



NJDOE News

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2005 NCLB-Required Unsafe School Choice Option Policy Announcement

Four New Jersey schools are developing plans to create safer learning environments as the result of the 2005 analysis of violent incidents reported by the schools, under the criteria set in the state's Unsafe School Option Policy (USCO).

Under the federal *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*, each state is required to annually identify schools that meet its policy definition of "persistently dangerous." Parents of the children attending these schools must be offered an in-district school choice option.

Based on a review of data regarding incidents of violence as reported by schools in the 2001-02, 2002-03 and 2003-04 school years, eight of the ten schools that had met the definition of "persistently dangerous" in 2004 have been removed from the list in accordance with the USCO policy.

They are: Atlantic City High School; Bonsall Elementary School, East Camden Middle School, Camden High School and South Camden Alternative School in Camden; Patrick F. Healy Middle School in East Orange; Samuel L. Berliner School in Newark; and Lincoln High School in Jersey City.

Two schools that had been identified in 2004 remain on the list: Grace A. Dunn Middle School in Trenton and D'Ippolito Intermediate School in Vineland. Two schools added to the list for the first time in 2005 are Trenton Central High School and the Martin Luther King Middle School, both in Trenton.

Parents of all students in the four schools must be informed of the designation by mid-August and offered the option to transfer their children to another school within the district. All student transfer requests must be completed by September 6.

Officials in the two affected school districts must develop and submit to DOE a corrective action plan for its school or schools meeting the criteria, describing methods to be used to reduce the number of violent incidents. The New Jersey Department of Education will provide guidance and support to the districts for the implementation of these plans.

Since New Jersey's USCO policy was first implemented in 2003, department and staff have refined the definitions of various offenses reported by the schools through the Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System (EVVRS) and have conducted statewide training to provide local school staff with opportunities to learn up-to-date information about the types of data to be reported.

New Jersey's USCO policy is available at the following link:

<http://www.nj.gov/njded/grants/nclb/policy/unsafe.htm>.

New Jersey has collected data and issued annual reports about the safety of its schools since the 1970s, more than 25 years prior to the passage of *NCLB*. The state has used the results of the annual report, *Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse in the Public Schools*, to help develop programs aimed at creating a safe environment for students and school staffs. Last year's report contains descriptions of approximately three dozen programs New Jersey has initiated to promote safe schools.

The most recent report was released in April and can be accessed on DOE's Web-site through the following link:

<http://www.state.nj.us/njded/schools/vandv>

Note: New Jersey was one of three states in 2004 to identify schools through the USCO required by NCLB. The other states were Pennsylvania and South Dakota.