



New Jersey Policy Institute

NJ POLICY INSTITUTE ON MURPHY STATE OF THE STATE: EXPANDING INTERDISTRICT SCHOOL CHOICE WOULD MAKE NJ “STRONGER AND FAIRER”

January 14, 2025

Wells Winegar, Executive Director of the New Jersey Policy Institute, released the following statement regarding Governor Murphy’s State of the State Address today:

“Governor Murphy has the opportunity to make NJ stronger and fairer in his last year of his administration by expanding Interdistrict School Choice. While New Jersey has some of the best schools in entire the country, the latest statewide test scores show a majority of public school students are not meeting critical learning benchmarks. And students in urban areas and poorer communities suffer from a dramatic achievement gap, despite receiving an influx of state education funding.

That’s why it’s critical to provide more students with greater educational opportunities by expanding the state’s Interdistrict Public School Choice program. This innovative approach started in 2000 and permits the state to authorize existing public school districts to become Choice Districts. This designation allows the districts to remove their zip code barriers and accept students from neighboring school districts. The State portion of the education funding follows the student to the Choice District. The local levy stays with the sending district to ensure stability in their budgeting.

Unfortunately, the Interdistrict School Choice program has been frozen to new applicants, with over 2000 students on the waitlist each year. In the current school year, 125 Choice Districts accepted 5,174 students, leaving 60% of applicants left out. Without action to unfreeze the Interdistrict School Choice program, the 2025-2026 school year will have a drop to 119 Choice Districts, with two counties – Essex and Middlesex – still without a single Choice District.

In 2025, the Legislature has the opportunity to go beyond unfreezing the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program and to expand the program to all interested districts to open up more seats. Since the funding mechanism is already established, the appropriation in the upcoming budget would be a minimal investment that won’t burden New Jersey seniors and property taxpayers. All New Jersey students deserve the opportunity for an excellent, high-quality education. Expanding the Interdistrict School Choice program would ensure New Jersey is ‘stronger and fairer’.”

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