

# Title I School Choice and Supplemental Educational Services Under No Child Left Behind

## Progress Toward Implementation

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The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was passed by the U.S. Congress in 2001 with the goal of ensuring that all children in U.S. public schools are proficient in reading and math by 2014. NCLB holds schools accountable for student progress and requires that teachers meet certain qualification standards. NCLB also offers two new educational options to parents whose children attend schools that have been identified as needing improvement. These Title I<sup>1</sup> schools are identified for improvement if they have not made adequate yearly progress toward meeting state standards for two or more years. The first new option under NCLB is that parents may choose to transfer their children to another school in their district that has not been identified for improvement, with transportation provided by the district. The second option is that parents may enroll their children in free supplemental educational services, such as tutoring and summer school, that are provided in addition to instruction during the school day and year. This option is available to low-income families whose children attend Title I schools that are in Year 2 or later of identified-for-improvement status.

As part of a federally funded study of NCLB's effects, RAND Corporation researchers, in collaboration with researchers from the American Institutes for Research and the National Opinion Research Center, examined the implementation across the country of the school choice and supplemental educational service components of NCLB through 2004–2005. The researchers drew on findings from two federally funded studies—the National Longitudinal Study of No

### Abstract

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) mandates options for children in low-performing schools to transfer and/or receive supplemental educational services. Researchers analyzed the implementation of these options and found that most districts sought to offer both options. Nevertheless, student participation rates were very low, due perhaps to communication glitches with parents and the fact that in some districts—such as those with only one high school or middle school—there were no schools to which students could transfer.

Child Left Behind (NLS-NCLB) and the Study of State Implementation of Accountability and Teacher Quality Under No Child Left Behind (SSI-NCLB).

In 2004–2005, nearly 6.2 million students were eligible for Title I school choice, and as many as 1.8 million were eligible for Title I supplemental educational services. Nonetheless, only a small proportion of these eligible students actually participated in the options available to them. About 1 percent of eligible students participated in the school choice option, and 17 percent participated in the supplemental educational services option. Communication problems, such as parents receiving notification too late or being unaware of the new options, as well as limited availability of transfer schools, may have contributed to this low participation.

### Notification of Parents Occurred Too Late for Timely Action

Less than one-third of districts required to offer Title I school choice notified parents of eligible

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<sup>1</sup> Title I schools are funded under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), the largest federal program supporting elementary and secondary education. NCLB is the most recent reauthorization of ESEA.

students about the transfer option before the beginning of the school year. One reason for the late notice may be that many states released the lists of “identified for improvement” schools in late summer or fall, making it difficult for schools to communicate with parents in time for them to exercise NCLB’s transfer option before the first day of school. Where parents were notified earlier, student participation rates were higher.

### Many Parents Were Unaware of or Did Not Fully Understand the New Options

Most districts required to offer Title I school choice and supplemental educational services reported that they notified parents of the options available to their children. However, more than 70 percent of parents of eligible students in a sample of eight urban districts said they had not been notified of the school choice option—despite the fact that all eight districts offered the option and produced notification letters. Similarly, more than half of parents of students eligible for supplemental educational services said that they had not been notified.

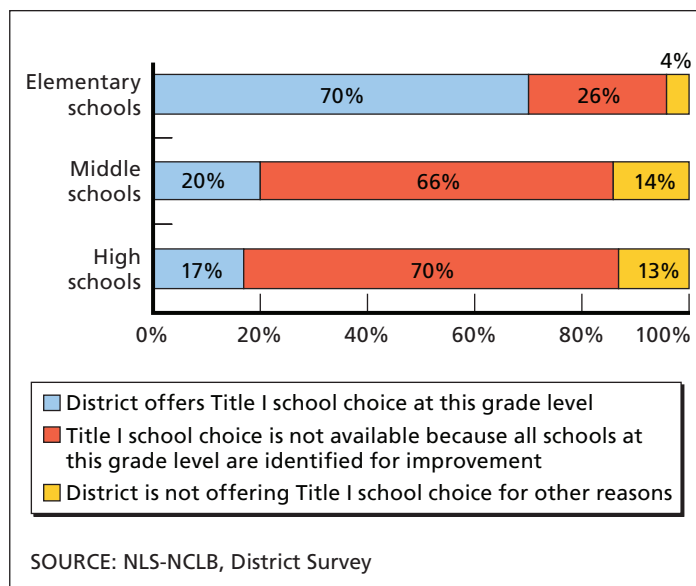
Although some of the district notification letters were clear and informative about available options, many did not contain all the information required by NCLB and lacked adequate information to make an informed decision.

