



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



GIVING PARENTS OPTIONS
STRATEGIES FOR INFORMING PARENTS AND
IMPLEMENTING PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE
AND SUPPLEMENTAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICES
UNDER *NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND*

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September 2007

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Innovation and Improvement

U.S. Department of Education

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September 2007

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FOREWORD

Since the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, the evidence that it is working has continued to grow. Because of this law, teachers and parents are getting the information and help they need to help every child reach his or her best in school—and as a result, student achievement is rising across America. While school districts and states have made great progress in implementing the goals of *No Child Left Behind* on behalf of students and families, our work is clearly far from over.

When schools do not meet annual performance goals for several years running, *No Child Left Behind* provides families with choices, including free tutoring and school transfers so their children can attend a better-performing school. By now, though, we have all read reports or heard stories of families unable to take advantage of these important options. That's why, in December 2006, I launched a project to learn more about how the public school choice and supplemental educational services provisions of the law are working. As part of this project, staff from my Office of Innovation and Improvement visited 14 school districts across the country, from Anchorage, Alaska, to Little Rock, Ark., to Miami, Fla. They listened to families, educators, and local and state administrators, and learned a great deal about the challenges and successes experienced in providing these options to parents.

This handbook details the results of those discussions, providing ways for districts and states to make *No Child Left Behind's* public school choice and tutoring provisions work for students and families. Together, we must continue to find effective ways to give parents information and to implement these options faithfully for the students who need them.

I've seen for myself that these options can make a profound difference in students' lives when—from the superintendent, to the teacher's aide, to the tutor—there is mutual dedication to making them work. It's not an easy task, but it is an essential one to the future of our students and our country.

As I have said many times before, parents know what is best for their children. I hope that this guide is useful to you as you help empower parents with information and options.

Margaret Spellings
U.S. Secretary of Education
September 2007

INTRODUCTION

One of the four pillars of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* is options for parents in educating their children. Under *No Child Left Behind*, local school districts must offer certain parents of students attending Title I schools identified as in need of school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring the option of selecting “public school choice” or “supplemental educational services” (SES) for their child. Access to these options by parents depends on two factors: student eligibility and the status of their child’s school. For public school choice, all students enrolled in Title I schools that are in the first year of school improvement and subsequent years may participate. For SES, students from low-income families who are enrolled in Title I schools in the second year of school improvement and subsequent years are eligible.¹

Public school choice gives parents of eligible students the option of transferring their child to another public school in their district. The transfer options available to parents through this provision of the law may include traditional public as well as charter, magnet, or virtual schools that are not identified for school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. If more than one transfer option exists, a district must offer more than one choice to parents. Districts must pay for or provide transportation to the new school, subject to funding limitations.

Supplemental educational services are provided outside of the regular school day to increase student achievement and may include assistance such as tutoring, remediation, and other academic interventions. Parents of eligible students may obtain these services for their child free of charge from an approved SES provider of their choice. State education agencies (SEAs) are responsible for approving SES providers and providing local districts with lists of approved providers serving their area.

The public school choice and SES provisions of *No Child Left Behind* are integral components of district efforts to improve schools and increase individual student achievement. By expanding the field of schools available to parents, public school choice gives schools a greater incentive to undertake the reforms needed to improve student learning. By providing opportunities for students to receive additional high-quality instruction outside of school, SES also makes a key contribution to districts’ improvement efforts. Both provisions aim to give students access to high-quality learning environments.

¹Title I schools are schools that operate programs funded under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as reauthorized by *No Child Left Behind*. Title I schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in meeting state standards for two consecutive years are identified by their state education agency (SEA) as “in need of school improvement,” and public school choice becomes available to students in these schools. Title I schools that fail to make AYP for a third year enter the second year of improvement status and must offer SES to eligible students along with public school choice. Title I schools that continue to fail to make AYP are subsequently identified for corrective action (after four years of not making AYP) and restructuring (after six years of not making AYP). Public school choice and SES options must remain available to parents of eligible students in these schools until the school is no longer in school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. Title I schools exit improvement, corrective action, or restructuring status after making AYP for two consecutive years.

Contents of This Handbook

Districts have made significant progress in offering public school choice and SES to eligible families since *No Child Left Behind* was enacted in early 2002. However, low participation rates in these options make clear that much important work remains to be done. To assist districts, this handbook shares ideas and strategies on a variety of issues related to implementing public school choice and SES effectively for parents and students.

The contents of this handbook are arranged by topic under the following two categories: Reaching and Informing Parents and Implementing Public School Choice and SES. The former category addresses parent notification and outreach efforts, while the latter category concerns administrative and programmatic aspects of implementation apart from outreach. While the guide is written primarily for local school districts, SEAs and other stakeholders—including SES providers—should find its contents useful. At the end of each section, consideration is given to ways that SEAs can support district implementation.

The sources of the contents of this handbook are largely the visits with 14 local school districts conducted by staff from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement during the 2006–07 school year. Generally, the visits consisted of separate meetings with district officials, state officials, parents, and SES providers, as well as roundtable discussions that brought together the various stakeholders to discuss how best to collaborate on effective implementation of public school choice and SES. Districts visited were:

- Anchorage (Alaska) School District: November 2–7, 2006
- Chicago (Ill.) Public Schools: November 29–30, 2006
- Los Angeles (Calif.) Unified School District: December 7–11, 2006
- Hillsborough County (Fla.) Public Schools: December 14–15, 2006
- Boston (Mass.) Public Schools: December 19–20, 2006
- Providence (R.I.) Public Schools: January 24–25, 2007
- Little Rock (Ark.) School District: January 29–30, 2007
- Buffalo (N.Y.) Public Schools: February 20–21, 2007
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg (N.C.) Schools: February 26–27, 2007
- Denver (Colo.) Public Schools: March 5–6, 2007
- Albuquerque (N.M.) Public Schools: March 8–9, 2007
- Miami-Dade County (Fla.) Public Schools: March 15–16, 2007
- Baltimore City (Md.) Public Schools: March 22–23, 2007
- Pittsburgh (Penn.) Public Schools: March 29–30, 2007

We wish to thank the staffs of these districts for facilitating the visits, and all participants for their valuable time and information. We also appreciate the feedback on a draft version of the handbook from attendees of the U.S. Department of Education's National Summit on Supplemental Educational Services and Public School Choice, held on June 27-28, 2007, in Arlington, Va.

While the contents of this handbook derive significantly from information shared during the 14 district visits, it must be noted that they are not the result of a formal monitoring process and should not be construed as official findings. Moreover, the handbook is not written using a formalized research methodology, and no individual tip or recommendation should be taken as supported by a research base or body of evidence of effectiveness.

Also, as is mentioned in several instances below, this handbook does not purport to cover all aspects of public school choice and SES. Districts and other stakeholders may use this handbook at their discretion and investigate the topics of most concern or interest to them, although all are strongly encouraged to consider its contents carefully in sum, as the handbook provides strategies used by district peers on a wide range of important aspects of implementation.

Sources of additional information are provided at the beginning of each of the handbook's sections, and include:

- Public School Choice Non-Regulatory Guidance
<http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/schoolchoiceguid.doc>
- *Creating Strong District School Choice Programs*
<http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/choiceprograms/index.html>
- BuildingChoice.org
<http://www.buildingchoice.org>
- Supplemental Educational Services Non-Regulatory Guidance
<http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/suppsvcsguid.doc>
- *Creating Strong Supplemental Educational Services Programs*
<http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/suppsvcs/sesprograms/index.html>.

You may wish to have these resources on hand as you use this handbook. For additional resources for reaching and informing parents and implementing public school choice and SES, see the Additional Resources section at the end of the handbook.

Note: All Web sites referred to in this handbook were last accessed on Aug. 15, 2007.

REACHING AND INFORMING PARENTS

Making parents aware of their options continues to be a fundamental issue for districts implementing public school choice and SES. To ensure parents are informed, below are some items for districts to consider when developing the parent notices required under *No Child Left Behind*, for engaging in additional parent outreach activities and pursuing other outreach strategies, and for facilitating the public school choice application and SES enrollment processes. Districts across the country have approached the requirement to notify parents in a variety of ways, and they have undertaken a staggering array of additional parent outreach. Rather than prescribe how to inform parents and get students signed up for public school choice or SES, what follows is meant to help districts learn more about various practices and determine if they might be appropriate or beneficial for them.

A note before proceeding. In developing parent notices and pursuing additional parent outreach, districts should not proceed at random. Rather, districts should undertake an assessment of their parent notification and outreach capabilities and needs, and then develop and carry out a clear and detailed plan based on the results of this assessment. A district that understands its needs and sets clear goals for itself is generally more likely to succeed in informing parents of eligible students of their public school choice and SES options.



The Parent Notice: Ensuring Effectiveness

Under *No Child Left Behind*, districts are required to notify parents of eligible students at least annually of their public school choice and SES options. *No Child Left Behind* specifies the basic information that must be contained in parent notices. While the notice to parents must include all the required elements, a letter written with only compliance in mind may not inform parents effectively of their options. Below are some ideas based on the spirit, in addition to the letter, of the law that may help ensure that notifications reach parents.

