

Open Enrollment in K-12 Public Education

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UPCOMING POLICY BRIEFS . . .

- ✓ *PL221: Is Indiana’s Accountability Law Working or is it Another Passing Education Reform Fad?*
- ✓ *Alternative Schools: What’s in a Name?*
- ✓ *The Progress of AP Incentive Programs*

INTRODUCTION

School choice can be broadly defined as any alternative to traditional public education that provides parents a degree of discretion in the selection of the school their children will attend. There are a number of school choice initiatives underway in the U.S. K-12 education system, including: charter schools, magnet schools, alternative programs, private school tuition vouchers, homeschooling, and open enrollment—the focus of this report.

School choice options are not only increasing in availability, but also in use. According to the National Household Education Survey (NHES), the percentage of students attending public schools to which they were assigned based on residency has declined from 80% in 1993 to 69% in 2007. Although private schools (13%) and homeschooling (3%) have grown in popularity, a larger percentage of those seeking alternatives are using some form of public school choice (15%) (NCES, 2009).

The various forms of school choice are intended to enhance student achievement outcomes and spur innovation through the introduction of competitive market forces in the educational system and satisfy parent desire for a greater say in their children’s education. Although choice options are becoming more commonplace in the public education arena, their efficacy continues to be intensely debated.

Proponents of open enrollment, in particular, see this option as a means to introduce competition while preserving the integrity of public education. To some, the adoption of an open enrollment law or policy, over other choice options, circumvents the debate over the appropriateness or constitutionality of using taxpayers’ funds for vouchers to private and religious schools. However, opponents of this strategy reject the feasibility of open enrollment and argue that, like all choice

plans, it would have a detrimental effect on public education as a whole.

The school choice option of open enrollment has yet to be rigorously evaluated, resulting in differing opinions about its potential advantages and disadvantages. In the past, the Center for Evaluation & Education Policy (CEEP) has examined the role of charter schools and homeschooling. Alternative education will be discussed in a subsequent Education Policy Brief. The primary objective of this brief is to explore open enrollment by examining the ways in which it is currently implemented. A second purpose of this brief is to identify the potential strengths and weaknesses of open enrollment in order to develop a more complete understanding of its contribution to education reform. Finally, recent changes to school funding in Indiana that more readily enable the use of open enrollment make this a timely report.

DEFINITION AND TYPES OF OPEN ENROLLMENT

The objective of open enrollment is to increase choice by giving students the ability to transfer from one public school to another public school. It exists entirely within the public school system. Open enrollment is meant to give parents and students school choice by providing more public school options and expanding the educational marketplace. Until recently there was no clear distinction between open enrollment and school choice due to the generally limited possibilities for exercising choice. With the emergence of multiple educational options such as charter, magnet, and alternative schools, there is clearly a need to distinguish open enrollment as a unique approach to choice. School choice is a general category for any program that provides parents and students with non-traditional options, of which open enrollment is a single type.

Open enrollment policies exist along two different dimensions. The first dimension is that of the flexibility school districts have in accepting transfer students. Mandatory open enrollment policies require school district participation, while voluntary open enrollment gives school districts the option of participating (ECS, 2008). The second dimension relates to whether open enrollment is available only within the school district in which the student resides (intradistrict), or whether the student may choose to attend a school in another school district (interdistrict). Considering both of these dimensions permits the classification of four basic types of open enrollment strategies: mandatory intradistrict, mandatory interdistrict, voluntary intradistrict, and voluntary interdistrict. Specific details concerning the legal transfer of students are a responsibility of the individual states or of local school districts, leading to a diversity of policies among and even within states.

POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES OF OPEN ENROLLMENT

Supporters of choice programs such as open enrollment assert that competition is a workable approach to producing a better educational system. Competition, accountability, assistance to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and a principled support for freedom of choice have all been identified by proponents as advantages of school choice plans. Advocates suggest that by introducing market mechanisms into the K-12 educational system, competition will lead to continual improvement as schools work to recruit and retain students. If schools are unwilling to meet the needs of those who attend, parents and students would have the ability to seek other educational options.

Competition is the central element of any school choice plan. The evidence that competition will improve student performance is mixed, with research suggesting both positive and negative effects of educational competition. “Only recently have choice policies been implemented in the U.S. on a scale sufficient to potentially elicit competitive responses from public schools.

