



NJDOE News

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Department of Education Accepting Applications for Interdistrict Public School Choice Program

The New Jersey Department of Education is seeking applicants from seven New Jersey counties to participate in the state's Interdistrict Public School Choice Program.

School districts in the following counties may apply: Cape May, Essex, Mercer, Middlesex, Passaic, Somerset and Sussex. Interdistrict public school choice is a program in which students who attend public school in their district of residence may attend public school in another school district at no charge. The five-year pilot program, created by law in 2000, is scheduled to expire at the end of the 2004-05 school year.

"Since its inception, the public school choice pilot program has attracted an increasing amount of interest," Commissioner William L. Librera said. "To date, we have been able to report many positive experiences for schools, students, and their families. Since Governor McGreevey and I are committed to finding diverse and multiple paths for students to succeed, we are very interested in following the progress of this test of the school choice concept.

"We believe that it is very important for students and their families to have flexibility in determining where children can go to school," said Dr. Librera. "Upon completion of the pilot, we will evaluate the experience and make recommendations to the Legislature in January 2005, based on the evaluation. To date, we have been able to report many positive experiences for schools, students and their families as a result of this program."

The Commissioner also noted that the choice program also meets the spirit of a portion of the federal No Child Left Behind Act in which educators are encouraged to create public school options, for students and their families, that go beyond attending traditional neighborhood schools.

The Interdistrict Public School Choice Program began in the fall of 2000 with 96 students attending school in 10 host districts. For 2003-04, 760 students from 101 school districts are expected to attend school in 14 host districts:

The current host districts are:

- Atlantic County: Folsom
- Bergen County: Englewood
- Burlington County: Washington Township
- Camden County: Brooklawn
- Cumberland County: Cumberland Regional
- Gloucester County: South Harrison
- Hudson County: Hoboken
- Hunterdon County: Bloomsbury
- Monmouth County: Upper Freehold Regional
- Morris County: Mine Hill
- Ocean County: Stafford
- Salem County: Salem City
- Union County: Kenilworth
- Warren County: Belvidere

The host districts have reported benefits from participating in the program ranging from smaller class sizes and expanded course offerings, to an increase in the diversity of student population and a greater investment in technology to support the curriculum.

A school district is eligible to participate in the program as a choice district if it has classroom space available,

submits a completed application in a timely manner, and receives department approval to participate. Generally, the districts that apply to become choice districts include those experiencing declining enrollment, a need to decrease class size, a need to implement innovative programs, a need to increase the financial resources available to the district, and/or a need to diversify the student population.

The application deadline is May 30, 2003. The Commissioner will make his determinations by July 30. Any new host district selected in this round would begin enrolling students in the fall of 2004.

For more information about the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program, visit the Department of Education's Web site:

www.nj.gov/njded/choice/