

2415.06 UNSAFE SCHOOL CHOICE OPTION

The Unsafe School Choice Option (USCO) provision of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) §9532 contains two provisions that apply to school districts that receive funds under NCLB: Provision I - Persistently Dangerous Schools and Provision II - Victims of Violent Criminal Offenses.

Effective the beginning of each school year, school districts receiving NCLB funds must be prepared to complete the transfer of pupils who choose to exercise Provision I and Provision II of NCLB and this Unsafe School Choice Option Policy. Compliance with the Policy is a condition of receiving funds under any and all titles under NCLB. The Superintendent is required to certify compliance with this USCO Policy to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) in the application for NCLB funds.

USCO Policy Provision I - Persistently Dangerous Schools (PDS)

1. Criteria for Determining Persistently Dangerous Schools.

A persistently dangerous school is a public elementary or secondary school building (except for Regional Day Schools, Educational Services Commissions and Special Services School Districts) that meets the objective criteria determined by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) for three consecutive years and is part of a school district that receives funds under NCLB. The NJDOE will use the most current available data from the Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System (EVVRS) to identify persistently dangerous schools on or before July 31 of each year, in compliance with federal regulations (68 FR 16789).

2. Procedures and Guidelines for Schools Determined to be Persistently Dangerous.

Once the district receives notification a school is identified as persistently dangerous, the district must inform all parents of enrolled pupils in the school of the designation within fifteen calendar days of the notice and offer them the option for their children to transfer to a safe public school within the district by the beginning of the respective school year. The district must complete all transfers by the beginning of the school year following the July notification.

Pupils are not required to accept the transfer option, but they must be afforded the opportunity to do so. Parental notice regarding the status of the school and the offer to transfer pupils should be made simultaneously. Parents of enrolled pupils must be notified of the persistently dangerous designation whether or not there is another school within the district for the transferring pupils.

To the extent possible, the district will allow transferring pupils to transfer to schools that are making adequate yearly progress in accordance with NCLB and have not been identified as being in need of school improvement, corrective action or restructuring. The district will take into account the needs and preferences of the affected pupils and parents.

3. Corrective Action Plan for a School Identified as Persistently Dangerous.

If a school in the district is identified as persistently dangerous, the district will submit to the NJDOE, on or before August 25, documentation of compliance with the parent notification requirement and actions taken to complete the transfer arrangements for all pupils exercising the option by the first day of the school year. The district will also develop and submit for approval a corrective action plan to the NJDOE on or before September 30 of the same year, which will apply to the respective school year. The corrective action plan, which must be completed in the format provided by the NJDOE, will describe how the school will reduce the number of incidents of violence as determined by the EVVRS. The NJDOE will provide schools with guidance for their corrective action plans, as well as monitor the school district's timely completion of the approved plans.

In the spring of each following year, the NJDOE will re-evaluate the status of a school identified as persistently dangerous. The NJDOE will review the school's progress towards completing their corrective action plan and compare the current year's incidents of violence, as reported on the EVVRS, to the criteria for determining persistently dangerous schools (PDS). A school identified as maintaining the persistently dangerous designation will be notified by the NJDOE on or before July 31 of the respective year and will be required to submit for approval a revised corrective action plan by August 25 of that year, which will apply to the respective school year. The school district must inform all parents of enrolled pupils in the school of the designation within fifteen calendar days of the notice and offer them the option for their children to transfer to a safe public school by the beginning of the respective school year.

A school no longer designated persistently dangerous will be notified on or before July 31 of the respective year. The persistently dangerous designation will be removed after one or more years contingent upon successful fulfillment of the criteria for removal, as determined by and in accordance with guidance provided by the NJDOE.

4. Procedures and Guidelines for Early Warning of Schools.

Effective in 2004, if a school meets the criteria set forth in this Policy for two consecutive years, the district will be notified of their pattern of offenses on or before August 15 of each year. If notified, the district will develop and submit to the NJDOE for approval a corrective action plan on or before September 30 of the same year, which will apply to the respective school year. The corrective action plan, which must be completed in the format provided by the NJDOE, will describe how the school will reduce the number of incidents of violence as determined by the EVVRS. The NJDOE will provide the school with guidance for their corrective action plan, as well as monitor the school's timely completion of the approved plan. This school shall become a top priority for intensified district support for research-based programs and technical assistance. A school receiving an "early warning" notice is not required to provide the transfer option to pupils.

In the spring of each following year, the NJDOE will reevaluate the school's progress towards completing their corrective action plan and compare the current year's incidents of violence, as reported on the EVVRS, to the criteria for determining persistently dangerous schools. Schools will be notified of their status on or before July 31 of the respective year.

