



## NJDOE News

**For More Information Contact the Public Information Office:**  
**Richard Vespucci**  
**Jon Zlock**  
**609-292-1126**

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### **ANNUAL REPORT RELEASED** **Continued Benefits Reported for Participants in** **the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program**

Students and the communities that host them continue to benefit from participation in New Jersey's Interdistrict Public School Choice Program. The State Board of Education today reviewed the third annual report of the program, which creates a way for students and their families to attend public school free of charge in a community other than the one in which they live.

"By all accounts, this small pilot program has had an overall positive impact on all participants," said Commissioner of Education William Librera. "Choice districts, choice students and their parents have benefited from the program in many ways. Along with charter schools and the public school choice options now made available to students of low-performing or persistently dangerous schools, the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program has again demonstrated that it is a valuable component in our efforts to foster multiple and diverse paths to student success."

The latest annual report covers the 2002-03 school year, which just concluded. Thirteen choice districts enrolled 461 choice students in 2002-03, up from 291 students participating in 2001-02. In 2003-04, 14 choice districts are expected to enroll 736 students. Later this month, Commissioner Librera will announce whether any of the districts in the latest round of applicants will be selected to participate in the fifth year of the program, 2004-05. Fewer than 100 students participated in the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program in

2000-01, its inaugural year.

Benefits realized by participation in the program include smaller class size, establishment of innovative programs, expansion of classes in art, music, literature and technology, longer school days and school years, and the enrichment of the school community through the addition of students of different backgrounds and experiences. It has also helped alleviate overcrowding in some districts by having students attend school in districts that are under-enrolled.

Details on benefits realized by specific choice districts are in the annual report.

The Legislature established the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program as a five-year pilot program. It was intended to be small, with no more than one host district permitted in each county.

All districts selected to enroll students from other communities receive a special type of state aid called school choice aid as compensation for taking on additional students.

The school choice program will expire in June 2005 unless reauthorized by the Legislature. The Department of Education is prepared to discuss the program's successes during the reauthorization process. The report discussed today presents recommendations from last year's report that support continuation of the program.