

Frequently Asked Questions  
about

## Required Identification and Notification Letters to Be Sent to Parents of Students in Title I Schools Identified as Priority Schools and Optional Choice/Transfer Program

Revised 8/26/13

### 1. **What correspondence is required to be sent to parents of students attending schools identified as Priority Schools for the 2013-2014 school year?**

The *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), and the Michigan Department of Education's (MDE) recently approved ESEA Flexibility Waiver, requires **Title I schools** that are identified as Priority and Focus schools, to disseminate the following specific information to the parents of students attending Priority and Focus schools:

- ◆ **Letter of Identification and Notification** – A letter sent to parents of students enrolled in a Priority school, both those named last August to the 2012 cohort of Priority schools, and those yet to be named this summer to the 2013 cohort of Priority schools. The letter must be sent to parents of those students enrolled in the 2012-2013 school year and those anticipated by the district to enroll in a Priority school for the 2013-2014 school year. Also to be included in the letter are the reasons for its identification and the school's and district's plans to improve student achievement. The MDE has determined this letter must be sent so that it will be received by parents no later than August 20, 2013.

The MDE's original determination was that this letter should be sent so that it would be received by parents no later than August 20, 2013.

Our work to ensure absolute accuracy in the public release of the Top-to-Bottom list resulted in unavoidable delays, so that the deadline is hereby adjusted. **The required letters should be sent so that parents will receive them no later than 10 days following public release of the Top-to-Bottom list.**

The status of elementary and middle schools, alternative schools and high schools that are identified as Priority schools is based on academic achievement as well as participation on the MEAP and MME, and is used to determine whether the school is meeting Michigan School Proficiency Targets and where it ranks in a "Top to Bottom" list of schools and their performance. As a result of this ranking in a "Top to Bottom" list of schools and their performance, a low achieving school may be identified as a Priority school. A school is identified in the 2013 cohort because it is among the bottom 5% of the Top to Bottom list as determined by the MDE

Schools that are identified as Priority schools must engage in the requirements associated with this identification, including the creation of the parental notification document described above.

- ◆ Note that once identified, a Priority school is part of a cohort for a period of four years. As a result of the school improvement efforts made by the school and the district, if a school is no longer identified as a Priority school for the 2013-2014 school year it will be followed by

the MDE through Spring 2016. All required activities and supports related to the school's identification as a Priority school must continue so long as the school remains in the cohort.

Generally, the requirement to send the parent letter applies to students that were enrolled in a K-12 program in the 2012-2013 academic year and are eligible to return. However, where students are reasonably expected to attend the identified Title I Priority school in the normal course of events, parents must be sent the identification letter as well. This includes students that are entering kindergarten, students transitioning from elementary to middle school, and from middle to high school. Districts should clearly identify in their written policy and procedures how this will be implemented. The MDE recommends that districts be inclusive in the implementation of these requirements.

To reiterate, the above requirements apply only to **Title I schools** that are identified as Priority schools in the 2012 and 2013 cohorts.

If you have questions about this information or need more information about the required documentation to parents, please feel free to contact Greg Olszta at 517-241-4715 or [olsztag@michigan.gov](mailto:olsztag@michigan.gov).

**2. With regard to the required letter to be sent to the parents of students in the identified Priority school, does it make a difference whether the school's Title I participating status is Statewide or Targeted Assistance?**

No, targeted assistance vs. school wide status does not matter in this instance. Schools that are identified as Title I Priority schools must send notification to parents of all students enrolled in the school in the previous school year and expected to return. However, where students are reasonably expected to attend the identified Title I Priority school in the normal course of events, parents must be sent the identification letter as well. This includes students that are entering kindergarten, students transitioning from elementary to middle school, and from middle to high school. Districts should clearly identify in their written policy and procedures how this will be implemented. The MDE recommends that districts be inclusive in the implementation of these requirements. The MDE has determined this letter must be sent so that it will be received by parents no later than August 20, 2013.