For additional information on parent notices, including required elements, see: Public School Choice Non-Regulatory Guidance, D-1,2; *Creating Strong District School Choice Programs*, pp. 7–16; BuildingChoice.org; Supplemental Educational Services Non-Regulatory Guidance, E-2; and *Creating Strong Supplemental Educational Services Programs*, pp. 23–30. The links to these resources are provided in Additional Resources at the end of this handbook.

Ensuring informative content

In addition to the elements required by the statute to appear in notices about public school choice and SES, districts should consider whether there is other information that parents need to know up front in order to be fully informed about their options. In particular, a district should consider whether there are unique aspects of its implementation of public school choice or SES that parents need to know about, and should be sure to discuss these, as appropriate.

For instance, in a notice about public school choice options, a district might address such issues as the district's particular timelines for receiving, processing, and implementing transfer requests, including the date by which parents can expect to receive a response to their request from the district. If possible, a district might also discuss how transportation will be provided.

In a notice about SES, a district might similarly consider including its procedures and timelines for receiving and processing SES enrollment forms, including the date by which parents can expect services to begin. Districts might also consider including provider-specific information in addition to what is required by the law, such as: tutor-student ratio; grades served; location of services, especially whether services are provided on school sites; total hours or sessions of services offered; and whether transportation is provided (by the district or by the provider).

For parents whose child is eligible for both options, a district should refer to the availability of public school choice in an SES notice, and vice versa. A district might also consider combining public school choice and SES notices into one notification letter for those parents whose child is eligible for both options. Doing so can help parents make fully informed choices.

In general, a district should be sure to let parents know whom in their district or school they may contact if they have questions about their options.

Using a checklist. Once a district has determined the information to include in parent notices, it should consider employing a checklist to make sure all of that information makes its way into the letter.

Ensuring readability

Equally essential to an effective parent notice is readability. A letter laden with legal and professional education terms is not likely to be informative to a parent and may prove intimidating. Rather than use potentially confusing jargon and “legalese,” districts should focus on writing a notice in language that is plain and easy to understand. To this end, districts might avail themselves of readability indexes and tools that convert complex or technical terms into simple language. Districts should also be sure to translate parent notices into languages other than English wherever needed.

Assessing readability. To assess readability, districts should consider checking parent notices against readability indexes such as the Fry, Fog or Flesch index. Such readability indexes are relatively easy to use and can provide a quick and effective means to evaluate the general readability of written text and, in some cases, the specific reading grade-level of the text.

Additionally, districts have used parent advisory groups to proofread and provide suggestions for making notices more “parent friendly” before they go out.

Converting into simple language. If, by using such tools, a district determines that a parent notice is too complicated or difficult to understand, the district might want to use an instrument or materials that convert technical terms into plain language and that convert complex or repetitive terms or phrases into simpler forms. Such instruments often accompany readability indexes.

Translating into multiple languages. As some parents of eligible students may have limited or no proficiency in English, districts should translate notices into languages other than English to further ensure readability for all parents. Districts should determine which languages are spoken in the home and should prepare notices in these languages accordingly. Parent advisory groups may be helpful in determining which languages are needed.

Districts may choose to make non-English versions of the parent notice available only upon request. However, districts are encouraged to include these non-English versions of the notice when initially notifying parents of their options.

Informing without overwhelming

While a district should include in its parent notifications all the information that parents need to make informed decisions, it also needs to be wary of presenting parents with too much information all at once. Developing a notification letter that meets the law’s requirements and includes any additional needed information and that does not overwhelm parents can indeed be a difficult task, but it is not an impossible one. In crafting truly user-friendly notification letters, districts should strive to find a balance between under-informing and inundating parents.

Using attachments. A notification letter that is written in plain, simple, and succinct language using the tools described above can be an important first step in the effort to provide appropriate information without overwhelming parents. Beyond this, a district might consider limiting the contents of its notification letters to what is absolutely necessary to help parents learn about their public school choice or SES options. As for information that is not required by law but is nonetheless needed in a fully informative parent notice as described above, a district may include it in an attachment or in other supplemental materials. However, if a district opts not to include a required component of parent notification in the letter, it must be sure to include this component in an attachment to the letter when it goes out in order to ensure compliance.

Including an SES provider catalog. Rather than include descriptions of SES providers’ services, qualifications, and evidence of effectiveness in the letter itself—which can result in quite a lengthy notice if there are many providers serving the district—a district might consider developing, as some have done, a separate catalog of SES providers that includes this required information and attach it to the parent notice. The district might also consider including additional general information about SES in the catalog to further assist parents in choosing a provider. In developing such a catalog, a district should be mindful of the bases on which parents make decisions about SES and present information about SES providers in multiple ways. For instance, in addition to providing individual descriptions of providers’ services, a district could include a chart that conveniently summarizes providers’ services and allows for comparisons of providers based on key considerations such as provider type (site-based, in-home, online, etc.), location of services, and number of hours or sessions offered.

Including a public school choice catalog. Districts might consider developing a similar catalog of the schools available as transfer options, where appropriate. In addition to the information districts are required to provide about transfer schools (e.g., measures of academic achievement), districts could also include descriptions of special academic programs or facilities, the availability of before- or after-school programs, and the professional qualifications of teachers at these schools.

For more information on providing materials in a supplement to parent notices, see “Using supplemental materials” on page 18.

Ensuring that the notice reaches its target

A district may go to great lengths to carefully craft a parent notice, only to find that parents never receive it. There are potentially many reasons for this occurrence, yet some key considerations will help districts ensure that parent notices reach their target audiences.

Knowing how information gets home: Sending the notice via mail or backpack. A notification letter may go unread for the simple reason that its manner of delivery was ineffective. Notices might be sent by regular mail or via an eligible student's backpack, and districts should consider which of these means is likely to be more effective in reaching parents. In some cases, sending a parent notice via regular mail can be ineffective, particularly, for instance, in communities where the rate of family mobility is high. In areas such as these—which might characterize many areas around the country, especially urban areas—sending notices via students' backpacks may have a greater likelihood of reaching parents than a mailing to an address at which a family no longer resides.

While a backpack mailing may in some instances prove to be a more effective means of reaching parents of elementary school students for whom this type of communication is common and expected, it may be less effective at reaching parents of older students whose backpacks are not always as accessible. Thus, in addition to issues related to family mobility, some districts also consider students' grade level when determining how best to notify parents of their public school choice and SES options. A district could decide to notify parents of elementary school students via backpack, and parents of middle and high school students via regular mail. A district could also decide to send notices through both means so as to increase the likelihood of reaching parents.

Knowing whom parents trust: Sending the notice from the district or the school. Even if a notification letter gets into parents' hands, it might still go unread for the simple reason that parents may be apprehensive of the letter's author and therefore decide to discard it before removing it from its envelope. One way that districts have helped prevent this from occurring is by being mindful of whom parents trust. In some areas, parents may be suspicious of any official communication from the district, but they may be more comfortable receiving correspondence from their child's school, perhaps because of relationships they may have established with teachers or school officials. In other areas, for any of a variety of reasons, the opposite may be true. Either way, districts should have a reasonable sense of which case generally applies to their parents and should consider sending parent notices from whichever level—district or school—holds more trust among the parent community. The responsibility for notifying parents remains, of course, with the district.

A district could also decide to send notices from both the district and the school, and in so doing can further emphasize to parents the value of these options to their child's education.

For more information on involving schools and school staff in parent outreach activities, see “Involving schools and school staff” on p. 14.

Distributing notices through broader means. Whether sending individual parent notices via backpack or regular mail, from the district or from the school, districts can further ensure parents are informed by including general versions of the notices in broader communications. For example, districts have included such versions in district newsletters and have posted them on Web sites. Schools have done likewise as well as made copies available to parents at school sites.

Some districts and schools have also included notices about SES opportunities in communications to families about their eligibility for free or reduced-price meals.

Double-checking: Getting feedback from parents

Even if a district has pursued the ideas and implemented the strategies described above, it should not assume that it has created either an effective parent notice or an effective means of getting it into the hands of parents of eligible students. Rather, districts should check their policies against the opinions of parents to ensure they contribute to the desired result. Districts should solicit regular and ongoing feedback from parents about public school choice and SES notices, and consider establishing formal channels for this purpose. For instance, districts could consider organizing parent focus groups to obtain responses and reactions to the notices, or convening regular meetings with advisory groups composed of parent and community leaders to discuss ways to improve notification efforts.

Support from the SEA

State education agencies (SEAs) can be an invaluable resource for district notification efforts and can provide assistance in a variety of ways. For instance, SEAs can provide districts with sample notices that have been assessed for readability and address how best to present information to parents. SEAs can supply districts with checklists of items that need or ought to be included in parent notices. SEAs also can consider providing districts with other materials or holding technical assistance meetings that address elements of parent notification and notice writing. SEAs should be sure to provide any technical assistance in a timely fashion so that districts may fully reap the benefits.

With respect to SES, an SEA should ensure that districts have timely and adequate information on the providers it has approved to serve students so that the districts can inform parents of these providers’ characteristics.