As yet, existing empirical studies permit no firm conclusions regarding the effects of school choice policies on student achievement and efficiency in traditional public schools” (Arsen & Ni, 2008). Open enrollment in particular has received limited attention by educational researchers. Most

research efforts on school choice aim at evaluating charter or voucher programs. The limited number of quality studies of open enrollment programs generally found a positive, yet small effect on student achievement on standardized tests (Miron, Evergreen, & Urschel, 2008).

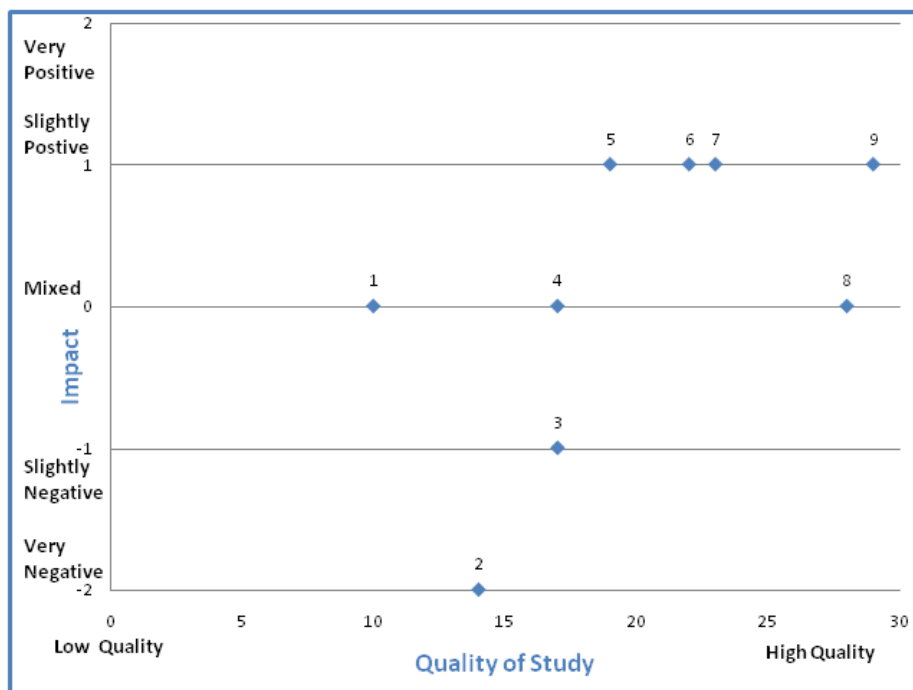
In a recent study evaluating the impact of public school choice, nine separate studies were examined and compared. The outcome of this analysis is presented in Figure 1 (Miron, Evergreen, & Urschel, 2008). Each study was rated on its effect on student achievement and its overall quality and reliability, with “-2” indicating a very negative result, “-1” a slightly negative result, “0” a mixed result, “1” slightly positive, and “2” a very positive effect of public school choice on student achievement. Of the nine studies, four were rated as having a slightly positive effect on student achievement, three had a mixed effect, one a slightly negative effect, and one other a very negative effect on student achievement.

One potential benefit of competition through open enrollment is the creation of incentives for traditional public schools to embrace reform. A recent CEEP study of the effectiveness of charter schools in Indiana states: “it appears that charter schools have played some role, through market competition, in

motivating school corporations to make positive structural and programmatic changes.” The study did not demonstrate student academic improvement outcomes different from traditional public schools, but schools competing with charter schools did make systematic changes in order to maintain student population (Akey, Plucker et al., 2009).

Proponents of open enrollment argue that accountability is another advantage of competition. Increased accountability to students and parents stems from the ability to transfer out of a school if they are unsatisfied. This requires schools to employ and create several different educational strategies to meet the needs of every student in order to maintain their student population. Accountability could produce positive educational experimentation and innovation as seen in CEEP’s study of Indiana charter schools (Education Week, 2004). There is some evidence that parents who are capable of exercising choice on behalf of their children are happier with the quality of education than their peers who are not. According to the 2007 NHES, 65% of parents who sent their children to public schools of their choice considered themselves “very satisfied” with the schools their children attended, while only 56% of parents with children attending schools to which they had been assigned considered themselves

FIGURE 1. The Effect of Public School Choice on Student Achievement



Source: Miron, G., Evergreen, S., & Urschel, J. (2008). *The impact of school choice reforms on student achievement*. East Lansing, MI: Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice.

“very satisfied.” Although the data include all public choice options, not just open enrollment, it is likely that the vast majority of students exercising choice are doing so through open enrollment. For example, charter schools serve under 3% of all enrolled students (Center for Education Reform, 2009).