A school that has successfully completed their corrective action plan and reported violent incidents that no longer meet the Criteria for Determining Persistently Dangerous Schools for one school year (the year in which the corrective action plan was in effect) will no longer be required to submit a Corrective Action Plan.

A school that does not successfully complete their Corrective Action Plan and that meets the criteria set forth in this Policy for a third consecutive year will be designated as persistently dangerous and will be required to submit for approval a revised corrective action plan on or before September 30 of that year, which will apply to the respective school year. The district will also provide the transfer option to pupils in the school designated as persistently dangerous.

5. Schools Not Receiving NCLB Funds, but Meeting the Criteria for PDS.

School buildings and districts that do not receive federal funds under NCLB, but meet any one of the criteria for persistently dangerous schools, will be contacted by the NJDOE and be required to develop and submit for approval a Corrective Action Plan on or before September 30 of the respective year. The Corrective Action Plan must be completed in the format provided by the NJDOE and describe how the school will reduce the number of incidents of violence as determined by the EVVRS. The NJDOE will provide the school guidance for their corrective action plan, as well as monitor the school's timely completion of the approved plan.

USCO Policy Provision II - Victims of Violent Criminal Offenses

The Victim of Violent Criminal Offenses provision of NCLB requires a pupil who becomes a victim of a violent criminal offense, as determined by State law, while in or on the grounds of a public elementary or secondary school that the pupil attends, be allowed to attend a safe public elementary or secondary school within the district, including a public charter school.

The Superintendent will consult with the Board attorney and communicate with designated local and/or county law enforcement authorities, per the provisions of the Uniform State Memorandum of Agreement Between Education and Law Enforcement Officials and N.J.A.C. 6A:16-6.2(b)12, on questions and issues that arise in the implementation of the individual victims of violent criminal offenses section of this Policy.

1. Criteria for Determining Victims of Violent Criminal Offenses

The following criteria must be used to determine when an enrolled pupil has become a victim of a violent criminal offense while in or on the grounds of a public elementary or secondary school that the pupil attends. These criteria only apply to a pupil who has become a victim of one or more of the violent criminal offenses enumerated below:

A pupil is considered a victim of a violent criminal offense when:

- a. A referral has been made to law enforcement officials for suspicion that one of the violent criminal offenses enumerated below has occurred; and
- b. One or more of the following applies:

- (1) Law enforcement officials have filed formal charges against the perpetrator(s) for commission of the violent crime; or
- (2) The perpetrator(s) of the violent crime has been disciplined in accordance with school policy; or
- (3) The perpetrator(s) of the violent crime either has not been identified or is not an enrolled pupil(s), but it is clear that the pupil (victim) has become a victim of a violent criminal offense based on objective indicators such as physical evidence, eyewitness testimony, and/or circumstantial evidence; or
- (4) The pre-existence of a restraining order against the perpetrator(s) of the violent crime.

2. Procedures and Guidelines

Effective the first day of each school year beginning in 2003, the district must be prepared to begin the transfer of any pupil who chooses to exercise the unsafe school choice option provision. The district must offer, within ten calendar days, an opportunity to transfer to a safe public school within the district to any pupil who has become a victim of a violent criminal offense while in or on the grounds of a public school that the pupil attends. While the pupil must be offered the opportunity to transfer, the pupil may elect to remain at the school.

To the extent possible, the district will allow any transferring pupil to transfer to a school that is making adequate yearly progress in accordance with NCLB and has not been identified as being in need of school improvement, corrective action or restructuring. The district will take into account the needs and preferences of the affected pupil and his or her parent(s). Transfers must occur within thirty days of the determination that the pupil was a victim of a violent criminal offense.

3. Violent Criminal Offenses

The violent criminal offenses under New Jersey statutes that apply to the individual victim provision are identified and explained below. The offenses apply to completed offenses, as well as threats and attempts to commit the offenses. The offenses and attempts to commit the offenses apply only when they occur in or on the grounds of a school that the pupil attends. The offenses apply whether they occur wholly or in part in or on the grounds of a school that the pupil attends.

The offenses apply only to acts or attempts that are directed at a person (victim) or a group of specified individuals (victims), rather than acts that indiscriminately affect the entire school population or non-specified individuals or groups. For the purposes of this Unsafe School Choice Option Policy, the term “victim” shall not include a pupil who purposely, knowingly or recklessly provokes the conduct constituting the criminal incident against him or her.

4. Applicable Violent Criminal Offenses

Below is a description of each applicable violent criminal offense that is based upon New Jersey statutes and references to statutory citations that provide complete explanations of each designated offense. The descriptions provided below are not intended to be a complete explanation of each offense or a substitute for the actual provisions of the authorizing statutes. Instead, the descriptions are provided as an aid in facilitating understanding of the general intent and practical applications of the violent criminal offenses that pertain to this Unsafe School Choice Option Policy.

