



NJDOE News

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504 Students Transferred From Schools In Need of Improvement This Year

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TRENTON -- During the first year of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, 504 students have transferred to another school within their districts under the federal law's school choice provision, according to a survey by the Department of Education of the 71 school districts in New Jersey that contain the 270 schools determined to be in need of improvement.

The 504 students who transferred during the current school year represent 60 percent of the 835 transfer requests received by 21 school districts as of September 30, 2002. These 21 school districts that received transfer requests represent 30 percent of the 71 districts with schools in need of improvement.

The department conducted the survey to determine the progress that districts have made in meeting two new key federal mandates: 1) the provision of intra-district public school choice for parents of students attending persistently failing schools, and (2) the provision of supplemental services to Title 1 students to assist them in achieving academic success.

"The survey demonstrates our ongoing commitment to implement the federal No Child Left Behind Act in New Jersey," said Commissioner of Education William L. Librera. "The ability of students to transfer to another school within their school district is consistent with our position in support of public school choice."

Dr. Librera said that while he was pleased that parents of children were given school choice and were able to exercise that choice, "We remain vigilant about improving all schools in New Jersey."

According to the survey, statewide, there appears to be a focus on moving students out of lower performing schools at the earliest grade levels. The majority of the transfers requested were for elementary school students, representing 70 percent of the total requests.

Overall, 835 transfer requests were received by 21 school districts as of September 30, 2002, representing 30 percent of the total number of districts with schools in need of improvement:

- o 585 for elementary schools
- o 72 for middle schools
- o 178 for high schools

Because the large number of requests for transfers were from elementary schools, requests granted for elementary schools were proportionately lower than for middle or high schools:

- o 47 percent of transfer requests granted for elementary schools
- o 75 percent of transfer requests granted for middle schools
- o 99 percent of transfer requests granted for high schools.

According to the survey, "This might be indicative of a lack of capacity to accommodate transfer requests at the elementary level, or it might indicate that parents are seeking to give their young children the best start in their education, and that they are seeking to ensure their older children have an appropriate education in high school to secure college acceptance, or simply to graduate.

"In either case, the clear focus is on the youngest and the oldest children in the system of public education with regard to school transfer," the survey found.

The survey results also indicate a proactive approach by school districts and schools to address school choice issues. Forty-seven districts, or 66 percent of the total number of number of districts in the state with schools in

need of improvement, indicated that they are undertaking activities to identify school capacity. This appears to indicate a clear recognition of the new federal mandate under NCLB for intra-district public school choice for students attending persistently failing schools.

However, despite efforts by these districts to address this mandate and identify capacity, a significant number of school districts indicated that they had "zero" capacity in their schools:

- o 33 districts indicated no capacity within elementary schools
- o 34 indicated no capacity within middle schools
- o 30 districts indicated no capacity within high schools

"In light of the fact that the final Title I regulations recently released by the United States Department of Education state that lack of capacity will not relieve a district of the responsibility to provide for intra-district public school choice for students attending persistently failing schools, additional effort to identify capacity at all grade levels and in all districts will be essential," the survey said.

The survey also found that many schools in need of improvement are offering a wide range of supplemental services in advance of the NCLB mandate, which takes effect in the 2003-04 school year for schools in need of improvement for the second year. This appears to indicate that districts are attempting to ensure that the most appropriate services are employed to best meet the needs of the students and that they are being proactive in identifying and providing these types of services.

"Consistent with the findings for transfer requests, there appears to be a greater focus on obtaining additional services for students at the earliest grade levels," the survey said. "The lack of requests for supplemental services for high school students might indicate a parental preference for student transfer at the upper grade levels. This might also indicate a belief by parents that transferring to a higher performing school offers the older student the greatest opportunity for more immediate academic success."

There were 1,003 requests for supplemental services from among the 71 districts with schools in need of improvement: 812 requests, or 81 percent of the total, were made for elementary school students, and 191 requests, or 19 percent, were made for middle school students; no requests were made for high school students.

Currently, a wide range of providers are being used by districts with schools in need of improvement to offer supplemental services to Title I students. These include use of over 70 providers whose services are:

- o internal LEA staff
- o private educational design and testing services
- o volunteers; whole school reform model developers
- o a variety of non-profit educational related organizations
- o county-based associations
- o individual private consultants
- o State assigned reading coaches and volunteers

Similarly, the range of services is broad, allowing for maximum effectiveness with the children receiving assistance. Supplemental services currently being provided include, but are not limited to:

- o before and after school programs;
- o lunch time programs;
- o one-on-one tutoring;
- o teacher workshops;
- o software programs;
- o resource room and homework assistance;
- o social services and guidance counseling, and
- o Summer school programs.

The majority of districts currently implementing supplemental services appear to use a variety of methods in combination, which appears to indicate that LEAs are attempting to ensure that the most appropriate services are employed to best meet the needs of the students.