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# No Child Left Behind Educational Options

## Availability Expands, But Participation Remains Low

**A** key goal of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is to provide new educational options to parents whose children attend Title I schools<sup>1</sup> that are identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring because the schools have not made adequate yearly progress toward meeting state standards for two or more years. The first of these options is the opportunity for parents to transfer their children to another school in the district that has not been identified for improvement. The second option gives parents the opportunity to enroll their children in supplemental educational services (SES), such as tutoring, remediation, or other academic instruction, that are offered by a state-approved provider. This option is available to low-income families whose children attend a school that is in Year 2 or later of identified-for-improvement status.

A report recently prepared for the U.S. Department of Education found that most school districts reported that they offered public school choice and SES if they were required to do so, and that the number of students participating in both options (especially SES) has increased substantially since NCLB began in 2002. However, only a small proportion of eligible students actually participated in the NCLB educational options, and a number of problems remain, including inadequate communication with parents about NCLB options and the lack of robust data systems that would enable rigorous evaluations of the effectiveness of the NCLB educational options.

As part of a federally funded study of the NCLB's options, researchers from the RAND Corporation and the American Institutes for

### Abstract

As required by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, most school districts with low-performing schools offer public school choice and supplemental educational services. However, researchers found that, although the total number of students participating in both options has increased substantially since NCLB began, only a small proportion of eligible students actually participated in the NCLB educational options, for a variety of reasons.

Research examined implementation of the school choice and SES components of NCLB, based on data collected in 2004–2005 and 2006–2007. The researchers drew on findings from two federally funded studies—the National Longitudinal Study of No Child Left Behind and the Study of State Implementation of Accountability and Teacher Quality Under No Child Left Behind. This report updates findings from the interim report, which were based on data collected in 2004–2005.

### Eligibility, Availability, and Participation

The researchers found that the number of students participating in Title I public school choice and SES increased substantially by the 2006–2007 school year: Nearly 6.9 million students were eligible for Title I public school choice, a fourfold increase since 2002–2003; and more than 3.3 million were eligible for SES, a nearly sixfold increase since 2002–2003.

However, participation rates remained consistently low, with most eligible students not participating—only 1 percent for the Title I public school choice option and 17 percent for SES. According to parents, the primary reasons for nonparticipation in public school choice were

<sup>1</sup> Title I schools are schools that operate programs 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.

satisfaction with the child's current school or inconvenient locations of alternate schools. Parents chose not to enroll children in SES because they believed that their children did not need help or because the services were provided at inconvenient times. In addition, public school choice was constrained at the middle and high school levels because more than half of the districts required to offer choice had no alternate middle or high schools to which eligible students could transfer. Similarly, SES providers were less likely to offer services to high school students than to elementary and middle school students.

In 2005–2006, as in 2004–2005, high-poverty, high-minority, and urban Title I schools were more likely to have students who were eligible for Title I public school choice and SES than were low-poverty schools outside of urban areas. Likewise, high-poverty urban schools made up a disproportionate share of those required to offer Title I public school choice and SES.

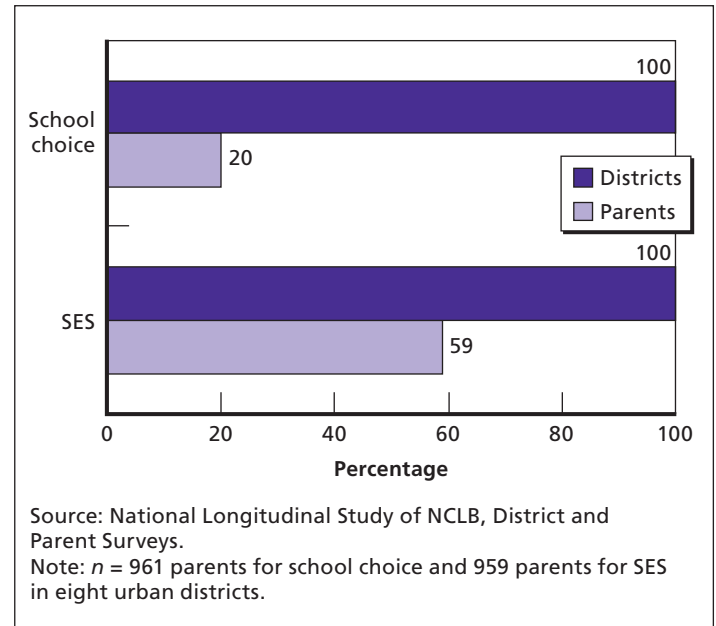
### Communication with Parents

Communication with parents about Title I public school choice and SES continued to be an issue in 2006–2007. The research team found that 95 percent of school districts required to offer Title I public school choice or SES reported that they provided written notification of these options to parents of eligible students, an increase from 64 percent in 2004–2005. However, only 43 percent of districts that were required to offer Title I public school choice notified parents before the start of the school year.

In a study of eight large, urban school districts, although all eight districts reported notifying parents about NCLB options, only 20 percent of parents of students eligible for Title I public school choice sampled in both 2004–2005 and 2006–2007 said that they had been notified of their option to move their child to another school. In contrast to those notified of the school choice option, 59 percent of eligible parents said they were notified of the Title I SES option (see figure).

Communication between SES providers and parents was considerably better. In 2006–2007, 78 percent of Title I SES providers in a sample of 16 districts reported that they communicated with the parents of participating students at least a few times monthly.

**Percentage of Districts That Notified Parents of Elementary Students of Their NCLB Educational Options and Percentage of These Parents Who Reported They Were Notified, 2006–2007 (in eight urban districts)**



### Implementing and Monitoring Supplemental Educational Services

Although progress has been made in the implementation of SES, there is still considerable room for improvement. For example, by 2006–2007, 42 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico had developed systems for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of Title I SES providers, and 32 states and Puerto Rico actually had begun to conduct such evaluations. In contrast, only eight states had databases containing student achievement and participation information that would permit rigorous evaluations of providers' effectiveness on a statewide basis.

Although there continue to be issues about the availability of Title I public school choice and SES, as well as the timely notification of and communication with parents, in the end it is parents of eligible students who will decide whether they want to avail themselves of the NCLB options offered to their children. To date, parents have shown a low propensity to take advantage of either public school choice or supplemental educational services. ■

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 VII—Title I School Choice and Supplemental Educational Services: Final Report*, by Georges Vernez, Scott Naftel, Karen Ross, Kerstin Carlson Le Floch, Christopher Beighley, Brian Gill, Beatrice Birman, Michael Garet, and Jennifer O'Day (available at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/opepd/ppss/reports.html>), 2008, 130 pp., also available as RP-1383 (<http://www.rand.org/pubs/reprints/RP1383>). This research brief was written by Michael J. Neumann. The 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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