



NJDOE News

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Commissioner of Education Approves [10 Districts](#) for Participation in the School Choice Pilot Program

Commissioner of Education David Hespe has approved [10 choice districts](#) for the 2000-2001 school year. New Jersey's interdistrict school choice program was enacted by the State Board of Education in September and applications were filed with the department a month later. Applications from 12 school districts were filed with the Department of Education last month and rigorously reviewed by department staff.

"School choice can open up a new world of options for parents and children," said Governor Whitman. "Parents who take advantage of those pilot projects will no longer be limited by the boundaries of the school district in which they happen to live. Parents will be able to select an educational setting that they believe is best suited to their child's interests, abilities and needs."

"This is an exciting and innovative initiative of the Whitman administration," said Commissioner of Education David Hespe. "It is our belief that parents should be able to choose the most appropriate educational program for their children. Our charter schools program, with 47 schools now in operation and another 45 applications pending, is already a success. The school choice program will give parents increased educational options for their children."

"I am extremely pleased that we will have 10 districts participating in the first year of the school choice pilot program," said Hespe. "This is the maximum number of districts allowed in the first year under the school choice regulations. We believe we have a good range of district types, sizes and programs that will enable us to begin the testing of the concept of school choice in this pilot project."

The school choice program is a five-year pilot project designed to test the concept of school choice in New Jersey. Under the regulations adopted by the State Board of Education, a maximum of 21 school choice districts will be phased in over a three-year period--no more than 10 the first year, an additional 5 in the second year and an additional 6 in the third through the fifth year. There will be no more than one choice district per county. By January 1, 2003, the Commissioner must submit to the State Board and the Legislature an evaluation of the school choice program based on an independent study and the annual reports from the choice districts. The evaluation will include the Commissioner's recommendations for expansion and/or modification of the program.

"I would like to commend all of the districts that submitted applications to us," said Hespe. "The 10 districts we selected for participation will now make their innovative educational programs available to out-of-district as well as resident students."

Among these offerings are specialized agricultural programs in the Cumberland County Regional and Upper Freehold Regional school districts. Salem City High School will offer career pathways programs in digital communications, international affairs, health, recreation and exercise science, performance dance, nuclear engineering and agriculture science. Englewood will offer "schools within a school" including a School of Communication, a School of Fine and Performing Arts, a School of Applied Sciences, and a School of International Studies and Business.

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. Choice districts also will receive all categorical aid including transportation aid for students participating in the program.

In addition, the Governor is providing a total of \$60,000 immediately to the choice districts to conduct public outreach and information campaigns.