



New Jersey Policy Institute



Will school choice help integrate NJ schools?

By Hannah Gross

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Some advocates are pushing for New Jersey’s public school choice program to be expanded after mediation talks failed in the lawsuit about how to desegregate the state’s public schools. The program allows students in grades K-12 to enroll in participating school districts in other towns for free. For the 2025-2026 school year, 119 of the state’s nearly 600 districts are choice districts. No new districts have been added to the program in about a decade, despite demand for the program outpacing the number of available seats. More than 2,000 students were on waitlists in the 2022-2023 school year, according to data from the state Department of Education.

At his recent confirmation hearing, Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer said he “absolutely” supports the program.

“Districts that participate are opting in and similarly, parents’ and families that choose to leave their district of residence and attend a nearby district is also by choice,” Dehmer said. “This is just another option for those families to make the decision they think is best for their children.”

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The New Jersey Policy Institute, a non-partisan organization focused on finding solutions for education, energy and economic issues, thanked Dehmer for his support of the program during his confirmation hearing and called for its expansion.

“Given the recent collapse of mediation in the desegregation lawsuit, we encourage the Legislature and Administration to take action now on behalf of all New Jersey students and expand the state’s highly successful Interdistrict School Choice Program,” Wells Winegar, executive director of the New Jersey Policy Institute said in a statement.

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