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■ EDUCATION

# Shifts in programs ordered

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Associated Press

Pennsylvania must restructure the way it provides education for students with disabilities who often wait more than a year to be placed in proper programs, a federal order says.

The order, received yesterday by attorneys in the case, was in response to a lawsuit against the state and the Department of Education brought by parents of children with disabilities.

Plaintiffs said their children fell through the cracks of a system that lacks enough conveniently located services.

The order listed requirements the state must meet, and said the state must track disabled students who cannot find placement, work with school districts to make sure programs are available locally and determine areas of the state that lack services.

The order also requires the departments of Education, Public Welfare and other agencies to have better coordination in helping to provide services.

The order was signed by Judge Sylvia H. Rambo, who last summer found Pennsylvania violated a federal law to provide "free appropriate public education" for every handicapped student. The new order spells out what the state must do to fix the problem.

"We think it represents really significant progress forward," said co-counsel Janet F. Stotland. "We are hopeful if it is implemented properly we'll see progress for youngsters who historically have not been well served."

More than 280,000 students are enrolled in special education programs statewide. However, there is no official estimate on the number of students waiting to be placed in programs.

PA Dept. of Educ.