The providers of the supplemental services varied widely in their communication with parents and school staff. Most providers reported that they communicated with the regular classroom teacher of their students, but one in five never did so.

### Limited Availability of the Two Educational Options Hindered Participation at the Secondary Level

Districts were more likely to provide the school choice option at the elementary school level than at the middle and high school levels. At the elementary level, 70 percent of districts with one or more elementary schools identified for improvement reported offering parents the option to transfer their children to another school (see the top bar in the figure). By contrast, approximately two-thirds of districts with middle or high schools identified for improvement were not offering school choice at those grade levels because all the schools at that grade level were identified for improvement (see the second and third bars in the figure); indeed, a large proportion of these districts operate only one middle school and one high school. As a consequence, the school choice option was much less frequently available in the secondary grades. At the middle school level, only 20 percent of affected districts reported offering the school choice option to parents. At the high school level, only 17 percent of districts offered school choice.

**Percentage of Districts Reporting Availability of Title I School Choice Option, by School Level, 2004–2005 (Among Districts Required to Offer Choice)**



Most districts offered the second educational option, supplemental educational services, to eligible elementary and middle school students, but only one-third of districts did so for high school students.

In 2005, there were 2,800 providers of supplemental services, a majority of which were private (nonprofit and for-profit) organizations. Private providers served the majority of students (58 percent), while schools and districts served most of the remaining students (34 percent). Participating students received an average of 57 hours of supplemental services.

Systems for monitoring providers and evaluating their effectiveness are only in their infancy. As of 2004–2005, most states were working to develop and implement standards for the monitoring and evaluation of supplemental service providers; only a few states had statewide databases incorporating participation and achievement information that would permit rigorous evaluations of the providers’ effectiveness.

### Participating Parents Wanted to Meet Their Children’s Educational Needs

Parents of eligible elementary students surveyed in a sample of eight large urban districts said that one of their main reasons for participating in either the school choice or supplemental educational services option was to better meet the educational needs of their children. Nearly half of parents said they had transferred their children at least in part because the new schools were better, and 47 percent said that previous schools did not meet their children’s needs. Simi-

larly, among parents who chose to participate in the supplemental services option, 60 percent said that one of their reasons for doing so was that their children needed extra help.

In contrast, 75 percent of parents of eligible students who chose not to transfer their children said that one reason they made that choice was that the alternative schools were located in a place that was not easy to get to; 50 percent of the parents chose not to transfer their children in part because their children wanted to stay at the original school. Parents of students eligible for supplemental educational services reported that their main reasons for nonparticipation included that the services were offered at times not good for the family (46 percent) and that their children did not need help (28 percent).

### **Looking Ahead**

The findings of this study indicate that states, districts, and providers are working to implement Title I school choice and supplemental educational services. However, with student participation still low, it is not yet clear whether they will meet the law's goal of providing a range of educational options to parents whose children attend persistently low-performing Title I schools and, ultimately, ensuring that all students are proficient in reading and math by 2014. Policy-makers' next steps may be informed by this study's key findings: Student participation was hindered by the fact that parents did not receive clear and timely communications and by the absence of available options for school choice and supplemental services. ■

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This research brief describes work done for the U.S. Department of Education and documented in *State and Local Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act: Volume IV—School Choice and Supplemental Educational Services: Interim Report*, by Brian Gill, Jennifer Sloan McCombs, Scott Naftel, Karen Ross, Mengli Song, Jennifer Harmon, Georges Vernez, Beatrice Birman, Michael Garef, and Jennifer O’Day (available at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oepd/ppss/reports.html>), 2008, 112 pp., also available as RP-1332, (<http://www.rand.org/pubs/reprints/RP1332/>). This work was performed in RAND Education, a unit of the RAND Corporation. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND’s publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. **RAND**® is a registered trademark.

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