

GUIDANCE FOR EARLY NOTIFICATION OF PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE

June 2009

This document is to assist school districts that choose to implement early notification for schools that cannot exit Federal status: School Improvement, Corrective Action, and Restructuring

Introduction

The purpose of this guidance document is to provide school districts with information about the **early notification option for Public School Choice** and the review of the parent notification materials (Public School Choice letter) by the Illinois State Board of Education.

This document contains the following items:

- Important General Advice on the early notification of Public School Choice and General Guidelines;
- Checklist for Early Notification for Public School Choice (Parent Letter);
- Suggested Contents for the Student Transfer Form;
- Sample Public School Choice Letter for schools that cannot exist school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring; and
- Example of District's Requirements for providing Public School Choice early notification.

General Advice

- Public School Choice is required when a school is in Federal school improvement status.
- Read the United States Department of Education's *Public School Choice Non-Regulatory Guidance*, Section D. Notification of Parents (D-6 and D-7) with references to the *Compiled Federal Regulations*.
www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/schoolchoiceguid.pdf
www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/finrule/2008-4/102908a.html
- Have your parent notification materials reviewed by ISBE before you send them out.

Although every attempt was made to include information that would assist school districts with the review of their Public School Choice Letters, there may be specific questions that require more direct attention. To discuss these questions, contact Evelyn Deimel at 217-524-4832 or at edeimel@isbe.net.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR EARLY NOTIFICATION FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE

- A school district can offer public school choice early only to students in schools that cannot exit school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring.
- A school district that offers public school choice early is not required to re-notify parents of the students about their option for choice or hold another enrollment period for those students after receiving school AYP determinations from ISBE.
- A school district, once it receives the determinations, must notify the parents of the students that their child's school is still identified in Federal status. The notice to parents of these students should also reference the fact that parents were given the public school choice option earlier in the year.
- A school district that offers public school choice early and receives enough transfer requests to use all available funds for choice-related transportation, must still offer public school choice to other eligible students through its "regular" notification process [*Section 1116(b)(1)(E)(i); 34 C.F.R. §200.44(a)*].
- A school district may not commit all of the funds it has available for choice-related transportation before it offers public school choice to all eligible students because doing so would violate the requirement that priority be given to "the lowest achieving children from low-income families" [*Section 1116(b)(1)(E)(ii)*]. Requiring a school district to reserve some choice-related funds ensures that students attending schools in Year 1 of school improvement status are not denied the opportunity to transfer because of early notifications.

Checklist for Early Notification for Public School Choice

A school district must notify parents of eligible students of the availability of public school choice sufficiently in advance of, but no later than 14 calendar days before, before the first day of the school year. However, a school district can offer public school choice early to students in schools that cannot exit school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring.

To assist school districts with the preparation of their letters, a sample Public School Choice letter for early notification is enclosed. Use this sample letter and the following check list to ensure that the School Choice letter to the parents contains all the essential elements required in the statute.

The School Choice letter should specify ...

- Whether the school has been identified for School Improvement, Corrective Action, or Restructuring, and an explanation of what the identification means
- The reason(s) for the school being identified for school improvement
- The parents' options to **transfer** their child to another public school with **transportation provided** by the School district when required
- An explanation of the selection of students when funding is limited (priority will be given to the lowest-achieving students from low-income families)
- Clear instructions and sufficient timelines for submitting the request to transfer

If there is at least one school making Adequate Yearly Progress to which students can transfer, the following items must be included.

- Student Transfer Form (See suggested contents on the following page.)
- List of school(s) to which students can transfer, including information on academic achievement of these schools (may use AYP Report for 2007-2008 school year)

Reminder:

School districts that implement early notification must notify their schools once AYP status for 2009 is final (mid summer). At that time, the letter informs the parents of the actual status of the school and reminds the parents that they have already been provided an option for transfer in the early notification letter.

Suggested Contents for the Student Transfer Forms

There is no specific form or required elements in the Public School Choice Student Transfer form other than there should be a list of the schools to which the student can transfer and the academic achievement of each school.

However, there are some elements that would probably make the Public School Choice administrative work more efficient for the school district. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) asks that these be considered when designing the district's form.

- Student name, school name, and grade information
- Parent contact information (address, phone, email, etc.)
- Parent consent form language
- Place for parents to decline option to transfer students
- Parent signature and date area
- Place for parents to indicate at least two choices of schools to which students can transfer, if multiple schools are available
- Academic achievement information about each school to which students can transfer can appear on this page
- District contact person and contact information for parents having questions

Remember that the form must be included with the Public School Choice letter that ISBE reviews prior to distribution to parents. Contact Evelyn Deimel (217-524-4832) or edeimel@isbe.net for further assistance.

District Letterhead]

Date

Parent name
Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Parent/Guardian:

(DISTRICT A) is committed to providing a high-quality educational program for your child. We are working hard to provide programs to help all students succeed in our school district.

Your child attends **(ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 3)** which receives federal Title I funds to provide additional opportunities for your child to meet state achievement standards. In the 2007-08 school year, the school did not meet the adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets in **(district inserts subject/subgroup)**. The school is currently in **(Choice/SES)** status which means that your child was eligible for public school choice and supplemental educational services.

While we do not have the AYP results for the 2008-2009 school year, we do know that students attending **(ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 3)** will be eligible for public school choice and supplemental educational services.

For the 2009-2010 school year, your child continues to be eligible for public school choice. You may make a decision about your option for public school choice by choosing one of the following for your child.

