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Tribune photo by Nancy Stone

Julian Mitchell, a 6th grader, works with teacher Laura Scherry at Disney Magnet School, to which he transferred this year. Julian was one of the few Chicago students who was able to change to a better school this year because spaces were so limited.

School reform pinch

Only 457 spots open for city students to transfer

By Ana Beatriz Cholo
Tribune staff reporter

Although tens of thousands of students will be eligible to switch to a better Chicago school this fall under federal education reforms, district officials say only 457 may be permitted to do so—the fewest since the No Child Left Behind Act took effect.

About 1,100 slots were available at 38 schools last year. This time, officials project that as

many as 493 schools—or 82 percent of the district—may be required to allow their students to move elsewhere because of low test scores.

That would leave only about 20 better-performing schools that would have enough space to receive transfer students, Chicago Public Schools officials said.

In addition, no high school students would get the opportunity to transfer under the law because only 10 of the 90 high

schools in the district are expected to stay off the failing list. Of those, seven are selective-enrollment schools that are set aside for high-achieving students, and the other three are full, officials said.

The “choice” provision is the most crucial element of No Child Left Behind but also the most problematic for many school districts around the country. Chicago, with about 600 schools, has struggled to keep up with the mandates of the law

for the last two years.

Chicago schools chief Arne Duncan, who was in Springfield Thursday to lobby for state funding, said the district is doing what it can to comply. “Given the constraints of this law, there is very little new we can add on top,” Duncan said.

Officials are making some changes this year, including a new effort to ensure that students who are unable to change

PLEASE SEE SCHOOLS, PAGE 16