

Kentucky Board of Education  
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Report from the Secretary  
Education and Workforce Development Cabinet

Improving Achievement through Inter-District Transfer

School districts in Kentucky always work hard to meet the needs of their students by offering innovative academic programs, instructional approaches, and co-curricular activities. But even with the best of intentions, students' needs and career aspirations are so diverse today that no school district can ever be expected to meet each demand. Putting students in the position of not being able to pursue their area of interest or career pathway because their aspirations do not align with the programs available in their home districts is not in the best interest of the student or our Commonwealth. It is even more unfortunate, however, that Kentucky students miss opportunities to participate in innovative programs aligned with their personal goals when seats are available in neighboring school districts.

We can improve this current reality by adopting a statewide policy which allows students to seamlessly attend schools in districts where they do not live when seats are available. Currently in Kentucky, local school districts may enter into voluntary inter-district enrollment agreements with other school districts allowing nonresident students to attend. While that current framework allows for some students to benefit from programs in neighboring districts, an enhanced statewide policy allows for many more students to benefit academically.

There are models for Kentucky to look to. In Michigan, state law provides for voluntary inter-district transfer. The receiving school district may limit the number of nonresident students it accepts in a grade, school or program. Receiving districts must give priority to siblings of enrolled students, and if the number of transfer requests exceeds capacity, the receiving district must hold a lottery and create a waiting list. Districts are permitted to refuse students who have been suspended from another school within the past two years or expelled at any time. Parents are responsible for transportation.

Similarly, Indiana has a statewide voluntary inter-district transfer law. Parents are permitted to submit a written request to transfer outside of their reside school district if: (a) parents believe a student can be better accommodated as they work to achieve their academic and career aspirations, (b) the school to which the student would like to transfer permits the student to receive an Academic Honors Diploma, (c) the school from which the student would like to transfer is overcrowded and the school to which the student is requesting transfer is not, or (d) the student has medical conditions that can be better accommodated at the school to which the student requests to transfer.

Two primary principles support allowing inter-district transfer or open enrollment across the Commonwealth. First, parents are and should be children's first and primary teachers. Parents know their children best. As such, parents should ultimately be the ones responsible for making decisions about where their children attend schools. Second is the principle that public school funding is for the

purpose of educating students, and that funding should follow students to whatever public schools they attend.

One question that routinely surfaces is athletics. A straight forward solution would give the student a choice of playing at their home school or red-shirt for their first year at the out-of-district school.

A second question involves funding. A potential solution would allow SEEK and federal funding to follow the student (as if the student moved) while local funding would stay in the home district. This approach allows approximately 60% of typical tuition to follow the child as incremental income for open seats in the receiving district with the remaining 40% staying in the student's home district (without the expense of educating the student).

Students in one Kentucky school district should never be prohibited from benefiting from innovative programs in neighboring districts, especially when parents are willing to provide transportation and an open seat is available. It's time for Kentucky to give consideration to this powerful tool available to parents in 19 other states. Providing students access to an expanded array of specialized academic and career programs is great for the student and a major step forward for the future of our Commonwealth.