Concerning low-income families, Howard Fuller of the Black Alliance for Education Options has stated that, “the only people who are trapped in schools that don’t work for them or their parents are the poor” Mickelson, Bottia, & Southworth, 2008). Unlike upper income families, the financially underprivileged do not have the option of simply relocating to a better school district if they are unsatisfied. Open enrollment allows families without the financial capacity to move their residence to still experience the benefits of choice (*Education Week*, 2004).

Participation rates in choice programs vary and could potentially undermine the benefits of open enrollment. Participation can be used as a potential indicator of the difficulty of implementation or the lack of public support. CEEP’s research on open enrollment found the potential number of open enrollment participants to be lower than expected. In the first year of Wisconsin’s open enrollment plan in 1998-99, of the 5,535 total transfer applications, 4,371 transfers were approved, and of these only 2,464 students actually transferred. A total of 1,164 transfer applications were denied, mostly due to space limitations. Every district in Wisconsin experienced some transfer in and out but the net change was small.

Ohio, in its second year of a voluntary interdistrict open enrollment policy during 1998-99, had only 57% of its districts participate and only 1% of the student population transferred, raising doubts that open enrollment had substantial effects (J.A. Plucker, personal communication, December 24, 2006). However, the mere potential for students to leave school districts could encourage innovation and reform as school districts became more accountable to their student population. Minimal student transfer is not an absolute indicator of the failure of or lack of demand for a school choice program. There is the possibility for participation in open enrollment programs to increase once the program has become established. More recent trends in Wisconsin have shown an increase in transfer students, from 2,464 total student transfers in 1998-99 to 21,028 in 2006-07 (Kava, 2009).

POTENTIAL DISADVANTAGES WITH OPEN ENROLLMENT

Opponents of open enrollment reject the idea that competition will necessarily lead to generalized gains in student achievement. Aside from doubts about the empirical effects of competition on participating students, there is the fear that open enrollment could have a deleterious effect on low-income families and segregate schools.

If competition were to occur in the realm of education it can be assumed that some schools would fail. Opponents of choice believe a sufficient number of failed schools could have a negative effect on the educational system as a whole. Students who do not have the means to transfer out of a failing school would be trapped. Schools that are already losing students could continue to lose funding and would eventually lack the ability to improve; instead, that school would continue to struggle while its students suffered the consequences. Competition could thereby endanger the future success of some students and schools (*Education Week*, 2004).

Critics doubt the benefit of open enrollment for low-income students. School choice systems rely on the active involvement of informed parents. Opponents of school choice fear that more affluent and better educated parents will participate, reinforcing class inequality among schools (Mickelson et al., 2008). Furthermore, there is the possibility that the most engaged parents of every background would be drawn off to the “best” schools, leaving the remainder of educational systems without the social capital to make improvements. In addition, CEEP’s research shows that in a large portion of states and districts with many educational options racial diversity within schools tends to decrease, with white students moving from mixed race to more homogenous schools. This would not only segregate schools, but would limit transfer options for students by running afoul of school desegregation orders. In addition, schools have the right to reject students based on a “racial imbalance.” If schools are becoming more ethnically homogenous due to open enrollment, students will be unable to transfer based on circumstances beyond their control (J.A. Plucker, personal communication, December 24, 2006).

Some opponents of choice programs argue that although “in theory open enrollment interdistrict choice plans could counteract the race and SES segregation in urban schools by providing students with an opportunity to transfer

to higher-performing suburban schools, the evidence indicates open enrollment plans have not done so” (Mickelson et al., 2008). There are practical problems impeding lower-income families’ ability to transport their student to another school district despite the option being present. Structural limitations such as parental responsibility for student transportation, some districts’ right not to participate in open enrollment, and their decisions on which students to accept and not accept make open enrollment “more symbolic than genuine, and in fact...allow more advantaged students to transfer to a relatively whiter, more affluent school system, thereby exacerbating race and SES inequality between districts” (Mickelson et al., 2008).