The MDE's original determination was that this letter should be sent so that it would be received by parents no later than August 20, 2013.

Our work to ensure absolute accuracy in the public release of the Top-to-Bottom list resulted in unavoidable delays, so that the deadline is hereby adjusted. **The required letters should be sent so that parents will receive them no later than 10 days following public release of the Top-to-Bottom list.**

**3. What happens if a building identified as a Priority school that was NOT a Title I participating school changes status and becomes a Title I participating school?**

If the Priority school in the 2012 and 2013 cohorts elects to become a Title I participating building, then it must meet all of the requirements for that identification. The parent notification must be sent as soon as possible after the school has elected to receive Title I funds. As described above, the district **may** offer Choice/Transfer and transportation for students in the identified Priority school.

**4. Does the letter to parents have to follow the MDE template language or may the district tailor it to meet district specifics?**

The district must add language describing what the district and school are doing to improve academic achievement and describe local context but the template is intended to model the simplest way to meet the requirements as completely as possible. Letters to parents who elected the Choice/Transfer option for their student in past years must provide updated information about the status of the students' ability to continue in the Choice/Transfer option school and/or be provided transportation to the school for the 2013-2014 school year. Those parents should be provided at least a 14 day notice before the start of the **school year if transportation is to be discontinued** by the district, and/or if students will no longer be allowed to attend the Choice/Transfer option school elected in previous years

**5. May the district/school send the letter out via email message, or does it have to go out via us mail?**

The district may use email and/or the postal service but must document the receipt of emails were delivered and that those parents without email addresses are sent the letters in regular mail. Districts should also be able to document that letters were sent using the postal service.

**6. What is the obligation to send the parent letters for a school that has already started school for the 2013-2014 school year, e.g. year-round schools?**

The district must still send the notification because it is required, even if the school year is already under way.

**7. Do the parent notification letters have to be sent to new incoming students (i.e. incoming kindergarten, students matriculating from elementary to middle school, or middle school to high school for the 2013-2014 school year)?**

Yes, letters must be sent to all students anticipated to attend a Title I Priority school in the 2013-2014 school year. Generally, the requirement to send the parent letter applies to students that were enrolled in a K-12 program in the 2012-2013 academic year and are eligible to return. However, where students are reasonably expected to attend the Priority school in the normal course of events, parents must be sent the identification letter as well. This includes students that are entering kindergarten, students transitioning from elementary to middle schools and from middle to high school. Districts should clearly identify in their written policy and procedures how this will be implemented. The MDE recommends that districts be inclusive in the implementation of these requirements. The MDE has determined this letter must be sent so that it will be received by parents no later than August 20, 2013.

The MDE's original determination was that this letter should be sent so that it would be received by parents no later than August 20, 2013.

Our work to ensure absolute accuracy in the public release of the Top-to-Bottom list resulted in unavoidable delays, so that the deadline is hereby adjusted. **The required letters should be sent so that parents will receive them no later than 10 days following public release of the Top-to-Bottom list.**

**8. If a State School of Choice, non-resident, student is in our Title I Priority school from a neighboring district must we still send those parents the identification letters?**

Yes, letters must be sent to all students anticipated to attend the Priority school in the 2013-2014 school year. Generally, the requirement to send the parent letter applies to students that were enrolled in a K-12 program in the 2012-2013 academic year and are eligible to return. However, where students are reasonably expected to attend the Priority school in the normal course of events, parents must be sent the identification letter as well. This includes students that are entering kindergarten, students transitioning from elementary to middle schools and from middle to high school. Districts should clearly identify in their written policy and

procedures how this will be implemented. The MDE recommends that districts be inclusive in the implementation of these requirements.

**9. If a student enrolls in a Priority school in the middle of the year is the district still required to send the parents the identification letter after the start of the school year?**

Yes, the parents of the student enrolling in the identified Priority school after the normal start of the school year must still be sent a copy of the identification letter to parents.

