



NCLB Fact Sheet #2

School Choice in Maine

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires schools to test all students in grades 3-8 and again in grade 11. In Maine, these tests are called the Maine Educational Assessment, or MEA. The State Department of Education uses MEA test scores to determine how well a school is meeting the State requirements for student achievement. If a school does not have the required number of students with passing MEA scores for two consecutive years, the school is then labeled a Continuous Improvement Priority School (CIPS1), and NCLB requires that the school district offer parents some educational options.

The first option that becomes available to families whose children attend a CIP school is known as School Choice. School Choice becomes available to all students in the school during the first year of CIP status (CIPS1). Under the School Choice option, parents may choose to send their child to another school in the district that is not a CIP school. Schools are required to notify parents immediately of CIP status and of their option to send their child to another school. If parents choose to send their child to a different school, the sending school must provide transportation at no cost to families. While this option for choice is available to all students, those who receive free or reduced lunch and are academically low performing are given priority. In addition, transportation funding caps may limit the number of children who are able to take advantage of School Choice.

In Maine, the School Choice option looks different than it does in urban areas like Chicago or New York. Many districts in Maine do not have more than one elementary or middle school, and only one city in the State has more than one high school. If there are no schools to which students can transfer because the rural nature of the district prevents choice, NCLB requires that districts work with other districts in the area, to the extent practicable, to establish a cooperative agreement that would allow inter-district choice.

Receiving schools within the same district as the CIP school cannot deny the School Choice option because of space, materials, or staff constraints. In districts where more than one school is an option for choice, the parents are given the final decision for placement.

Parents whose children receive special education services may also decide to transfer their child under the School Choice option, as long as the receiving school is able to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for their child. When students with disabilities transfer using the School Choice option, the receiving school will use their current IEP, or a new one may be developed.

For more information on this and other educational topics, contact Maine State PIRC.



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