SEAs can further enhance implementation by ensuring that their monitoring of districts in this area is thorough. In addition to looking at whether district notices contain all the ele-

ments required by law, SEAs could assess notices on the qualitative bases described above (i.e. readability, presentation, delivery). An SEA should clearly communicate its monitoring protocols to districts and set forth expectations for parent notices well in advance of the start of the school year.

MAKING IT WORK

When assisting districts in notifying parents, SEAs are strongly encouraged to engage their Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs). Funded under *No Child Left Behind*, PIRCs assist local school districts and nonprofit organizations in implementing effective parental involvement policies, programs, and activities, and often work to help parents understand school and district accountability data and opportunities for public school choice and SES. PIRCs could be particularly effective partners in state efforts to develop and disseminate parent notification materials and resources.

A Letter Is Not Always Enough: Pursuing Additional Outreach for Comprehensive Coverage

While parent notices may and do succeed in informing parents about their public school choice and SES options, it is inevitable that these notices will not meet with success in every instance, and that there will be parents of eligible students who remain unaware of their options. Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that parent notices, by themselves, will not result in a general awareness of public school choice and SES among the greater parent community. For these reasons and others, it is clear that additional efforts to reach out and inform parents are almost always needed. In fact, federal regulations take this into account, requiring that states, districts, and schools provide parents whose children attend schools in various stages of the improvement process with information on their options through additional broader means such as the Internet, media, and public agencies serving these students and their families.

Following are some parent outreach activities and strategies that districts may consider to complement their notices and to help ensure that parents are educated about their public school choice and SES options. What follows is not intended to cover the topic of outreach exhaustively. Some of the activities and strategies discussed are more costly and/or labor-intensive than others, and districts should give some consideration to their means and staffing needs when developing any additional outreach plans. That said, districts should recognize that there is no universally effective strategy or “magic bullet” when it comes to reaching out to parents, and should consider undertaking as many outreach efforts as possible. Districts that engage in multi-faceted, comprehensive parent outreach campaigns are generally more successful in informing parents and the community about public school choice and SES.

For more information on additional outreach, see: Public School Choice Non-Regulatory Guidance, D-2,3; *Creating Strong District School Choice Programs*, pp. 7–16; BuildingChoice.org; Supplemental Educational Services Non-Regulatory Guidance, E-2; and *Creating Strong Supplemental Educational Services Programs*, pp. 23–30. The links to these resources are provided in Additional Resources at the end of this handbook.

Engaging in additional outreach activities

The following activities are offered as additional opportunities for districts to reach parents and provide information about public school choice and SES options.

School choice and SES provider fairs. Districtwide school choice and SES provider fairs may be particularly effective tools for providing parents with additional information about their options. Such fairs have come to be particularly popular among parents, as they can provide unique face-to-face opportunities to learn more about the offerings of schools that parents may be considering as transfer options for their children, and/or about the services of SES providers they may be considering as tutors. Taking into account district size and numbers of eligible students, districts might consider whether it is best to have one fair covering both public school choice and SES, or separate fairs for each.

Districts that administer choice programs and options apart from the public school choice provisions of *No Child Left Behind*, such as charter or magnet school programs, open enrollment, and other state or local school choice programs, might consider holding fairs at which all choice options are presented. Similar considerations might apply to districts with other out-of-school programs in addition to SES.

MAKING IT WORK

District choice and SES fairs depend for their success on a variety of factors, including advertising and accessibility. If a district wishes to hold a fair, it should take care to spread the word as effectively as possible so that it proves maximally useful for all parties. Moreover, a district should ensure that such fairs occur at locations that are conveniently accessible for parents (e.g. along public transportation lines) and at times when most parents can attend (e.g. after work or over the weekend). A district might also consider attaching the fair to other districtwide events that are well known and well attended by the parent community. To further ensure parent attendance, some districts have also chosen to offer refreshments and childcare.

Public service announcements. Another potentially effective means for reaching out to parents is through public service announcements (PSAs) via radio or television. Using an audiovisual format, PSAs can be a useful tool to inform parents whose reading skills may be limited.

MAKING IT WORK

When providing PSAs, districts should be mindful of what parents listen to or watch and when. Districts should know when various segments of parents are most likely to be listening to the radio (e.g. during a commute to or from work), and should know which television programs parents most often watch (e.g., local news, soap operas, “telenovellas,” etc.). Moreover, when making PSAs, districts should also consider who is best able to engage the attention of parents, be it a fellow parent, a teacher, principal, superintendent, local community member, local celebrity, etc.

Districts with their own television stations or with partnerships with local public access stations could also use these to provide parents with information about public school choice and SES.

Automated phone messages and information hotlines. One potentially cost-effective means of informing parents about their choice and SES options is via an automated phone message. Increasingly, districts are using automated phone message systems to inform parents of school closings and important school events, and parents often report that this is a convenient way to be informed about what is happening at school. Districts can use these systems to an additional advantage by providing information about school choice and SES options.

Districts and schools also provide telephone hotlines as additional points of information for parents. Some districts have created special hotlines specifically to provide parents with information on public school choice and SES, while others have provided this service for a broader menu of topics that parents can access by calling the district’s general information number.

Advertisements in local print media. Districts also often advertise public school choice and SES options in local newspapers and other print media. When doing so, districts should consider which media parents of eligible students read most often and should target advertisements accordingly. In particular, districts should consider posting advertisements in smaller newspapers and publications of communities in which eligible students live, especially those in which languages other than English are predominantly spoken.

Some districts have also advertised these options on billboards in neighborhoods of eligible families.

Flyers and brochures. Flyers and brochures remain effective means for spreading information, and many districts have developed such materials to provide general information about public school choice and SES to eligible students and the greater community. Districts could also develop informational posters and distribute them to schools where students are eligible for public school choice and SES, which could then post them at school entrances and in school offices to further increase parent awareness.

MAKING IT WORK

When making flyers and other informational materials available in the greater community, districts should be mindful of where parents are most likely to congregate and where they generally expect to receive information, e.g., community centers, places of worship, beauty salons, or doctors' offices.

Informational CDs and DVDs. To further enhance their reach, some districts have produced audio and video CDs and DVDs with information about public school choice and SES, and have made copies of these available for parents to use at schools, libraries, and other locations throughout the community. These products could contain the PSAs discussed above, as well as a variety of other information that can be very helpful to parents. For instance, some districts have invited SES providers to contribute short descriptions or demonstrations of their individual programs, so that parents can gain first-hand knowledge of their options at their convenience. Regarding public school choice, districts could involve the staffs of schools that may be transfer options in similar ways.

District Web sites. As parents increasingly rely on the Internet to obtain information, the district Web site has come to be a useful and cost-effective means for spreading the word about public school choice and SES. Districts should consider developing Web pages with details about public school choice and SES, as well as a means for parents to submit public school choice or SES applications online.

Pursuing additional outreach strategies

The following strategies are offered as ways some districts have enhanced parent outreach efforts by involving others, branding “products,” and developing supplemental materials.

Getting others involved. While there is much that districts can do to inform parents about their public school choice and SES options, they need not rely only on themselves to spread the word. Rather, districts can and should enlist the support of others. Below are venues through which districts can engage school-level personnel and the greater community in outreach efforts.

Involving schools and school staff. For many parents, their child's school is the primary place where exchange of information about education occurs. With this in mind, districts should ensure that schools with eligible students are actively providing information about public school choice and SES. Indeed, in many cases schools have assumed a central place in reaching out to parents.

Using communication channels at the school. Schools can get involved in the outreach process rather easily and immediately by using existing channels of communication with parents. For instance, schools have included notices about these options in school newsletters and other regular communications with parents, including student report cards, and have also made information available on school Web sites. Schools have also used back-to-school nights, open houses, and other similar events as forums for distributing information about public school choice and SES. Schools also often provide information about these options in “new student packets” for families of students who are entering or transferring to the school.

Some schools also make information about these options available to parents in the schools’ front offices, and train administrative assistants so that they can answer questions parents may have.

MAKING IT WORK

Districts can facilitate these kinds of outreach efforts across their schools by preparing and distributing informational materials to school principals and staffs. Some districts provide schools with CDs from which they can make copies of materials at their discretion. In any case, districts should be careful to ensure that there is uniformity in communications at the school level so that parents are consistently receiving the same message.

Creating parent liaisons or choice-SES coordinators at school sites. Another way that schools can support the flow of information about public school choice and SES to parents is by establishing parent liaisons or choice-SES coordinators. Such liaisons or coordinators can be responsible for organizing and carrying out school-level outreach activities, and can serve as designated points of contact for parents with questions about public school choice or SES. In some instances, schools might already use parent liaisons for other purposes, in which case choice and SES responsibilities could be absorbed by this position. In others, the role of liaison or coordinator could be assumed by an assistant principal, guidance counselor, teacher, or administrative staff person.

The use of school-based liaisons or coordinators is on the rise across the country, with districts assigning a wide variety of responsibilities to these positions. For more information about roles that liaisons or coordinators could play with respect to SES in addition to providing information to parents, see “Using SES coordinators at school sites” on p. 33.

