



NJDOE News

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Department of Education Receives Thirteen School Choice Applications

Commissioner of Education David Hespe today announced that the Department of Education has received applications from 13 school districts in 11 counties for a total of about 1700 available seats for students interested in participating in the state's school choice program in the 2000-2001 school year. New Jersey's school choice program was enacted by the State Board of Education in September, and the department will complete the approval process by November 29, 1999.

"I believe that parents should have the option of choosing the most appropriate educational program for their children," said Commissioner of Education David Hespe. "Before the enactment of our pilot program, only parents who could afford tuition to send students out of their own district had school choice. This program gives parents statewide important new educational options for their children.

"I would like to commend the school districts that have submitted applications. They are obviously proud of their educational programs and wish to make them available to students from other districts.

"Given the tight timeframes in this first year of the program I am pleased by the initial response from school districts. This pilot program will allow us to test the concept of choice so that we can evaluate the program to determine whether it should be expanded or modified."

Under the regulations adopted by the State Board, a maximum of 21 school choice districts will be phased in over a three-year period--no more than 10 the first year, no more than 15 the second year and no more than 21 in the third through fifth year. There will be no more than one choice district per county. Sending districts that choose to limit the number of children who can participate from their district must pass a resolution. Such a resolution may limit participation to 7 percent or greater of its total enrollment and/or 2 percent or greater of its enrollment per grade per year.

Governor Whitman has committed \$6 million to this program in its first year to provide aid to choice districts and to ease the impact on sending districts. Participating choice districts also will receive transportation aid for students participating in the program. The regulations require the commissioning of an independent study of the first two years of the school choice program and the submission of an annual review to the State Board and the Legislature.