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Survey: Most parents unaware of choices for students in bad schools

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ALBANY - Most parents with children in poorly performing public schools don't realize their children have the right to transfer to better schools, according to a federally-funded survey released this week by Brighter Choice Charter School.

The survey was conducted using a \$4 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

The purpose of the grant money, which the school received in October, is to create options for children whose parents want them to attend better schools. Brighter Choice's efforts are focused on the Albany and Buffalo school systems.

Albany school Superintendent Lonnie Palmer said he wished the federal money used to fund the survey had been spent on something else, such as public school teachers, rather than "a survey with a political motive."

The survey shows that more needs to be done to make parents aware of their rights under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, said Tom Carroll, founder and chairman of Brighter Choice.

Signed a year ago, the No Child Left Behind Act allows children in failing money through the Bush administration's Voluntary Public School Choice Program. The other 12

public schools to transfer to better schools or receive free educational services, such as tutoring.

"A shocking number of parents have no idea that their children are in failing schools," Carroll said. "Over 70 percent of the parents had no idea."

If parents don't know their children are attending failing schools, they're not going to take advantage of the options available to them, Carroll said. "This certainly shows the need for an aggressive public education effort," he said.

Albany has three schools on the state Department of Education's roster of poorly performing schools: Arbor Hill Elementary, William S. Hackett Middle School and Philip Livingston Magnet Middle School.

Arbor Hill's test scores have improved, and the school could be removed from the list this year. Hackett and Livingston need to make improvements for the next two years.

The survey queried parents whose children attend Arbor Hill, Hackett and Philip Livingston. Once told their children were attending failing schools, 79 percent of the parents polled said recipients were school districts or state departments of education.

they would transfer their children to another school and 92 percent said they would take advantage of free tutoring services, according to the survey.

"An astounding number of students would transfer," Carroll said. Many parents said they favored creating more charter schools, he said.

The Albany school system has publicized the options available to parents, Palmer said. Letters were mailed home to every parent with a child in Livingston, Hackett and Arbor Hill, and the information was posted on the school's website.

Since the survey, nobody has called to ask to transfer schools, Palmer said. He questioned whether parents really want to see more charter schools. "People complain about the charter schools, because they're taking resources out of the building," he said.

Carroll is biased toward charter schools, Palmer said. "His thing is to show that charter schools are the way to go," he said.

Brighter Choice, Albany's second charter school, was the only school in the country to receive grant

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