Involving teachers. As teachers are often a parent’s first point of contact regarding their child’s education, they can play a critical role in making parents of eligible students aware of their options. Teachers know the strengths and weaknesses of their students, and should be encouraged to include information about options when communicating with parents about their child’s progress, for instance, during parent-teacher conferences. This may prove especially helpful to parents of students who teachers know are struggling during the

regular school day and stand to benefit from extra help. At the high school level, teachers as well as guidance counselors may also be able to provide information and guidance to students directly. Personal attention and assistance from teachers and counselors may motivate students and families to consider their SES options and make an informed decision. For more information about high school students' participation in SES, see "Serving high school students" on p. 36.

If requested, teachers could also provide information on the programs of the various SES providers serving the district to help parents select the provider that best suits the needs of their child. In doing so, teachers should be as objective as possible. If a teacher is affiliated with or employed by a provider serving the district (including the district, if it is also a provider), he or she should be sure to consult with the district and the provider about what information is appropriate to share with parents. In cases such as these, it may be preferable for the teacher to direct parents to a liaison or SES coordinator for information about their options.

Giving advance notice: Using "feeder" schools. Some districts engage elementary and middle schools whose students will become (or remain) eligible for public school choice and SES upon graduating and be starting at a new school the following year. Staff at these "feeder" schools can, toward the end of the school year, provide students and parents with information about the options that will become available to them upon entering their new school, so that they can be on the lookout for notices that should arrive as the next school year approaches.

Leveraging the community. In addition to more localized outreach efforts undertaken at the school level, districts have also sought assistance from the broader community by partnering with parents, faith-based and community organizations, businesses, and other stakeholders.

Engaging parent advisory groups. Whether affiliated with the district or not, parent advisory groups, including parent-teacher organizations, are important players in efforts to provide parents with information and advice about education options and services. Districts should consider seeking out the support and assistance of these groups to spread the word about public school choice and SES. Rooted in the community, such advisory groups possess a unique ability to reach parents and can be key partners in developing and implementing an outreach campaign. For instance, parent groups in some districts have formed volunteer corps to canvass neighborhoods—often their own neighborhoods—and provide information to families about their options. Another cost-effective practice, "foot patrols," can make individual visits to eligible students' homes and can be particularly effective when staffed by parents who themselves have children participating in public school choice or SES.

Enlisting community organizations. When it comes to penetrating deep into parent communities, community organizations, including faith-based and nonprofit groups, may be of equal or greater value. Districts should know which organizations are particularly support-

ive of empowering parents and should consider soliciting the time, spirit, and relationships with parents that these organizations uniquely possess for use in outreach efforts. Some districts have found that partnering with churches and other places of worship can be particularly effective in making parents aware of options for their child's education.

Reaching out to municipal organizations and local businesses and business organizations. Districts have further expanded their reach into the community by soliciting the support of municipal and local business groups. Municipal organizations, such as police departments and social service agencies, can be surprisingly effective outreach partners by disseminating information about public school choice and SES among their employees and by making information available at the organizations' offices and on Web sites. Local business groups, including individual private businesses and business associations such as hotel and hospital associations and chambers of commerce, are also often supportive of efforts to inform and empower parents and can be instrumental in parent outreach.

MAKING IT WORK

Outreach partnerships with the business community can be strengthened when districts take care to share with these partners the results of their investment. Whether it be on the number of families reached, the number of students participating, the amount of funds spent, or the effect on student achievement, following up with these groups and providing them a sense of the impact of their involvement can help solidify a positive working relationship and lead to increased support in subsequent efforts.

Relying on SES providers. Districts should not overlook an obvious ally in parent outreach: SES providers. SES providers have an interest in informing parents about their SES options, and districts can tap the SES providers with whom they are partnering for outreach assistance. Districts can make general information about public school choice and SES available to providers for distribution. In addition to their responsibility to notify parents of approved providers, districts can also facilitate providers' ability to share more specific information on their individual programs, as this can further increase awareness of SES in the community. Of course, prior to doing so, districts and providers should mutually agree on acceptable outreach practices, and providers should be sure to adhere to local and state policies in this area where applicable.

For information on involving providers in the SES enrollment process, see "Involving SES providers" on p. 21.

Branding your "product." "Branding" means to create for a product or service a distinctive identity that renders it recognizable in the marketplace. Districts have benefited greatly from applying this basic marketing practice to public school choice and SES. Some districts have employed distinct designs, layouts, fonts, etc., in public school choice and SES materials in order to increase familiarity, and other districts have also chosen to color-code materials so that

parents clearly know what to look out for. As parents are likely to be more responsive to what is familiar, branding these options through consistent presentation can be particularly effective.

Using simple terms and catch-phrases. Districts can further increase their chances of reaching and engaging parents by using simple terms and phrases. For instance, when advertising SES, some districts have used the phrase “*free tutoring*” instead of “supplemental educational services,” as the former is both easier to understand and harder for parents to miss or forget. Other districts have attempted to catch parents’ eyes by giving SES a dollar value, i.e., by referencing the maximum amount that the district may spend on services for a student.

Using supplemental materials. Even after a district has developed a clear and user-friendly parent notice and has undertaken a comprehensive parent outreach campaign involving a variety of activities and stakeholders, parents still may have unanswered questions about public school choice and SES, or may need assistance in choosing from among their options. To ensure parents are fully able to make informed choices, districts might consider preparing the kinds of supplemental materials described below. Of course, districts may also consider including some or all of the information that would be contained in these kinds of supplemental materials in flyers or brochures, as discussed in “Flyers and brochures” on p.13.

Districts should be sure to make any supplemental materials readily available to parents upon notifying them of their public school choice and SES options.

FAQs for parents. Parents may often need additional basic information about public school choice and SES. By providing this information in a frequently-asked-questions (FAQ) format, parents may be able to find answers to their questions quickly and easily. In developing FAQs for parents, districts have addressed other topics such as steps to participation and expectations for parents, and district-specific issues such as enrollment deadlines and timelines for implementation.

For more information on helping parents choose a school or SES provider, see *Choosing a School for Your Child* and *SES in Action: A Toolkit for Parents and Community Leaders*. The links to these resources are provided in Additional Resources at the end of this handbook.

Lists of questions for parents to consider when choosing a school or a provider. While parents may have all the general information they need about public school choice and SES, they may still be uncertain as to how to choose from among their various transfer or SES provider options. To help parents make choices, districts have often developed or provided lists of questions for parents to consider when selecting a school or an SES provider.

Coordinating with outreach for other options. Districts can ensure that parents are optimally informed by advertising the options under *No Child Left Behind* alongside other school choice and out-of-school program options offered in the district.

Leveraging other school choice options. In addition to public school choice under *No Child Left Behind*, parents may have a variety of other school choice options to consider, such as charter schools, magnet schools, or open enrollment programs. Some of these options may predate public school choice under *No Child Left Behind*, and for this reason may be more familiar within the district’s parent community. To help ensure that parents are aware of public school choice, districts might consider absorbing public school choice outreach into outreach for other choice programs and coordinating these efforts within a single campaign. Short of this, districts should consider leveraging parent interest in other options in efforts to spread the word about public school choice.

Using a choices catalog. In “Using attachments” on p. 8, districts are encouraged to consider developing a catalog of the schools available as transfer options under public school choice. In districts where there are other school choice options available, one potentially effective way to leverage these options and coordinate outreach is through a choices catalog. Such a catalog could provide information on the general types of school choice available to parents (including student eligibility for these options) and describe the individual schools offered under the respective programs.

For information about coordinating implementation of public school choice with that of other choice options, see “Coordinating implementation” on p. 29.

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Districts often do not receive AYP results from states until shortly before the start of the school year, and only then do they know with certainty whether they must offer the option of public school choice to parents of students in certain schools. As a result, district efforts to inform parents about public school choice may trail behind efforts to inform parents about other choice options, which generally occur at some point during the previous school year. To help ensure that parents are fully informed of all the choice options potentially available to them, districts should include information about public school choice in their outreach efforts for other choice programs that may precede the release of AYP results, even if this information is tentative or general in scope.

More importantly, districts should also begin offering and implementing public school choice in advance of AYP results wherever possible, particularly for students in schools that cannot exit identified status. For more information on implementing public school choice “early,” see “Getting a head start” on p. 28.

Presenting SES and other out-of-school programs as complementary. Parents may be unsure of the relationship between SES and other out-of-school programs (e.g., extended day programs, 21st Century Community Learning Centers) and may view the choice of such programs for their

child as an “either-or” proposition. With this in mind, districts should be sure to let parents know that they do not necessarily need to choose only one program, but could participate potentially in multiple programs, schedules and other factors permitting. When advertising SES, districts and schools should provide information about other out-of-school programs—particularly about when they are offered—so that parents can make fully informed choices.

Districts and schools should strive to implement SES and other out-of-school programs in complementary, not competitive, fashion. For more information on integrating SES and other out-of-school programs, see “Integrating SES and other out-of-school programs” on p. 33.

Support from the SEA

As with district parent notices, SEAs can assist other district outreach activities in a number of important ways. For instance, SEAs could develop flyers, brochures, or posters with information on public school choice and SES and disseminate these to their districts. SEAs could also develop general sets of FAQs for parents and lists of questions for parents to consider when choosing a school or SES provider, which districts could then modify or supplement, as appropriate. In activities of this sort, SEAs are again encouraged to solicit the support of their PIRCs.

