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School Choice More than Triples Enrollment in Year Two of Pilot Program

Student participation in New Jersey's school choice pilot program is expected to more than triple in the 2001-2002 school year. In 2000-2001, the first year of the program, there were 96 students who attended school in 10 choice districts. In September, it is expected that 308 students will be attending school in 11 choice districts.

"I am extremely pleased at the progress of our school choice program in its second year," said Commissioner of Education Vito A. Gagliardi, Sr. "I am most proud of the fact that this program gives parents an important option other than simply sending their children to the schools in the districts in which they happen to live. Choice students and their parents are extremely enthusiastic about the program.

"The school choice program has been effective in increasing educational opportunities for students and parents in the communities surrounding choice districts. It has also been effective in helping choice districts to improve or increase program offerings, reduce class size, lower the local property tax burden, hire teachers and purchase technology equipment. The program has further been effective in helping to reduce the enrollment in overcrowded districts while assisting under-enrolled districts."

The choice districts for the 2001-2002 school year are as follows:

- Folsom
- Englewood
- Washington Township (Burlington County)
- Cumberland Regional
- Hoboken
- Bloomsbury
- Upper Freehold
- Mine Hill
- Salem City
- Kenilworth
- Belvidere (this is district's first year participating in the program)

In July 2001, the Commissioner approved two additional choice districts. Brooklawn and South Harrison Township will open their doors to choice students in the 2002-03 school year. Interested students can apply to the 13 choice districts beginning November 1, 2001.

New Jersey's school choice program was designed as a small, limited, controlled pilot test of the concept of interdistrict public school choice and its viability in New Jersey. The program was first established in State Board of Education regulations in September 1999. It was established by statute in January 2000.