- a. Homicide [N.J.S.A. 2C:11-2] - A person is a victim of a homicide when he or she is the child, sibling or other relative of a decedent, resulting from someone purposely, knowingly or recklessly causing the death of the pupil’s parent, sibling or relative in or on school grounds.
- b. Assault [N.J.S.A. 2C:12-1(a)(1) and 2C:12-1(b)(1)] - A person is a victim of an assault when the actor purposely, knowingly or recklessly causes bodily injury to the victim [N.J.S.A. 2C:12-1(a)(1)]; negligently, recklessly, knowingly or purposely causes bodily injury to the victim with a deadly weapon [N.J.S.A. 2C:12-1(a)(2), N.J.S.A. 2C:12-1(b)(2) and N.J.S.A. 2C:12-1(b)(3)]; attempts by physical menace to put the victim in fear of imminent serious bodily injury [N.J.S.A. 2C:12-1(a)(3)]; or knowingly points a firearm at or in the direction of the victim, whether or not the actor believes it to be loaded. [N.J.S.A. 2C:12-1(d)(4)].
- c. Aggravated Sexual Assault [N.J.S.A. 2C:14-2] - A person is a victim of an aggravated sexual assault when the actor commits an act of sexual penetration with the victim under any of the following circumstances:
 - (1) The victim is less than thirteen years old.
 - (2) The victim is:

- (a) At least thirteen, but less than sixteen years old; and
 - (i) The actor is related to the victim by blood or affinity to the third degree; or
 - (ii) The actor has supervisory or disciplinary power over the victim by virtue of the actor's legal, professional or occupational status; or
 - (iii) The actor is a foster parent, a legal guardian or stands in loco parentis within the household.
 - (3) The act is committed on the victim during the commission, or attempted commission, whether alone or with one or more persons, of robbery, kidnapping, homicide, aggravated assault on another, burglary, arson or criminal escape.
 - (4) The actor is armed with a weapon or any object fashioned in such a manner as to lead the victim to reasonably believe it to be a weapon and threatens by word or gesture to use the weapon or object on the victim.
 - (5) The actor is aided or abetted by one or more other persons and the actor uses physical force or coercion on the victim.
 - (6) The actor uses physical force or coercion and severe personal injury is sustained by the victim.
 - (7) The victim is one whom the actor knew or should have known was physically helpless, mentally defective or mentally incapacitated.
5. Sexual Assault - A person is a victim of a sexual assault when:
- a. The actor commits an act of sexual contact with a victim who is less than thirteen years old and the actor is at least four years older than the victim; or
 - b. The actor commits an act of sexual penetration with a victim under any of the following circumstances:

- (1) The actor uses physical force or coercion, but the victim does not sustain severe personal injury.
 - (2) The victim is at least sixteen but less than eighteen years old.
 - (3) The actor has supervisory or disciplinary power of any nature or in any capacity over the victim.
 - (4) The victim is at least thirteen but less than sixteen years old and the actor is at least four years older than the victim.
6. Bias Intimidation [N.J.S.A. 2C:16-1(a)] - A person is a victim of the crime of bias intimidation when an actor commits, attempts to commit, conspires with another to commit or threatens the immediate commission of an offense specified in chapters 11 through 18 of Title 2C of the New Jersey Statutes; N.J.S.A. 2C:33-4; N.J.S.A. 2C:39-3; N.J.S.A. 2C:39-4 or N.J.S.A. 2C:39-5 in the following circumstances:
- a. With a purpose to intimidate an individual or a group of individuals because of race, color, religion, gender, handicap, sexual orientation or ethnicity; or
 - b. Knowing that the conduct constituting the offense would cause an individual or a group of individuals to be intimidated because of race, color, religion, gender, handicap, sexual orientation or ethnicity; or
 - c. Under circumstances that caused any victim of the underlying offense to be intimidated and the victim, considering the manner in which the offense was committed, reasonably believed either that:
 - (1) The offense was committed with a purpose to intimidate the victim or any person or entity in whose welfare the victim is interested because of race, color, religion, gender, handicap, sexual orientation or ethnicity; or
 - (2) The victim or the victim's property was selected to be the target of the offense because of the victim's race, color, religion, gender, handicap, sexual orientation or ethnicity.