- Remain at **(ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 3)** and continue to receive the benefits of Title I academic services. If your family meets the low-income guidelines, you will receive additional information about Supplemental Educational Services in a letter.
- Transfer to **(ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 4)** with transportation provided by the district. If demand for transportation exceeds funds available, priority will be given to the lowest-achieving students from low-income families. This school was making adequately yearly progress for the 2008-09 school year.
- Transfer to **(ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 2)** with transportation provided by the school district. If demand for transportation exceeds funds available, priority will be given to the lowest-achieving students from low-income families. This school was not in Federal improvement status for the 2008-2009 school year. However, if the school does not meet the AYP targets for the 2008-2009 school year, the school will be in Year I of school improvement status and must offer public school choice. Once a "choice" school is in status, the district may continue to provide transportation for the students to attend the choice school. However, the school district is not required to provide transportation for students attending the school.

To transfer your child to one of the schools listed above, you must complete the Student Transfer Form enclosed and **(district enters process for applying for choice options here)** during the enrollment period. *This will be your only enrollment opportunity for the upcoming school year.* Enrollment is for a period beginning **(insert date)** and ending **(insert date)**. (School districts

should give the parents a minimum of 14 days to choose a school after receiving notice of their options.).

If you have questions or need assistance with this application, please contact **(district inserts the contact information.)** Thank you for your continued interest in your child's education.

Sincerely,

Superintendent

Cc: The Honorable

Example of District's Requirements for Providing Public School Choice Early Notification

This sample letter is for districts that want to provide early notification to the parents of children attending schools in improvement, before the Adequate Yearly Progress for 2009 has been determined. The chart that follows is provided to demonstrate various stages of improvement status and when notifications must occur.

Hypothetical District A contains six schools with the current status and 2008-2009 status.

Elementary School 1 is in School Improvement status and must offer Public School Choice. Therefore, this school can participate in early notification. The school offers the parents the option to transfer to two other elementary schools that are not currently in school improvement status: Elementary School 4 and Elementary School 2.

Elementary School 2 has missed AYP for the first time in 2006-2007 but not for two consecutive years. Because this school could enter school improvement status in 2009, parents must be made aware of this school's AYP status, along with the Student Transfer Form. When the school enters School Improvement status in 2009, the parents receive a letter with the option to transfer to a school that is making AYP.

Elementary School 3 is in School Improvement status and must offer Public School Choice and Supplemental Educational Services. The school offers the parents the option to transfer to two other elementary schools that are not currently in school improvement status: Elementary School 4 and Elementary School 2. In 2009, the school misses AYP in a new subject and remains in the same status.

Elementary School 4 is making AYP and would be an appropriate choice for a school to which students could transfer. Parents will receive information about his school's performance with the Student Transfer Form.

High School 1 does not receive Title I funding and is not subject to Federal status. Therefore, the parents will not be sent a letter.

High School 2 is in Restructuring, the parents can receive early notification. However, there is no other Title I high school so there is not option for transfer. While transferring to a non-Title I school is a local district option (unless not permitted by the State Education Agency), parents must be adequately informed and understand that their children will not receive Title I services at a non-Title I school.

This chart is an example of how the notification process may work, assuming July 15 as the release date for the AYP Reports and September 1 as the start date for the district.

SCHOOL DISTRICT A	2007-2008 STATUS	EARLY NOTIFICATION		AYP STATUS 2009	REQUIRED NOTIFICATION	
School District A has 6 schools. The status of each school is provided in the cell to the right of the school listed.		Early notification letter submitted to ISBE (ISBE will review and return letters within 30 days)	Early notification letter provided to parents (district must send out letters immediately upon receiving ISBE approval)	2008-2009 Adequate Yearly Progress Status Released	Required parent notification (letter) submitted for approval to ISBE Section 1116, NCLB	Required parent notification letter provided to parents no later than 14 days prior to the start of the school year [34 C.F.R. §200.37(b)(4)(iv)]
Elementary School 1	School Improvement (must offer Public School Choice)	May 30 Transfer Option: Elementary School 4 or Elementary School 2	June 30	Makes AYP but remains in status (must offer Public School Choice)	July 15 Parent Notification Letter of school status with notation that parents were previously notified of choice option	August 15
Elementary School 2	Not in School Improvement Missed AYP for the first time in 2006-2007 school year	x-1	x-1	Misses AYP for second consecutive year; School Improvement status (must offer Public School Choice)	July 15 Parent Notification Letter with transfer options	August 15
Elementary School 3	School Improvement (must offer Public School Choice and Supplemental Educational Services)	May 30 Transfer Option: Elementary School 4 or Elementary School 2	June 30	Misses AYP but in a new subject; does not advance but remains in status (must offer Public School Choice and Supplemental Educational Services)	July 15 Parent Notification Letter of school status with notation that parents were previously notified of choice option	August 15
Elementary School 4	Not in Status	x-1	x-1	Makes Adequate Yearly Progress	x-1	x-1
High School 1	Does not receive Title I Funding	x-2	x-2	Federal status does not apply to this school	x-2	x-2
High School 2	Restructuring (must offer Public School Choice and Supplemental Educational Services)	May 30 No option to transfer to Title I school	June 30 No option to transfer to Title I school	Misses AYP, continues in Restructuring (must offer Public School Choice and Supplemental Educational Services)	July 15 Parent Notification Letter of school status with notation that parents were previously notified of choice option	August 15

x-1 indicates that the school is not required to send a parent notification letter since it is not in Federal status

x-2 indicates that the school does not receive Title I funding and does not come under the No Child Left Behind Act

When ISBE posts data on IWAS for review and correction, districts should consider this data **FINAL**. If a district is requesting data correction, the data will be final after the data correction window closes, and the files have been reposted. If after completing the data correction process the district still believes its data is in error, the district may file an appeal with ISBE. The district should provide notification to the parents within the school in question while the appeal process is on-going. An appeal does not negate the district's other responsibilities required under the law, such as timely notifications.