

Fact Sheet #13

School Choice

What does NCLB say?

Parents have the right to change schools if their child's school has not met goals for two consecutive years and has been identified as in need of improvement. (See Fact Sheet on "Schools In Need of Improvement.") Federal funds are provided to cover the costs of these transfers. No state or local education funds are used.

Parental choice means:

- Parents have the right to transfer to a higher performing school in the same school district. As long as the original school remains in need of improvement, the school district must provide transportation to the new school.
- If student achievement improves at the sending school and the school is no longer in need of improvement, the family has the right to keep their child in the new school, but the school no longer has to provide transportation.
- When adequate spaces aren't available, priority must be given to the lowest achieving children in low-income families. School districts are encouraged to make arrangements to allow students to transfer to neighboring districts.

- If transfer options aren't available to accommodate all transfer requests, the school district should offer supplemental services to children from low-income families in the first year of school improvement. (Usually supplemental services aren't available until the second year of school improvement. See Fact Sheet on "Supplemental Services.")

Why is this important?

All parents want their children to go to successful schools and to get a high quality education. In the past, parents often felt that their children were stuck in unsuccessful schools, and they had no choice but to stay. No Child Left Behind tries to make sure that families have choices when their neighborhood school is not successfully educating their children.

What can I do?

Be aware of your rights under the law and make careful decisions about what is best for your child. If you learn that your child's school has been identified as "in need of improvement," you should find out why, what the school is doing to address its problems, and what choices you have. Here are some things to look for when you

think about choosing a new school for your child:

- Does the school have a record of success with all its students, or only some groups?
- What are the achievement levels at the new school? How do different groups of students do on the tests? For example, look to see if certain ethnic groups do much better on the tests than others. A good school should have narrow if any gaps.
- Visit the school. Talk to school officials, teachers, and students if possible. Talk to parents of children at that school.
- What is the atmosphere like in the school? Were you welcomed?

Remember that even if you have the right to move your child to a new school, the decision is still yours. Just because a school is in need of improvement does not mean that it is not good for your child.

You should find out as much as you can about your rights and about the choices available to you. Get as much information as you can; think about the possible benefits and the possible difficulties. And finally, you should make the decision that seems best for the needs of your child.