



TEXAS PUBLIC POLICY FOUNDATION

EMPOWERING PARENTS THROUGH OPEN ENROLLMENT

Texas policy should be updated to:

- End the practice of charging students tuition for a public education
- Create a transparent way for parents to find out which public schools have space for their child
- Ensure the student transfer process is easy and predictable
- Regularly review past data to learn how to better support Texas students and schools

As Texas moves to empower parents, state leaders should ensure meaningful student access to open seats in Texas public schools.

Students can apply to transfer to a public school campus in another district, if that district has a policy that allows it. However, only 2.6% of Texas students successfully transferred districts in 2018–19, a significantly lower rate than in states with more robust open enrollment policies. For example, Florida requires that, if a school district has an open seat and a child applies for that seat, the district must accept them; as a result, 10% of their public school students are transfer-ins. This low rate is especially unfortunate since Texas and national data consistently show that transferring students tend to transfer to higher-performing districts.

Public school districts can charge students up to tens of thousands of dollars per student per year to fill an empty seat—while also receiving full funding for those students through the state formulas. Districts can also change tuition year over year, creating significant uncertainty for transferring families.

In addition, districts are still allowed to screen transferring students based on things like past academic performance and attendance history. Districts can also make students reapply to transfer every year, even if there's still space for them at their campus—again causing unnecessary uncertainty for families.

30–1 Recent open enrollment proposals in both chambers have seen significant bipartisan support, including a 30–1 Senate passage vote and bipartisan coauthors.

UNDER RECENT PROPOSALS:

No resident student would be denied entry to their zoned school because of these reforms. Transfer students would continue to fill available positions not occupied by resident students.

Districts could (but would not be required to) deny the application of any student under a current suspension or expulsion. Under some proposals, districts would also be able to revoke the transfer of a student in certain cases.

Parent empowerment through open enrollment would make no change to the UIL's governance of student participation in sports.

FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS:

Empowering parents through open enrollment would not require districts to create additional facilities or hire new teachers or staff. In fact, these reforms would bring in additional revenue for districts which have open seats.



The following fiscal effects on school districts are already part of current statute and would continue to apply to the student transfer process under recent proposals:

- A student who transfers from one campus to another within the same district creates a neutral financial impact to the district.
- When a student transfers from one district to another district, that student is counted toward the receiving district's formula funding in the same way that a resident student is counted.
- A student transferring from one district to another does not impact either district's locally approved I&S tax rates or revenues, which fund capital expenditures such as facilities. Empowering parents through open enrollment would not require districts to accept students for whom they do not have current capacity.
- Districts are not required to provide transportation to transferring students but are allowed to provide it under certain circumstances.

TEXAS DISTRICTS LEADING THE WAY

Districts across Texas have voluntarily led in adopting student-focused open enrollment policies. TEA already provides supports for districts developing such policies through the System of Great Schools program.

- Dallas ISD has devoted extensive effort to informing families inside and outside the district of school options and potential openings using its SchoolFinder guide.
- Midland ISD has created a common application process, ApplyMidland, in which a student can use one common application to apply to multiple district campuses at the same time.
- San Antonio ISD has opened a portfolio of schools that offer seats to students across the county and surrounding area.
- Though some districts continue to charge transfer students tuition, other districts, such as Eanes ISD, choose to admit transfer students without charging them.

OPEN ENROLLMENT IN OTHER STATES

Many other states offer open enrollment options to students. Florida and Oklahoma are two that offer exceptional student access and transparency:

- Florida allows students to transfer to any public school with open seats, and they may remain at that campus until they complete the highest grade level offered. The majority of students transferring to other districts are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. Over 90% of those students transfer to an A- or B- rated district.
- Oklahoma also allows students to transfer to any available seat. Every year, it publicly reports information on numbers of transfer applications, approvals, and rejections, and reasons for transfer rejections. This kind of transparency confirms that the program is working as intended: in fall 2022, for example, 77% of transfer applicants were admitted. Among denied applications, 88% were for capacity reasons.



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