Perhaps more importantly, SEAs can enhance implementation by setting clear expectations as to the kinds of additional outreach districts should engage in, and as to the partnerships districts may enter into with community organizations and SES providers in the effort to reach parents. As appropriate, an SEA could consider incorporating its expectations in these areas into its district monitoring process.

Facilitating Applications and Enrollment

Once parents have received information about public school choice and SES, and have chosen to pursue either of these options for their children, they still need to request a transfer by submitting a public school choice application, or services by submitting an SES enrollment form to the district. Below are some ideas for districts to consider in ensuring that these processes are efficient and easy for parents to navigate. Some of the ideas that follow apply only with respect to enrollment in SES, and are designated accordingly.

For additional information on facilitating applications and enrollment, see: Public School Choice Non-Regulatory Guidance, D; *Creating Strong District School Choice Programs*, pp. 7–16; BuildingChoice.org; Supplemental Educational Services Non-Regulatory Guidance, E-I; and *Creating Strong Supplemental Educational Services Programs*, pp. 23–30. The links to these resources are provided in Additional Resources at the end of this handbook.

Simplifying forms for parents

Districts can help ease the burden on parents by ensuring that transfer applications and SES enrollment forms are simple and easy to understand.

Ensuring readability. As they should with parent notices, districts should avoid using jargon and “legalese,” check readability of public school choice applications and SES enrollment forms using readability indexes, and convert technical terms and complicated language into simpler language wherever appropriate. Districts should also be sure to translate applications and enrollment forms into languages other than English wherever needed.

Districts should also be sure to work with parents in developing these forms and get feedback as to their user-friendliness.

Using enrollment assistance sessions. Districts can further assist parents by providing hands-on explanations of the public school choice application and SES enrollment forms and processes through enrollment assistance sessions or other similar events. These offer parents an opportunity to ask questions and receive assistance in filling out public school choice applications and SES enrollment forms.

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Sessions such as these can be particularly helpful when staffed by parents who have completed the enrollment process previously for their own children and are, thus, knowledgeable about the areas where parents may need assistance and the questions parents may have. Having translators on hand can further assist parents who speak languages other than English.

Expanding access to forms

The application and enrollment processes can be further eased for parents by not unduly limiting access to application and enrollment forms. Rather than providing parents with only one original form per eligible student, or making forms available at only one location in the district—which may be difficult for parents to access—districts are encouraged to make forms available widely throughout the community. For example, in addition to including forms with the notices that go out to parents, districts have made forms available at eligible school sites and in local libraries, and have put a downloadable version of the form online at district and school Web sites. Districts that do so should clearly specify which parents are eligible to enroll and remind parents to fill out only one form per child.

Involving SES providers (SES only). SES providers can play a key role in spreading the word about SES, and districts should consider giving providers access to enrollment forms to assist in signing students up for services.

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In giving providers access to enrollment forms, districts should clearly delineate each entity's responsibilities. While providers can play important roles in distributing and collecting enrollment forms, responsibility for processing and approving SES enrollment requests for eligible students will remain with the district. Districts should also consider setting expectations for providers' use of the forms. For instance, a district might instruct providers to distribute forms only while enrollment windows are open and could make recommendations as to the locations most appropriate for making forms available to parents.

At any rate, districts need not flatly deny providers access to enrollment forms on the supposition that it may create an uneven playing field among providers, or on the basis of past improper use of forms in isolated instances. Rather, a district could use access to forms as an opportunity to foster equitability and propriety among providers.

For more information on involving SES providers in parent outreach, see “Relying on SES providers” above on p. 17.

Preserving student and family privacy (SES only). Unless it has obtained prior written consent from parents, a district may not disclose the identity of students eligible for (or receiving) SES to providers or other parties or organizations that may wish to participate in the enrollment process. If a district is not able to obtain such consent from parents of all eligible students, concerns about student and family privacy still need not cause the district to bar the greater community from helping to provide information about SES. Districts may make general information about SES—including general, non-student specific application forms—available to SES providers and others who wish to assist in signing students up for services. To help ensure that information about SES is targeted to eligible students, districts could consider giving providers and others lists of schools at which SES must be offered to eligible students.

Moreover, districts should not prohibit providers from sharing information about their services with the general public, and may choose to assist providers in this effort in order to lessen concerns about preserving student privacy. For instance, a district could offer to mail providers' program literature. In this case, providers could give the district their materials in stamped envelopes, which the district could then address to parents of eligible students and mail on the providers' behalf. The district should take care, however, that its mailing of materials does not in any way constitute an endorsement of any provider.

For more information about disclosure of student information and involving others in the enrollment process, see Supplemental Educational Services Non-Regulatory Guidance, F-8–10, in Additional Resources at the end of this handbook.

Expanding sign-up periods

Parents may be provided with useful information about public school choice and SES, yet still not be empowered to exercise these options because the period for submitting applications or enrollment forms is too short. A sign-up window that, for instance, opens when parent notices go out and closes two weeks later is unlikely to give all parents of eligible students—whose individual circumstances may vary greatly—sufficient time to decide whether to pursue public school choice or SES for their child.

While a district may need to set a deadline by which parents must make choices, it should ensure that this deadline is reasonable and allows parents ample opportunity to choose a transfer school or SES provider.

Using multiple or rolling windows. A short sign-up period at or around the beginning of the school year may also exclude from participation parents of eligible students whose desire or need for public school choice or SES does not become apparent until later. To further ensure that families have real opportunities to make choices, many districts offer multiple application or enrollment windows throughout the school year. Alternatively, other districts use a rolling or continuous application or enrollment process, which allows parents of eligible students to choose a transfer school or SES provider at their convenience.

In some cases, district administrative needs may force a district to not offer rolling enrollment or to impose cut-off dates for receipt of forms earlier than might otherwise be preferred. In others, needs on the part of SES providers to reach a critical mass of students prior to starting services may require a district to take similar actions. In cases such as these, the district should work with both parents and providers to determine application and enrollment processes that are acceptable to all parties and that enable the district to meet its obligations under the law.

MAKING IT WORK

In some instances, parents will wish to pursue SES for their child after attending parent-teacher conferences or upon receiving first progress reports or first-quarter or first-semester report cards from the school. A district should ensure that its SES enrollment process allows parents in these circumstances to enroll their child with an SES provider (although a district should also offer SES enrollment opportunities closer to the start of the school year). Indeed, some districts (and their schools) have held special enrollment periods or “pushes” that coincide with these events.

Creating a master calendar

To help manage application and enrollment periods—as well as various outreach activities and responsibilities—a district should consider creating a master calendar of public school choice and SES events. The district could include in this calendar a variety of important dates, including the date it receives AYP data from the state, the date(s) by which parent notices go out, the dates of various district- and school-level outreach functions, and the date(s) by which parents must submit public school choice applications and SES enrollment forms.

Districts could also use a master calendar to manage other public school choice and SES implementation responsibilities after parents have been informed of their options and made choices. Regarding public school choice, districts could include, for instance, the date by which transfer requests must be implemented. For SES, districts could include the date(s) by which student learning plans should be developed, the date(s) by which services to students should begin, and other dates related to SES provider billing and payment. Districts could of course also include in a master calendar important planning events and meetings with providers.

Maximizing enrollment (SES only)

Given infrequent attendance and attrition in some SES programs, districts should use caution in setting a target or cap on the number of students that can be served. In general, districts should avoid setting an absolute cap on the number of students who can be served by simply dividing the amount of funds available for SES by the district's maximum per-pupil SES expenditure, as this does not take into account the likelihood of some students missing SES sessions or dropping out of SES programs and, thus, funds being available to provide services to additional numbers of students. If a district wishes to use a cap, it should instead plan to set it at a level that takes into account historical attendance and attrition rates. Alternatively, some districts have initially employed a simple cap, but then work quickly through a waiting list or use unspent funds for SES programs later in the year or during the summer. Pursuing these alternatives will help a district meet its expenditure obligations under the law and also allow for as many students as possible to receive services.

Support from the SEA

SEAs can enhance district application and enrollment processes by setting clear expectations regarding timelines and procedures, and are strongly encouraged to communicate them to districts through technical assistance materials and other opportunities. In particular, an SEA could provide districts with its expectations on issues such as frequency and length of sign-up periods and, with respect to SES, participation by providers. SEAs could also provide districts sample application and enrollment forms, and could assist districts in determining appropriate SES enrollment targets.

Holding a calendar planning session. One way in which SEAs can provide technical assistance in this area is through calendar planning sessions. In these kinds of sessions, the SEA can provide districts with a blank calendar and a set of responsibilities and activities involved in implementing public school choice and SES, and then direct the districts to determine where best to place the responsibilities and activities on the calendar. By engaging districts actively in a planning process, hands-on technical assistance opportunities such as these can be particularly helpful to implementation.