**10. What are “Choice/Transfer” Requirements for Title I Priority Schools for the 2013-2014 school year?**

The Michigan Department of Education’s (MDE) recently amended ESEA Flexibility Waiver, effective with the 2013-2014 school year, **no longer requires that Title I schools identified as Priority and Focus schools must offer Choice/Transfer and transportation for students.**

Effective with the 2013-2014 school year, the school, district, or PSA are no longer required to continue transportation for students whose parents had in past years chosen to transfer students under the Choice/Transfer option. However, districts and schools are encouraged to be sensitive to the burdens that this will place upon families and students affected by this change.

- If the district elects to no longer provide transportation for students whose parents had in past years chosen to transfer students under the Choice/Transfer option, those parents **must be provided at least a 14 day notice** before the start of the **school year if transportation is to be discontinued** by the district, and/or if students will no longer be allowed to attend the Choice/Transfer option school elected in previous years
- If a school is identified as a **Priority** school for the 2012 or 2013 cohort, a district **may** elect to offer Choice/Transfer and transportation to students and to pay for transportation costs for those students to attend a Choice/Transfer option school, including a school selected in prior years, using the district’s Title I funds to pay for transportation costs.
- If the district chooses to offer Choice/Transfer and transportation in the 2013-2014 school year, Choice/Transfer option schools made available by districts to parents and students must not be identified by the MDE as a Priority or Focus school for the 2013-2014 school year, or identified as a Priority school for the 2012-2013 school year. Additional information, including sample letters will be sent to districts for their use
- If the district has **elected to offer Choice/Transfer and transportation in the 2013-2014 school year**, it must determine the budgeted amount using Title I funds for elected Choice/Transfer and transportation based upon locally determined need and anticipated actual costs for transportation
- If the district has **elected to offer Choice/Transfer and transportation in the 2013-2014 school year**, it must have written policy and procedures for implementation of the Choice/Transfer and transportation option such that the processes are open and transparent
- If the district has **elected to offer Choice/Transfer and transportation in the 2013-2014 school year**, transportation costs may **not** be budgeted from any district or building set-aside in the Consolidated Application.
- If the district elects, anticipated Choice/Transfer transportation costs are identified in the Consolidated Application budget as Pupil Transportation Services, Function Code 271
- The district may continue to allow students to attend the Choice/Transfer option school elected in previous years even though transportation to the Choice/Transfer option

school **may be discontinued** by the district; however, those parents must be provided at least a 14 day notice before the start of the **school year if transportation is to be discontinued** by the district

- If a school identified as a Priority or Focus school is **no longer a participating Title I building**, then the district is no longer required to provide or to pay for transportation costs for students that have elected to transfer to the Choice/Transfer option building(s) in previous years; however, those parents should be provided at least a 14 day notice before the start of the **school year if transportation is to be discontinued** by the district, and/or if students will no longer be allowed to attend the Choice/Transfer option school elected in previous years.

If a district elects to offer Choice/Transfer and transportation for the 2013-2014 school year, the MDE has drafted sample letter templates for district and school use. All template letters will need to be revised by the district to reflect current and accurate information for the building and the district before the letters are sent to parents. Letters must include specific details regarding the parents' right to transfer their student to another public school, including:

- ◆ Notice that transportation will be provided subject to certain cost limitations
- ◆ Notice that if the district receives more applications than can be accommodated, priority will be given to the lowest-achieving children from low-income families
- ◆ A list of available schools that are not identified as Priority in the 2012 or 2013 cohort, or Focus schools (attach copy of list)
- ◆ Other information to help parents decide which school(s) would be best for their student(s)

Districts will be required to submit to the MDE proof of documentation (signed copies of letters sent to parents and sample Choice/Transfer Request Forms) that the above information was sent to parents in a timely way. A future communication will be sent notifying districts to upload copies of signed letters, Choice/Transfer Request Forms, if applicable, and other documentation on the MDE Grant Electronic Monitoring System (GEMS). Districts should retain copies of all documentation that supports compliance with these requirements.