



Did You Know...?

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What *No Child Left Behind* Says About Public School Choice

One of the big changes that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) provides for families is called Public School Choice. Parents may take their child out of a low-performing school or an unsafe school and transfer him or her to a different school. Public School Choice applies to any school that receives Title I funds from the federal government. Ask your school principal if your child's school receives Title I funds!

Here's how school choice applies for schools in need of improvement:

1. The law says that a school is determined to be "in need of improvement" if it has failed to meet state standards for two years in a row.
 - Student achievement is measured by standardized tests. In 2003-04, NM began using Criterion Referenced Tests (CRT) based on New Mexico state content standards/benchmarks. High School students must take the NM High School Competency Exam.
 - New Mexico uses a formula to determine how the scores should be progressing. This is called "adequate yearly progress" (AYP).
 - If a school's scores are NOT high enough, then the school has failed to make adequate yearly progress. Schools who fail to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) two years in a row are "in need of improvement."
2. Districts must notify all parents if their school is "in need of improvement". The information should be in a language that the parents understand.
3. School Choice applies to parents of *all* children, including children with disabilities, attending schools "in need of improvement".
4. The district must provide the choice of at least 2 schools which have met the state goals for achievement. Parents can select one of those schools for their child to attend and the district will pay for transportation to the new school.
5. NCLB says that if there are no other schools in the district that can accept your child, then the district has to try to make cooperating agreements with nearby districts that do have eligible schools. Even if there are no schools close enough, your school must notify you if it is on New Mexico's list of schools in need of improvement
6. School choice is available on the first day of the next school year after a school is determined to be "in need of improvement". Parents must be informed of choice options before the beginning of that school year.



Here are the answers to questions parents ask about school choice:

- 1. If I decide to move my child into another school, how long can she stay in that new school?** Your child can stay in the new school as long as you choose through the highest grade offered in that school. The district will pay for transportation as long as your child's original school remains in improvement status. If the original school makes adequate yearly progress, the district won't provide free transportation to the new school, but your child can still stay in that school. You will then be responsible for transportation to that school.
- 2. What if my child's school is the only one in our district, or the next nearest school is too far away?** The law says that if there are no other schools in the district that can accept your child, then the district has to try to make cooperating agreements with nearby districts that do have eligible schools. If there are no schools nearby, your school must still notify you if it is "in need of improvement".
- 3. What information should I get from the eligible schools to help me make an informed decision?** Visit the school. Visit with other parents who have children attending the school. Ask yourself "Do I feel welcomed in this school?" Here are some questions you can ask the principal of a school that you are considering for your child:
 - How do you deal with students who are having trouble in school?
 - How do students score in reading, math and other subjects?
 - How has achievement changed in this school over the last few years?
 - Tell me about your school's reading and math programs
 - What percentage of your teachers is highly qualified? Ask to see their qualifications.
 - How will you help my child prepare for college?

The Right Question

We need good information to make informed decisions that will help our child succeed. The best way to get information is to ask questions and listen to the answers. Asking "the right question" will help get specific information and may help to open discussions about possibilities.

Closed-Ended Questions get a yes or no answer. (Does this school have monthly meetings for parents?)

Open-Ended Questions create discussions. (How does our reading program help struggling readers?)

For more information, please see **Did You Know #17** (*Demystifying School Choice*).

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