IMPLEMENTING PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE AND SUPPLEMENTAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICES (SES)

These sections offer ideas for district implementation of public school choice and SES apart from parent notification and outreach activities and responsibilities. As SES involves a greater number of stakeholders and presents a wider variety of issues, we give more attention to implementing SES, including a separate section with ideas for building relationships among districts, schools, and SES providers.

There are many aspects of district implementation of public school choice and SES, and numerous strategies that districts have pursued to improve or enhance implementation with respect to a particular topic. As with the preceding sections, the following sections do not purport to cover these topics comprehensively or to provide definitive resolutions of issues that may exist. Rather, they are intended to provide districts with selected useful suggestions for implementation based, in part, on the practices of their peers. In pursuing any of the ideas discussed below, a district should be mindful of its particular characteristics and any state or local policies that may apply.



Implementing Public School Choice: Selected Aspects

Following are considerations for districts in their efforts to implement public school choice effectively. For more information on implementing public school choice, see: Public School Choice Non-Regulatory Guidance; *Creating Strong District School Choice Programs*; and BuildingChoice.org. The links to these resources are provided in Additional Resources at the end of this handbook.

Getting a head start

Under *No Child Left Behind*, districts are required to notify parents of eligible students of their public school choice options no later than by the beginning of the school year. In many cases, districts need to receive school AYP results from the state before knowing which schools are identified for improvement and thus which students are eligible for public school choice. As states often do not provide AYP results until shortly before the school year starts, districts are often faced with tight timelines for notifying parents, and many do not begin to implement transfer requests until well into the school year. Districts confronted by these circumstances should, at a minimum, begin the planning process for implementing public school choice well before release of AYP results. Following are some ideas for districts to help ensure that parents can make choices as early as possible.

Determining which schools may serve as transfer options regardless of latest AYP results.

Each spring, districts should know if there are schools that can serve as transfer options for the following fall regardless of the latest AYP results (i.e., Title I schools that have not missed AYP or non-Title I schools). Districts should be able to inform parents well before the school year starts that these schools are transfer options. Districts also should consider working with principals to prepare these schools for receiving transfers for the next school year.

Implementing public school choice early for students in schools that cannot exit identified status. Districts also know which schools cannot exit improvement, corrective action, or restructuring status regardless of latest AYP results (i.e., identified schools that did not make AYP for the prior school year's AYP determinations, as schools must make AYP for two consecutive years in order to exit identified status). Students in these schools will continue to be eligible for public school choice, and nothing should prevent districts from offering public school choice and implementing transfer requests by parents of these students in advance of release of AYP data. Indeed, a district should consider offering public school choice to parents of students in such schools at some point during the prior year, and may choose to make such offers coincide with offers of other choice programs that do not depend on AYP data.

Coordinating implementation: Using a school choice office

In districts where a number of school choice options are available to parents, coordinating implementation of these options may be wise—and in some cases, imperative. To this end, many districts have created a school choice office where responsibilities for administering choice programs are consolidated, including those for public school choice under *No Child Left Behind*. This strategy may improve implementation by, among other things, avoiding duplication of effort, providing information to parents about options that is comprehensive in scope and consistent across programs, and coordinating transportation.

For information about coordinating parent outreach on public school choice with that of other choice options, see “Leveraging other school choice options” on p. 19.

MAKING IT WORK

If a district opts to administer public school choice through a school choice office, it should consider whether to include responsibilities for implementing SES in this office also. If a district determines that such an arrangement is not preferable, it should be sure to facilitate coordination between the school choice office and the office that administers SES so that the information to parents regarding all their options under *No Child Left Behind* is consistent.

Providing transportation effectively

No Child Left Behind requires districts to pay for or provide transportation to students transferring to a new school under public school choice. As more and more students exercise choice and attend schools at various locations in the district, providing transportation for all students may become more of a challenge. Below are some considerations for districts in devising transparent and efficient transportation plans or systems.

Using a transportation Web site. As concerns over transportation may cause parents to be hesitant about exercising choice, a district should consider making information about its transportation plan readily available to parents via the Internet as well as by e-mail and other means. A district could provide information about how it will pay for or provide transportation and include bus routes, stops, and rosters, etc. By making this information available on a Web site, the district can easily make changes to the plan and ensure that parents have the most up-to-date information.

Districts could also consider setting up electronic portals through which parents, principals, and others could ask questions and make transportation requests.

Coordinating busing across schools: Using a system of hubs and shared routes. Establishing a coordinated transportation system across schools is another step that a district could take to address transportation challenges when providing public school choice. In such a system, certain schools in the district could, for instance, serve as busing hubs that receive students from various schools across the district and then transport them home. Based on area of residence—not school of attendance—transportation systems such as these may allow schools to share routes and thus can help avoid the need to transport only a small number of students from one school long distances across the district.

Defining transportation zones. To further facilitate providing transportation, some larger districts have opted to set up defined transportation zones based on geographic location, and offer transportation to families exercising public school choice only in schools within a certain zone or zones. Parents may still be able to choose a school for their child that is outside the designated zone(s), although the district may not provide transportation directly for that student, or may choose to defray only a portion of the costs associated with transporting the student to and from the school.

In defining zones, districts should make decisions based on genuine issues of distance, and should strive to include in each zone a range of transfer options that is as diverse as possible.

Helping students adjust to new schools

Students transferring from one school to another often need assistance in adjusting to a new environment, and districts have pursued various ways to provide additional support to transferring students and to the schools that receive them.

Using a receiving schools coordinator. To help students transferring to various schools via public school choice and other choice options, districts might consider employing a receiving schools coordinator whose responsibilities could include meeting regularly with individual transfer students to discuss their progress, and organizing or facilitating meetings of these students and their parents to discuss issues or concerns in making the transition to a new school.

Receiving schools coordinators could also survey receiving schools as to how they help transfer students acclimate to their new school environment, and could make recommendations to the schools or provide additional support or assistance as needed.

Using mentors. Districts might also consider working directly with individual transfer schools to assign mentors to students new to the school as a result of public school choice and other choice options. Mentors could provide individualized assistance, including academic assistance as necessary. Mentoring roles could be performed by classroom teachers, support staff, or others at the school.

Support from the SEA

SEAs can greatly assist districts' implementation efforts by providing AYP results as early as possible. SEAs can also support districts by providing guidance and technical assistance on key issues such as how districts can offer and implement public school choice in advance of AYP results, and how they can coordinate public school choice with other choice options. SEAs could also make resources available to districts to help students adjust to new schools.

As with parent notices (see p. 10), SEAs can enhance districts' efforts by ensuring that their monitoring of public school choice implementation is thorough. SEA monitoring could address issues such as when districts notified parents of eligible students of their opportunity for public school choice, how and when districts determined which schools could serve as transfer options, and when districts implemented transfer requests. An SEA should clearly communicate its monitoring protocols to districts and set forth expectations well in advance of the start of the school year.

Implementing SES: Selected Aspects

Following are ideas for districts to consider in their efforts to ensure that delivery of SES is efficient and contributes to improved student academic achievement. For more information on district implementation of SES, see: Supplemental Educational Services Non-Regulatory Guidance, E-I; and *Creating Strong Supplemental Educational Services Programs*. The links to these resources are provided in Additional Resources at the end of this handbook.

Managing SES at the school level

As SES programs continue to develop in districts across the country, individual school sites where SES must be offered are becoming involved increasingly not only in efforts to inform parents about their options but also in many aspects of the day-to-day operation of SES programs. Following are some considerations for districts in managing SES operations at the school level.

For more information about involving schools and school staffs in parent notification and outreach efforts, see "Involving schools and school staff" on p. 14.

Arranging for provider access to school facilities. For a number of reasons, provider access to school sites is proving to be a central component of effective SES implementation in many districts. Districts are encouraged to carefully consider the benefits of allowing SES providers access to school facilities and to set uniform, districtwide policies regarding site access wherever appropriate. In other cases, districts may need to work individually with principals to open school doors to providers.

Improving provider access by setting reasonable rent. Districts can improve access by making space available to providers at a fair and reasonable price and by treating providers the same as other similarly classified organizations seeking use of school facilities. Districts should be sure to disclose to providers all applicable fees up front.

Ensuring equity when demand for site access is high or space is limited. In some cases, allowing all providers equal access to school facilities may seem unmanageable—especially if the number of providers serving the district is high—and in practice may result in the chaotic circumstance of having many providers, with each serving only a handful of students at a particular school. In other cases, allowing equal access to school sites may simply be impractical due to limited availability of space. In cases such as these, districts have considered limiting provider access to school sites to ease implementation.

If opting to limit access to facilities, a district should be sure to develop fair and transparent policies and procedures for determining which providers can serve students on school sites and solicit the input of providers and parents in doing so.

A district could devise a variety of processes to distribute access to school sites among providers. For instance, a district could match each school with a small number of providers based on provider capacity and the mutual interest of providers and school administrators in providing services at individual schools. Alternatively, a district could randomly assign a number of providers to schools, again taking into account providers' respective capacities to serve students and available space.

MAKING IT WORK

If a district opts to limit provider access to school facilities, it should be mindful of the effects of such policies on the ability of parents to choose a provider freely. A district should inform parents up front, as part of the notification and enrollment process, about the providers at each school site and about those serving at other sites in the area and the locations of those sites, including in the home. The district must clearly state to parents that they may choose from among any of the providers approved to serve the district, not just those providing services at their child's school.