7. Terroristic Threat [N.J.S.A. 2C:12-3(a) and 2C:12-3(b)] - A person is a victim of a terroristic threat when the actor threatens to commit one of the violent criminal offenses enumerated under the USCO Policy Provision II against the victim with the purpose to put the pupil in imminent fear of one of the violent crimes enumerated in the USCO Policy Provision II under circumstances reasonably causing the victim to believe the immediacy of the threat and the likelihood that it will be carried out. The definition of terroristic threat applies to N.J.S.A. 2C:12-3(a) insofar as the threat was directed at a person (victim) or a group of specified individuals (victims).
8. Robbery [N.J.S.A. 2C:15-1] - A person is a victim of a robbery when the actor, in the course of committing a theft, inflicts bodily injury; or uses force upon the victim; or threatens the victim with or purposely puts the victim in fear of immediate bodily injury.
9. Kidnapping [N.J.S.A. 2C:13-1] - A person is a victim of a kidnapping when the actor unlawfully removes the victim from the school or school grounds; or the actor unlawfully confines the victim with the purpose of holding the victim for ransom or reward as a shield or hostage; or the actor unlawfully removes the victim from the school or school grounds or a substantial distance from where he or she is found in school or on school grounds; or if the actor unlawfully confines a pupil for a substantial period of time to facilitate commission of a crime or flight thereafter, or to inflict bodily injury on or terrorize the victim.
10. Arson [N.J.S.A. 2C:17-1] - A person is a victim of arson when the actor starts a fire or causes an explosion in or on the grounds of a school whereby purposely or knowingly the victim or group of specified victims are in danger of death or bodily injury; or with the purpose of destroying or damaging the victim's or group of specified victim's property that is in the school or on school grounds.

Miscellaneous Provisions of USCO

1. Transfer Time Period – Persistently Dangerous Schools

The transfer will be temporary and will be in effect as long as the pupil's original school is identified as persistently dangerous.

2. Charter School Transfer Option

While NCLB permits affected pupils to be afforded the opportunity to attend a public charter school, in addition to a safe public elementary school or secondary school within the school district, the application of this provision in New Jersey is limited. Transfers to a charter school can only occur as a part of the charter school's "equal opportunity" selection process and among charter schools administered under the same managing authority (i.e., charter schools within the charter school district).

Since charter schools in New Jersey are considered public LEA's, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:36A-3, operated independently of a local board of education, transfers may only take place among charter schools within the LEA. Therefore, pupils may be permitted to transfer to another charter school that is administered under the same managing authority of the charter school, but are not permitted to transfer to a school in the local public school district administered by a local board of education.

However, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:36A-7, a charter school must be open to all pupils on a space available basis and may not discriminate in its admission policies or practices (although it may establish reasonable criteria to evaluate prospective pupils), and in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:36A-8, if there are more applications to enroll in the charter school than there are spaces available, the charter school must select pupils to attend using a random selection process for enrollment.

3. Funding Sources for USCO

The Unsafe School Choice Option law does not authorize resources specifically to help cover USCO costs. However, under certain circumstances Federal funds may be used. For example, funds under SDFSCA (Title IV, Part A of the NCLB) may be used to establish safe zones of passage to and from school to ensure that pupils travel safely on their way to school and on their way home [Section 4115(b)(2)(E)(v)]. In addition, SDFSCA funds may be used to help cover costs such as tuition or transportation related to the Unsafe School Choice Option or expansion of public school choice [Section 5121(8) and 5131(12 and (25))].

4. Special Education Pupils

The district will provide transferred special education pupils with the program required by the pupil's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

5. Transfer Schools

In the event there is not another school within the school district for a transferring pupil, the district is not required to transfer the pupil to a school outside the school district.

Under the federal regulations (68 FR 16789), this Policy only applies to offenses that occur in the 2003–2004 school year and thereafter. Beginning with the 2004–2005 school year, the district must provide the transfer option to victims of violent criminal offenses that occurred in the previous school year, if the determination that the pupil was a victim was made thirty days or fewer before the end of the school year.

The district will use the school choice option as one response to incidents of victimization. Additionally, the district will develop and implement appropriate strategies for addressing the circumstances that contribute to or support victimization, as well as consistently and proactively manage individuals who have victimized pupils. The district will promote the importance of school safety and respond to the needs of pupils and staff. Pursuant to the law, the district will provide an opportunity for pupils, parents and school district and law enforcement personnel to discuss methods for keeping schools safe from violence; to create school safety plans; and to recognize pupils in need of help. The district will organize activities to prevent school violence, including, but not limited to, age-appropriate opportunities for pupil discussion on conflict resolution, issues of pupil diversity and tolerance. Law enforcement personnel will be invited to join members of the teaching staff in the discussions. Programs shall also be provided for school district employees that are designated to help school district employees recognize warning signs of school violence and to instruct school district employees on recommended conduct during an incident of school violence.

N.J.S.A. 18A:17-46 requires a public hearing in the third week in October of each year for the Superintendent to report to the Board all acts of violence and vandalism that occurred in the district during the previous school year. The public hearing shall be transcribed and kept on file in the Board of Education Office. The transcript shall be made available to the public upon request. The Board must also file the transcript with the NJDOE for review.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 §9532

Adopted: 27 April 2009