

HB 711 -- ADMISSION OF NONRESIDENT PUPILS

SPONSOR: Pollitt

This bill establishes transfer procedures to nonresident districts for students in public schools.

DEFINITIONS

The bill adds Sections 167.1200 to 167.1230, RSMo; establishing the "Public School Open Enrollment Act". For the purposes of the Act, the bill defines "nonresident district" and "resident district" among other definitions.

TRANSFER POLICY AND PARTICIPATION (Section 167.1205)

The bill establishes a public school open enrollment program with the design to improve quality instruction and increase parental involvement, provide access to programs and classes, and offer opportunity to align parental curriculum options to personal beliefs.

The bill specifies that any student beginning kindergarten or already enrolled in a public school may attend a public school in a nonresident district participating in the program. Districts must declare participation in the open enrollment program by December 1st for the following school year. Participating districts are not required to add teachers, staff, or classrooms to accommodate transfer applicants.

The bill includes a procedure for districts when a transferring student has special education needs. Schools can also establish standards for transfer applications and post the information on the school website and in the student handbook. School districts that are served by special school districts must reach an agreement with such special school district regarding finance, staffing, and other items prior to participating in the program.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) or an entity skilled in policy development must develop a model open enrollment transfer policy as outlined in the bill. All public schools must adopt the model policy, regardless of participation in the Program; however, each school board can modify the model policy based on the district's needs.

Students who wish to attend nonresident schools that have an academic or competitive entrance process must furnish proof that they meet the admission requirements.

Students that participate in open enrollment in high school can not participate in varsity sports during the first 365 days of enrollment in a nonresident district with exceptions outlined in the bill.

No transfers under this Act can begin until the school year 2026-27.

Districts can restrict the number of outgoing transfer students to 3% of the previous school year's enrollment. DESE must develop and maintain an online resource to facilitate applications and provide a searchable public database for allowable transfers.

#### APPLYING FOR TRANSFER (Section 167.1210)

Any student who applies for a transfer can only accept one transfer per school year, although the student can return to his or her resident district and, if so, complete a full semester before applying for another transfer. Students can complete all remaining school years in their nonresident district and any sibling can enroll if the district has the capacity as provided by the bill. For the purposes of determining federal and state aid the student must be counted as a resident pupil of the nonresident district, except for federal calculations of military impact aid. Parents will be responsible for transportation to the nonresident school or to an existing bus stop location in the nonresident district. Students who qualify for free and reduced meals can have transportation expenses reimbursed quarterly as outlined in the bill.

#### PARENT PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE FUND (Sections 167.1211 and 167.1212)

The bill creates the "Parent Public School Choice Fund" which is created with an \$80 million appropriation to be used to supplement open enrollment transfers from any resident district for transportation cost for students that qualify for free and reduced meals and to reimburse for special needs education as outlined in Section 167.1211.

#### NUMBER OF TRANSFER STUDENTS (Section 167.1215)

The bill specifies that annually, before December 1st, each school district must set and publish the number of transfer students the district is willing to receive for the following school year. This number does not have to be more than zero. Districts will also develop a policy for waitlists and the department must include such waitlist online and notify an applicant if they have been waitlisted.

#### APPLICATION PROCESS (Section 167.1220)

The processes for a transfer application and the details for notifications of acceptance or rejection are specified within the bill. The Department must create an online resource to receive applications which must be submitted by February 1st. The Department will conduct a lottery of applications by February 15th and facilitate and provide notice to all applicants regarding the acceptance or rejection of each application.

The Department must be notified of all accepted students and will request an anonymous survey related to the reasons for participating in the Open Enrollment Program. The Department will publish an annual report based on the survey results.

#### ALLOWED EXEMPTIONS (Section 167.1225)

This bill specifies that prior to December 1st, a school district can annually declare an exemption for the upcoming school year, from the requirements set forth in this bill, provided that the school district is subject to a desegregation order or mandate of a federal court or agency remedying the effects of past racial segregation or subject to a settlement agreement remedying the effects of past racial segregation.

The bill requires that any student who transfers from a K-eight district enroll before the start of the student's sixth grade year, or the K-eight district must pay tuition as specified under Section 167.131. Additional exemptions are specified for students who qualify for transfers under other listed sections.

#### APPEAL PROCEDURE (Section 167.1227)

The bill determines when a student may be denied a transfer based on his or her discipline record and includes an appeal procedure.

#### ANNUAL REPORTING (Section 167.1229)

The Department must collect and report data annually from school districts on the number of applications and study the effects of the public school choice program transfers. The report must be submitted annually by December 1st to the Joint Committee on Education, the House Committee on Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Senate Committee on Education.

#### ALTERNATIVE FUNDING (Section 167.1230)

The bill requires that enrollment of students under the program not occur before July 1, 2026. The bill outlines what steps must be

taken if the Parent Public School Choice Fund does not have sufficient funding necessary to provide for eligible reimbursements for transportation and special education expenses. Transportation costs must be considered eligible expenses under 163.161, and special education students will be provided additional weight in the formula calculation for the nonresident district.

This bill is similar to HCS HB 1989 (2024) and HCS HB 253 (2023).