Setting implementation policies uniformly within and across schools. As providers continue to seek to provide services on school grounds, districts can facilitate service delivery by setting uniform expectations or policies within and across school sites. For instance, districts could set clear expectations as to when services should begin at school sites after the enrollment process has finished. Districts could also set uniform policies as to the school staff with whom providers should communicate and work at school sites (e.g., the district could use designated school-based SES coordinators; see below). Such expectations and policies can assist the implemen-

tation not only of programs by multiple providers at one school, but also of programs of one provider at multiple school sites across the district.

Using SES coordinators at school sites. School-based SES coordinators can be crucial components of effective SES implementation, and their use is on the rise in districts across the country. SES coordinators can perform a variety of other important functions, in addition to serving as a point of contact for parents and organizing school-based outreach activities on SES, as discussed in “Creating parent liaisons or choice-SES coordinators at school sites” on p. 15. SES coordinators can assist in collecting, processing, and forwarding SES applications to the district. They can serve as liaisons between principals and teachers and the providers serving a school’s students, and also assist in negotiating provider access to school sites by, for example, helping determine the amount of available space at the school. School-based coordinators can be responsible for overseeing all on-site programs, and can play active roles in monitoring programs and ensuring student attendance. School-based coordinators can also track student attendance at SES programs that are off school grounds.

A district could assign SES coordinators at each school with students eligible for SES, or alternatively each school’s principal could do so. An SES coordinator could be compensated for his or her efforts via a stipend or supplemental pay; however this could not be counted toward the district’s expenditure requirements for choice and SES purposes.

MAKING IT WORK

To ensure that SES coordinators do not unduly influence parent choices, districts should ensure that SES coordinators work independently of any provider serving on site, including any SES programs run by the district or school itself. If using school-based coordinators, districts should ensure that they are provided with a thorough orientation about SES—in general terms, and on the individual programs of providers serving the district—before services begin.

Integrating SES and other out-of-school programs. SES is generally not the only out-of-school program offered at a school site but often is just one of a variety of choices, such as extended-day programs and 21st Century Community Learning Centers. To enhance SES implementation, schools should not set SES up as a competitor of these other programs but, with the support of the district, as a complement to them, and, to the extent practicable, integrate SES seamlessly into an overall schedule or menu of out-of-school programming. To this end, schools and districts have arranged for SES to be provided, for instance, on certain days during the week or at certain times, with other programs then operating on other occasions or during the rest of the week. Alternatively, SES can be provided in such a way that students receive services for certain periods of time during the week and then return to a regular, ongoing out-of-school program to engage in other activities.

To the extent appropriate, schools and districts could also consider advertising SES as part of a larger menu of out-of-school programming to further increase parent awareness. For more information on this, see “Presenting SES and other out-of-school programs as complementary” on p. 19.

Developing student learning plans effectively

Under *No Child Left Behind*, once a parent chooses an SES provider for his or her child, the district must enter into an agreement with the provider that includes, among other things, specific achievement goals for the student to be developed in consultation with the student’s parents and the provider; a description of how the student’s progress will be measured; and a timetable for improving student achievement. The student learning plans that result from these requirements are an essential component of SES implementation. Following are some considerations for developing student learning plans that inform service delivery and contribute to improved student achievement.

For information on involving school staff in this process and using student learning plans to connect SES with the classroom, see “Leveraging student learning plans” on p. 40.

Approaching student learning plans appropriately. Districts may approach student learning plans from a range of perspectives. At one end, a district may view student learning plans as a paperwork responsibility that amounts to little more than checking the appropriate boxes. At the other, a district may place such numerous and detailed requirements on these plans that their development, review, and approval cause a significant delay in the start of services. In general, districts are advised to seek a balance between these extremes and develop useful, informative learning plans while not imposing requirements that cause delays or act as barriers to the provision of services to students.

Using specialists. Districts could enlist the support of curriculum specialists and experts in developing student learning plans. For students with disabilities covered under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* or for students covered under Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, districts could include specialists in those areas to assist in the development of the plans. Such experts could provide the SES coordinators in the district with training on the components of an effective student learning plan and could play active roles in plan development and review.

Facilitating transportation to and from SES programs

Arranging for transportation for SES remains a crucial consideration for parents, and districts continue to pursue ways to assist them. Districts might consider whether they have the capacity and resources to provide transportation directly to students receiving SES, and whether

other transportation arrangements involving the resources of providers and community organizations are possible.

At a minimum, districts should clearly indicate to parents the locations at which providers are offering services and which providers offer transportation to and from their programs.

While a district may provide transportation directly or through other arrangements, it may not count the costs of such transportation toward satisfying its expenditure requirements under the law.

Allowing providers' access to school facilities. Districts have eased parents' transportation needs by allowing providers to work at school sites, which may make accessing SES easier for parents than if they have to transport their children to other locations in the district. Moreover, transportation could be provided from school sites through various arrangements, given district, school, and provider capacities. In some cases, allowing providers on site may enable students to access a school's late bus to get home. In cases where a school has an out-of-school program that provides transportation, districts and providers might also consider working with the school to include students receiving SES in existing out-of-school transportation arrangements, to the extent practicable. In cases where there are multiple providers serving at a school site, the district, school, and providers might also consider pooling resources to provide transportation home for students receiving SES at the site.

For more information on arranging for provider access to school facilities, see p. 31.

Involving community centers. Districts have further assisted parents by facilitating providers' access to community centers and other neighborhood buildings, including those of faith-based organizations. This can be particularly effective in addressing issues of transportation as these centers are located in neighborhoods where students eligible for SES live. Many students also may already be involved in activities at these local centers during out-of-school time. Moreover, as community and faith-based organizations often offer learning opportunities for adults simultaneously with those for children, providing SES at these local sites may be an added draw for parents.

Involving community organizations that provide transportation. Districts could also facilitate transportation for SES by working with local groups, including faith-based organizations, that provide transportation throughout the community or that have transportation resources. Such organizations could incorporate SES transportation into other transportation schedules and could provide transportation on a voluntary basis or for a nominal fee. Districts should ensure that any organization they partner with carries a sufficient amount of insurance and possesses any clearances needed to provide transportation to students.

Facilitating SES from an administrative perspective: Using data management systems

From enrollment forms to student progress reports to provider invoices for services, implementing SES presents many new administrative responsibilities and record keeping and data needs for districts. To ease some of this administrative burden, districts have employed data management systems to serve as processing agents and repositories for information related to SES. Data management systems can assist a district in any number of its administrative responsibilities. For instance, data management systems can assist in receiving and processing SES application forms from parents. To providers, data management systems could provide student-level data and lists of students. From providers, data management systems could allow for submission of assessment data, student learning plans, progress reports, attendance sheets, invoices, etc. Additionally, data management systems could be configured to allow for access by parents, SES coordinators, principals, and teachers, thereby assuming an important communication role. Data management systems can also help track student attendance and attrition, as well as perform other important functions related to monitoring and accountability.

Combating attrition and low attendance

Low student attendance and attrition in SES programs are major concerns of districts and providers alike. While it is clear there is no easy means to guarantee student participation in SES, there are a number of steps that districts can take to make improvements in this area. The ideas discussed above regarding managing SES at the school level (see p. 31), providing transportation (see p. 34), and using data management systems (see above) can all make important contributions to the effort to ensure students remain in SES programs. Also, the ideas discussed below regarding districts and providers working together (see p. 38), while mainly general in scope, should also apply in the specific context of student attendance. Following are some additional ideas for districts to consider to foster attendance in SES.

Getting parents involved. Parents obviously have interest in and responsibility for their children's attendance in SES programs, and districts should enlist the support of parents in making sure students are present to receive services. Together with parent organizations and community groups, districts and providers could, for instance, develop a corps of volunteer parents to serve as attendance monitors for SES programs at schools and other locations in the community.

Serving high school students. As many high school students are confronted with numerous out-of-school activities and responsibilities, including part-time jobs, caring for siblings, and other obligations, providing SES to these students presents distinct challenges and requires particular commitment and creativity. To ensure these students are served, districts, together with schools, could structure out-of-school programming in such a way that SES is not a competitor with other offerings. To further increase participation of eligible high school students in SES, districts, together with providers, could consider developing special incentives to

enhance these students' enrollment and attendance. Following are some additional ideas that districts have pursued in reaching out to and providing SES to high school students.

Outreach at the high school level: Special considerations. Districts often engage in special or additional outreach activities and strategies in order to reach high school students eligible for SES. For instance, districts advertise SES during high school sporting events, such as football games, as eligible students and their families are likely to attend these events together. Together with schools, districts also work to ensure that SES is discussed during student-teacher or student-counselor advisory sessions so that eligible students can hear firsthand from their advisers about the potential benefits of SES. Also, as high school students may tend to feel a stigma attached to receiving tutoring, some districts have referred to SES by another name, such as "enrichment," when reaching out to these students.