Implementation of open enrollment may be an obstacle as well. Schools can choose simply not to participate as is the case in Indiana with interdistrict transfer policies. Some schools are not willing to accept transfers. As seen in Wisconsin and Ohio, participation rates were initially extremely low. Several school boards in Indiana are opposed to open enrollment and believe students should be required to attend schools in which they are geographically situated. If even a small portion of districts or schools are unwilling to accept transfers, it will be difficult for open enrollment to be implemented. School choice could also have unanticipated consequences as the link between residence and education is broken. Voters might be less willing to support education funding and local involvement in schools could be affected if a substantial portion of students attending a local school are from outside the community.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS SCHOOL CHOICE

It is unclear to what degree public opinion supports open enrollment policies. National education surveys tend to focus on the broader concept of school choice, which includes, but does not specifically address, open enrollment. Furthermore, surveys of support for school choice in the abstract have yielded ambiguous results, making it difficult to draw any definitive conclusions about current public attitudes towards open enrollment.

The conflicted nature of public opinion is exemplified by the Phi Delta Kappa (PDK)/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools. Respondents were asked to respond to the following: “A proposal has been made which would allow parents to send their school-age children to any public,

private, or church-related schools they choose. For those parents choosing nonpublic schools, the government would pay all or part of the tuition. Would you favor or oppose this proposal in your state?" The poll found that 41% were in favor, while 58% were opposed to this type of proposal. However, the ambiguity of "all or part of the tuition" invited criticism of the survey. To remedy these concerns, the PDK/Gallup Poll follows up by asking, "Would you be in favor of this proposal if the government paid all the tuition?" The results showed that 67% were opposed while just 33% were in favor of the proposal. When respondents were asked if they "would be in favor of this proposal if the government paid just part of the tuition," 51% were in favor while 48% were opposed (Rose & Gallup, 2007).

Nationally about half of all surveyed are in favor of school choice options. However, unlike other school choice plans, open enrollment does not require substantial government funding. As the PDK/ Gallup poll illustrates, people are more inclined to support a choice program that the government does not completely fund (Rose & Gallup, 2007). Unlike private school vouchers, open enrollment is a choice option that introduces a measure of competition while avoiding the opposition of those who are opposed to choice programs which are heavily funded by the government.

When compared to options of additional funding to improve low performing schools or financial support for tuition used as methods for school improvement, the option of open enrollment is least preferred among Indiana residents. School choice broadly defined (including those supporting both vouchers and open enrollment) as a means for school advancement is supported by 40% of Hoosiers. The views of Indiana residents were examined in CEEP's 2008 Public Opinion Survey on Education in Indiana. The survey asked:

Assume you had a child attending a public school that has been placed on academic probation by either the state or federal government. Which would you prefer: to have additional efforts made in your child's present school to help him or her achieve, to transfer your child to another public school that is not on probation, or receive state financial support to offset part or all of the tuition for a private school?

Approximately 53% of Indiana residents supported additional funding, while 18% were in favor of public transfer (open enrollment). About 23% of Hoosiers preferred the option of receiving financial support for tuition; the

remaining respondents did not know or did not respond to the question.

WHAT ARE STATES DOING?

States have pursued a range of different open enrollment policies. Figures 2 and 3 represent each state's open enrollment policy. Figure 2 displays which states' open enrollment policies are mandatory, voluntary, or a combination of both (varying whether intradistrict or interdistrict). Figure 3 shows which states have enacted policies that are interdistrict, intradistrict, or a combination of both.

According to information acquired from the Education Commission of the States, 46 states have some type of open enrollment policy (see Table 1). In all, 11 states require full intradistrict mandatory open enrollment, with 15 requiring intradistrict choice in some cases. Similarly, 9 states have mandatory interdistrict policies, with 9 others requiring open enrollment across school districts in some circumstances. While 5 states have some form of voluntary intradistrict plans, 29 states permit students to attend school in different districts if the receiving school is willing. Only 20 states specify some level of transportation support for students making use of open enrollment (ECS, 2008).

OPEN ENROLLMENT IN INDIANA

Indiana open enrollment laws exemplify the distinction between mandatory and voluntary policy discussed previously. Indiana has enacted three open enrollment policies or laws. First, a mandatory intradistrict law was enacted by the Indiana General Assembly in 1995 (PL 340) that only applies to Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS). Schools outside of IPS are not held to the same standards and have the capability of defining their own intradistrict transfer policy within their corporation. The second policy is a result of the adoption of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB provides a school choice option to students in schools that fail to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The third Indiana policy is voluntary interdistrict and allows a district to choose to participate.

