



NJDOE News

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Commissioner Names Lower Township School District as New School Choice Participant

Commissioner of Education William L. Librera today announced that the Lower Township School District in Cape May County has been selected to participate in the Interdistrict Public School Choice program, and will be accepting applications for the 2005-06 school year. By participating in the program, Lower Township expects to offer smaller class sizes and increase the diversity of its enrollment.

Lower Township students have demonstrated levels of performance on statewide tests that equal or exceed the results of districts statewide. For example, in 2003, results of the NJ ASK4 exam showed that 86 percent of general education students performed in the advanced proficient and proficient categories on the language arts test, and 81 percent on the mathematics test, as compared with 86 percent and 75 percent, respectively, for general education students statewide.

Small class sizes in Lower Township will become even smaller as a result of increased sections in each grade to accommodate new students who will come from neighboring communities. The district anticipates drawing students from three districts: Woodbine, Wildwood and Middle Township, all of which have substantial African American and Hispanic populations. The district has been seeking ways to increase the diversity of its student enrollment, which is currently 93 percent white.

A small pilot program entering its fourth year, the school choice program provides students with the option of attending a public school outside their districts of residence without cost to their parents. The program is consistently benefiting students, schools and communities where it has been implemented, confirmed by four consecutive positive annual reports on the program.

The Legislature adopted the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program Act of 1999 as a pilot program to see how effective public school choice can be in enhancing the educational experiences of students. The pilot was launched by 10 school districts in 2000-01. Fourteen districts enrolled 736 choice students in 2003-04, up from 461 students participating in 2002-03. The pilot program will expire in June 2005, pending reauthorization from the Legislature.

"Since its inception, this rather small pilot program has demonstrated its value to students and school communities in a variety of ways," said Commissioner of Education William L. Librera. "It has delivered positive results in many areas, ranging from better use of classroom space to enhanced learning opportunities, with many points in between.

"These successes continue to impress us, and at this point we have every reason to believe that the program can be expanded," the Commissioner said.

School districts participating in the school choice program report that participation has helped them to improve or increase program offerings, reduce class size, lower property taxes, hire teachers and purchase technology equipment.

In its first year, the program enrolled 96 students. For the 2004-05 school year, an additional 445 seats will be available in current choice districts, for a total of 1,181 seats - over 12 times the number of seats in the inaugural year of the program.