Coordinating with schools. As noted above, providing SES to high school students requires a particular commitment, and perhaps nowhere is this more needed than in the individual schools where students are eligible for SES. Districts should work particularly closely with high school principals, counselors, and teachers as their support and engagement are crucial to successful SES programs. To this end, some districts hold regular meetings with high school staffs to discuss SES, both prior to and during the provision of services, and have also facilitated meetings between providers and high school principals to foster partnerships. Districts have also taken special care to discuss SES with sports coaches and instructors in other afterschool activities such as music so that they can encourage students to participate and can arrange practices and activities in such a way that they do not prevent students from receiving services.

Coordinating with providers. As high school students often have a variety of competing demands on their time, districts have also worked with the providers approved to serve their area to make SES more feasible and attractive to high school students. Rather than compete with other afterschool options, districts have opted to work closely with providers that offer programs in the morning, on weekends, or during the summer. To serve this population of students, some districts have also worked closely with providers approved to offer services online or in the home as these providers' programs can be flexible and adjust to students' busy schedules.

Coordinating with employers. Districts have also sought to inform prominent employers of high school students about SES and, together with parents and providers, have worked to coordinate students' employment schedules so as to allow them to receive services.

Support from the SEA

SEAs can provide particularly effective support for district implementation of SES by setting clear expectations or policies on topics such as provider access to school facilities, and on other topics not discussed above, such as district and provider use of enrollment incentives and at-

tendance awards. SEAs can further assist districts by preparing sample SES implementation materials, including district-provider contracts, student learning plans, and student progress reports. By recruiting and approving providers that offer online or in-home programs, or that offer programs in the morning, on weekends, or during the summer, SEAs can also assist district efforts to serve high school students.

MAKING IT WORK

As SES involves multiple stakeholders and a variety of issues, SEAs might consider developing task forces for setting statewide expectations or policies for SES implementation. Such task forces could consist of representatives of key SES stakeholders, including districts and providers, and could be charged with making recommendations for policy on individual issues in SES implementation, as warranted.

Districts, Schools, and SES Providers Working Together

Positive working relationships among districts and schools and the SES providers who serve their students are essential to effective SES implementation. Below are some ideas for communicating effectively and working collaboratively to meet the goals of improving student achievement.

For more information on districts and SES providers working together, see: *Creating Strong Supplemental Educational Services Programs*, pp. 15–22. The link to this resource is provided in Additional Resources at the end of this handbook.

Communicating, communicating, communicating!

It goes almost without saying that breakdowns in SES implementation are often the result of breakdowns in communication between districts and providers. With this in mind, it is imperative that districts and providers establish clear lines of communication, communicate with each other on an ongoing basis, and strongly consider setting up regular meetings for the purpose of discussing topics related to SES implementation. In doing so, both parties should recognize and convey to one another that successful implementation is a mutual benefit.

MAKING IT WORK

Some providers serve many districts, and some serve in multiple states. To ensure that there is effective communication at the local level, districts and providers should work together to establish a designated contact for each district a provider serves who is knowledgeable of SES implementation in the district and can respond quickly to inquiries from the district.

Clarifying policies and expectations up front. Disputes that may arise between a provider and district are often attributable to a lack of clarity from the outset about local SES policies (i.e., policies on the administrative and logistical issues discussed above such as access to school facilities as well as other issues including payment). To prevent such occurrences, districts are well advised to inform providers of local SES policies and expectations prior to the start of services. In doing so, a district should be sure to discuss the procedures through which complaints or grievances by providers may be addressed.

To help providers get acquainted with the various local aspects of SES, some districts have developed SES handbooks or manuals that compile in one source local policies, practices, and timelines for SES implementation. Such handbooks can also be useful tools for other district and school staff involved in SES, including SES site coordinators.

Involving providers in decision making. While districts are expected to set local expectations for SES implementation and convey these to providers, implementation is generally more effective when districts do not make decisions on SES issues unilaterally. Rather, SES works more smoothly in districts that actively seek the input of providers when developing policies affecting SES and give providers equal opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns.

Connecting providers and schools

In addition to cultivating relationships between themselves and providers, districts should facilitate productive communication between providers and the schools of the students they serve.

Educating school staff about SES and providers. It is critical that school staff—especially principals, teachers, and SES coordinators—are well informed about SES in general terms, about how the SES process works, and the potential benefits it can provide to students and schools. It is equally important that school staff be knowledgeable about the programs of individual providers serving the district. Below are some ways that districts can educate school staff about SES.

Professional development opportunities. Districts should consider providing principals and teachers with regular professional development opportunities at which the SES provisions of *No Child Left Behind* are discussed. Districts could provide such opportunities during inservice days or other district functions. In discussing SES, districts could include information as to which schools (and potentially which students) in the district are SES-eligible.

Provider forums. Districts should also consider arranging forums for providers to present and explain their programs to principals, teachers, and other school staff. Some districts have held provider fairs for principals and teachers at which school staff talk individually with provider representatives at their discretion. Districts have also coordinated individual provider-school

meetings for a similar purpose. Pursuing either of these options may depend on the number of providers serving the district and the preferences of schools.

Provider forums such as these can also be a useful means for providers to recruit teachers as tutors.

Educating providers about schools. Just as school staff need to be educated about SES, so too do providers often need to learn more about aspects of school culture and operation, and districts should consider giving providers opportunities to learn more about the schools of the students they intend to serve. Districts could help accomplish this by adding another dimension to the provider forums discussed above, through which principals could present to an audience of providers.

Connecting SES with the classroom. While it is the responsibility of the state to approve providers whose programs are aligned with state standards and consistent with curricula used at the local level, district and school officials may nevertheless have concerns about the relationship between what is happening in SES programs and what is happening in the classroom during the regular school day. To ensure that classroom instruction can help inform SES, and vice versa, it is imperative that districts not only provide opportunities for providers and school staff to get to know one another, but also facilitate regular, ongoing communication between providers and classroom teachers throughout the provision of services. To this end, districts could arrange for providers and classroom teachers to exchange contact information (e-mail addresses, phone numbers, etc.), and could also use school-based coordinators as conduits of information between providers and teachers.

At a minimum, districts should ensure that teachers have access to SES student progress reports.

Leveraging student learning plans. Connections between SES and the regular school day can be further enhanced by involving classroom teachers in the development of student learning plans. The level of involvement of teachers in this process could vary, ranging from an advisory role to more direct responsibilities for developing, alone or in conjunction with providers, individual student achievement goals based, in part, on perceived student weaknesses and knowledge of state standards.

For more information about developing student learning plans effectively, see p. 34.

Support from the SEA

SEAs could assist district and SES providers in working together by organizing or facilitating regular meetings of districts and providers, and also by providing technical assistance to new and emerging SES providers and to districts new to SES about building successful working relationships.

SEAs also play an important role in arbitrating disputes, including those related to the district-provider contract, and should be sure to perform this function in a fair and timely fashion, as needed.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Below are links to sources of a wide array of information related to reaching and informing parents and implementing public school choice and SES.

Some of the links below are to Web sites created and maintained by organizations other than the U.S. Department of Education. They are provided for the reader's convenience. The U.S. Department of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of this outside information. Further, the inclusion of links to particular items in hypertext is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed or products or services offered on these outside sites, or the organizations sponsoring the sites.

Afterschool Alliance (SES): <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/home.html>

American Institutes for Research: <http://www.air.org/>

- *SES in Action: A Toolkit for Parents and Community Leaders*: http://www.tutorsforkids.org/documents/SES_Action_Toolkit_Color_Web_FINAL.pdf. This publication was developed through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

Black Alliance for Educational Options: <http://www.baeo.org/>

Center on Innovation and Improvement (CII): <http://www.centerii.org/index.html>. CII, a national content comprehensive center, receives support from the U.S. Department of Education's Comprehensive Centers Program: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/newccp/index.html>.

Council of Chief State School Officers: <http://www.ccsso.org/>

Council of the Great City Schools: <http://www.cgcs.org/>

Education Commission of the States: <http://www.ecs.org/>

Education Industry Association (SES): <http://www.educationindustry.org/>

Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options: <http://www.hcreo.org/>

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education: <http://www.ncpie.org/>

U.S. Department of Education: <http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml>

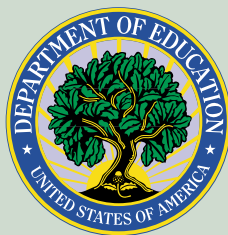
For information on public school choice, see:

- Choice Web site: <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/choice/index.html>
- Public School Choice Non-Regulatory Guidance: <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/schoolchoiceguid.doc>
- Creating Strong District School Choice Programs (Innovations in Education series): <http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/choiceprograms/index.html>
- BuildingChoice.org: <http://www.buildingchoice.org>
- Choosing a School for Your Child: <http://www.ed.gov/parents/schools/find/choose/index.html>

For information on SES, see:

- SES Web site: <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/choice/help/ses/index.html>
- Supplemental Educational Services Non-Regulatory Guidance: <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/suppsvcsguid.doc>
- Creating Strong Supplemental Educational Services Programs (Innovations in Education series): <http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/suppsvcs/sesprograms/index.html>
- For information on Parental Information and Resource Centers, see <http://www.ed.gov/programs/pirc/index.html>.





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