another symbol of progress and pride for the city. Education is the cornerstone of New Jersey’s economic future. And we are committed to providing safe, modern classrooms and improved facilities that will enhance student performance. So when our kids enter the global marketplace they will have the skills they need to compete and succeed.”

Camden’s demonstration project includes the new 122,000-square-foot Catto School, which will provide state-of-the-art educational opportunities for 540 pre-Kindergarten through 6th grade students. The new school will replace the antiquated Catto School. Along with traditional classrooms, the new Catto School will include common areas such as a library/media center, auditorium and gymnasium.

The nonprofit Boys & Girls Club of Camden County will finance and operate a facility attached to the school with a 7,000-square-foot swimming pool and community meeting rooms. Catto students can use the gym, auditorium and pool during school hours. Use of these common areas will be available to club members, as well as area residents, during non-school hours. The project also will include community-accessible athletic fields and a 12-acre park.

Codey joined with state Senator Wayne R. Bryant, Assemblywoman Nilsa Cruz-Perez, Caren S. Franzini, Chief Executive Officer of the NJ Economic Development Authority, Camden Mayor Gwendolyn Faison, Camden School Superintendent Annette Knox, other

state and local officials, teachers and students for a brief ceremony at Woodrow Wilson High School before participating in the groundbreaking at Dudley Grange Park near the old Catto School.

“This is a great example of government working together for the best interests of our children,” said Assemblywoman Nilsa Cruz-Perez. “This project blends core educational values with community pride and will help secure a better future, both for the children of Camden and for the city as a whole.”

“This demonstration project represents how we, the residents of the City of Camden, perceive ourselves, a citizenry with a future, people with a vision, a City that is part of the 21st century,” said Mayor Faison. “The City of Camden is a place where families want to live and have their children educated.”

The state is funding the \$72 million school component of the project. The state Economic Recovery Board (ERB), which provides a redevelopment strategy to help Camden achieve economic growth and self-sufficiency, is also providing a \$1 million grant to assist the Boys & Girls Club in constructing a clubhouse as part of the project.

“Today's groundbreaking is the result of several outstanding partnerships, including local and state government, the educational community, as well as the not-for-profit sector,” said Caren Franzini. “It is a symbol of the great things that can happen for a community when we work together to leverage our resources.”

“The new Catto School is a state-of-the-art facility in which our innovative ideas can flourish and our children can succeed without limitation,” said Superintendent Knox. “It is also a school that is a destination, bringing together the three basic elements of a quality education - the students, the community, and the parents - all under one roof.”

“By linking two major existing community assets - Baldwin's Run and Dudley Grange Park - the Catto Community School and Boys and Girls Club will serve as enhancements to this thriving neighborhood and to the city as a whole,” said Arijit De, Executive Director of the Camden Redevelopment Agency.

“Today we celebrate a great partnership, which combines the strength and expertise of our schools and the Boys & Girls Club of Camden County to create hope and opportunity for the children of Camden,” said Melvin R. Primas, Jr., President, Board of Trustees, Boys & Girls Club of Camden County. “As our club expands to provide young people with the resources they need to succeed, we are proud to work hand-in-hand with the Camden Board of Education, the City of Camden and the State of New Jersey to bring about change.”

This is New Jersey's fourth demonstration project to begin since May. Four are under way in Camden, Vineland, Union City and East Orange, with two others scheduled for Trenton and New Brunswick.