Mandatory Intradistrict - Indiana Code 20-25-7-1

There are several precedents for open enrollment policies in the state of Indiana. In 1993,

under former Superintendent Sherl Gilbert, Indianapolis Public Schools instituted the "Select Schools" plan giving parents the ability to send students to schools across the district, but implementation problems regarding transportation were prevalent and led to the abandonment of the plan in 1997. In 1995, as part of a reform of the Indiana Public School (IPS) system, the Indiana legislature crafted language that suggested the creation of an intradistrict open enrollment system in the Indianapolis school system. As re-codified, the legislation reads as follows:

Indiana Code 20-25-7
Chapter 7. Neighborhood Schools

IC 20-25-7-1

Parental Choice Program

Section 1. The school city shall offer a parental choice program that allows a parent the opportunity to choose the school in the school city that the parent's child will attend. *As added by P.L. 1-2005, SEC. 9.*

IC 20-25-7-2

Criteria for parental choices and assignment to schools

Section 2. (a) The board shall establish appropriate criteria to:

1. set priorities for parental choices
2. assign students to schools

(b) Criteria established under this section must provide that if the parent of a student chooses to enroll the student in a neighborhood school, the student will be assigned to the neighborhood schools, subject only to building capacity limitations.

As added by P.L. 1-2005, SEC. 9.

Although the language of the legislation implies the right of Indianapolis parents to exercise school choice within the public school system, it does not specifically endorse an open enrollment policy. The provision granting the school board the ability to "establish appropriate criteria" introduces further ambiguity. Although Indianapolis has not adopted a full-scale open enrollment system, it does have a substantial magnet school program that is intended to meet the requirements of the "parental choice program" legislation.

NCLB

NCLB public school choice requirements have been incorporated into Indiana law and must be followed by all school corporations. NCLB deals primarily with intradistrict transfer. NCLB provides students attending Indiana Title I schools (generally schools with large percentages of low income students) the option of public school choice. More specifically, students attending Title I schools that do not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for

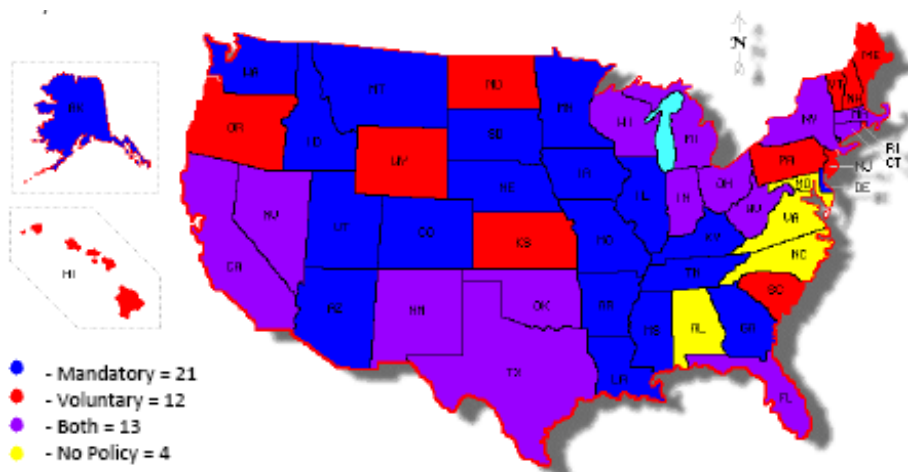
two consecutive years are allowed to transfer. Schools not meeting AYP for two consecutive years are identified by NCLB as “Level 1” schools. “Level 1” schools are given school improvement status requiring public school choice for students in the school. Transportation costs are absorbed by the transferring school, and local educational agencies (LEAs) must spend up to 20% of the Title I allocations on these costs.

Public school choice remains an option until the school is no longer considered “Level 1” status. Every student from a school identified as “Level 1” is eligible for public school transfer. Schools that do not meet AYP for two consecutive years are required to provide parents with notification and information of their school choice options. A student transferring out of a “Level 1” school must transfer to a non-Title I school or a Title I school that currently demonstrates AYP. If no school within the student’s district meets the AYP targets, schools must, to the best of their abilities, provide other eligible transfer options. Under these circumstances, “Level 1” schools may arrange options with schools outside of their own district. The lowest achieving and lowest income students in “Level 1” schools are given highest priority. “Level 1” schools are not required to grant parents their first choice transfer option; however, federal regulation does not allow schools to deny a transfer request based solely on lack of physical capacity (Bathon & Spradlin, 2007).

