

# No Child Left Behind

## Tip Sheet: Public School Choice

*No Child Left Behind is the education plan that was signed into law by President Bush in January of 2002. It's designed to improve student achievement and help schools do a better job of teaching. The law includes a number of important opportunities for parents to be involved with the schools. These Tip Sheets from The Mississippi Forum on Children and Families are designed to help parents understand their rights under the law.*

One of the big changes that No Child Left Behind provides for you as a parent is called Public School Choice. This is the right to take your child out of a low-performing school or an unsafe school, and transfer him into a better school. This is true in any school that receives Title I funds from the federal government. A school can receive Title I funds if a certain percentage of its students are eligible to receive a free or reduced-price lunch. Ask your principal if your school receives Title I funds. Here's how school choice works for schools in need of improvement.

- 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.
  - In Mississippi that's determined primarily by Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) and Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program (SATP) scores.
  - There's a formula that the state uses to determine how the scores should be progressing. This is called "adequate yearly progress."
  - If a school's scores are NOT high enough, then the school has failed to make adequate yearly progress. If this happens for two years in a row the school is said to be "In Need of Improvement."
  
- Districts are required by law to notify parents if their school is In Need of Improvement. They can do this through the mail or using email. In addition, the listing of schools In Need of Improvement, should be widely disseminated through such means as:
  - Newsletters
  - Posters
  - Web sites
  - All information must be in a language that parents can understand
  
- Public school choice is available to all children in Title I schools In Need of Improvement, and must be offered to parents beginning in the first school year after a school has been determined to be in need of improvement.
  
- 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

Here are the answers to some frequently asked questions about choice:

***When should my school notify me about school choice?***

Since school choice becomes available on the first day of the school year following the determination that a school is in need of improvement, you must be notified well before the beginning of the school year in which choice will be offered. For example, if your school is determined in the spring of 2003 to be in need of improvement, then you should be notified of your choice options well before the first day of school in the fall of 2003.

***How will I know which schools I can transfer my child into?***

When your child's school district tells you that your child is eligible for school choice because his school is in need of improvement, they must tell you what schools are available to you to select for your child, and tell you about the quality of those schools.

***If I decide to move my child into another school, how long can she stay in that new school?***

The law says that your child can stay in the new school as long as you want her to, right up through the highest grade offered in that school. The district will pay for her transportation as long as her original school remains in improvement status. If the original school begins to make adequate yearly progress and is no longer considered a low-performing school, the district won't provide free transportation any more to the new school, but your child can still stay in that school. You will then be responsible for getting your child back and forth to that school.

***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. Even if there are no schools close enough to permit choice, your school must notify you if it is on Mississippi's list of schools in need of improvement.

***What information should I get from the eligible schools to help me decide which school to choose for my child?***

Here are some questions you can ask the principal of a school that you are considering for your child:

1. How do you deal with students who are having trouble in school?
2. How will you help my child do better in school?
3. How well do your students do in reading, English, math and other subjects?
4. How has achievement in your school changed over the last few years?
5. How do you teach reading and mathematics?
6. What percentage of your teachers is highly qualified?
7. How will you help my child prepare for college?

***Where is the first place I go to get this information?***

You can request it from the local district's superintendent's office. If you cannot get the information you need, contact Judy Qualls at the State Department of Education at (601) 359-3515.

***Where else can I go to find out more about No Child Left Behind?***

- Mississippi State Department of Education: <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us>
- The U.S. Department of Education's No Child Left Behind web site at <http://www.nclb.gov>
- Call Mississippi Forum on Children and Families and ask for the PIRC coordinator at (601) 355-4911 or visit our web site at [www.mfcf.org](http://www.mfcf.org)