Voluntary Interdistrict - Indiana Code 20-25-11

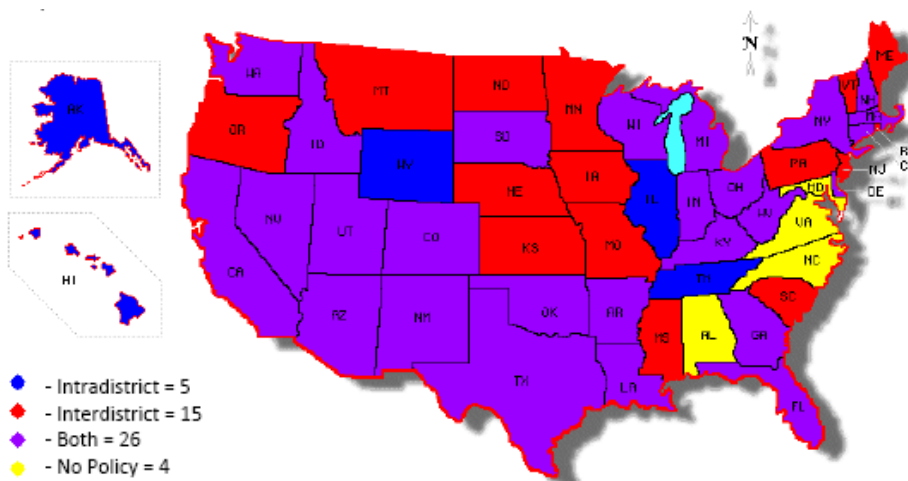
This statute allows parents of any student to request a transfer from a school corporation in which the student has a legal settlement (i.e., home district) to a transferee school corporation in Indiana or another state. Students can transfer outside of their home district if they can be better accommodated in a different school corporation. Better accommodation is determined by examining crowded conditions of the transferrer corporation, curriculum offerings at the high school level that are important to the vocational or academic aspirations of the student, medical reasons, and lack of accreditation of the transferee school. For the transfer to occur, both districts must concur and adhere to guidelines. Indiana does permit a district to accept a transferring student without the permission of the home district if the parents pay the tuition costs—referred to as transfer tuition. These guidelines only apply to those districts that

FIGURE 2. Mandatory vs. Voluntary Open Enrollment Policy



Note: Identifying states that have enacted only mandatory or only voluntary open enrollment policies, states that may have enacted both mandatory and voluntary policies, and states that have no open enrollment policy.
Source: Education Commission of the States. (2008). *Open enrollment 50-state report*. Retrieved

FIGURE 3. Intradistrict vs. Interdistrict Open Enrollment Policy



Note: Identifying states that have enacted only Intradistrict or only Interdistrict open enrollment policies, states that may have enacted both Intradistrict and Interdistrict policies, and states that have no open enrollment policy.
Source: Education Commission of the States. (2008). *Open enrollment 50-state report*. Retrieved

choose to participate in interdistrict transfer; corporations do have the option of whether or not student transfer requests are accepted.

CURRENT OPEN ENROLLMENT ISSUES IN INDIANA

There have been multiple attempts to institute a statewide interdistrict open enrollment system. In recent years, in both 2007 and 2009, bills sponsored by State Senator Luke Kenly

passed the State Senate but were not taken up by the House of Representatives. The 2007 version of the bill (S.B. 262) permitted students to transfer to schools within or outside of their district of residence and provided funds to cover transfer tuition, but made parents bear the cost of transportation expenses. The bill also required that school districts inform parents of their right to exercise open enrollment and provide the parents with the school’s annual performance report. With the passage of Public Law 146 (House Bill 1001) in 2008 and the consequent reduction in

TABLE 1. Specific Open Enrollment Policy by State

	Mandatory	Voluntary	Both Voluntary/Mandatory
Intradistrict	Mandatory Intradistrict: 3 States - Alaska, Illinois, Tennessee	Voluntary Intradistrict: 2 States - Hawaii, Wyoming	Voluntary/Mandatory Intradistrict: None
Interdistrict	Mandatory Interdistrict: 6 States - Iowa, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska	Voluntary Interdistrict: 9 States - Kansas, Maine, New Jersey, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont	Voluntary/Mandatory Interdistrict: None
Both Intradistrict/ Interdistrict	Mandatory Intradistrict/Interdistrict: 12 States - Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Utah, Washington	Voluntary Intradistrict/Interdistrict: 1 State - New Hampshire	Mandatory Intradistrict and Voluntary Interdistrict: 11 States - California, Florida, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, West Virginia Mandatory Interdistrict and Voluntary Intradistrict: 2 States - Connecticut, Wisconsin

Source: Education Commission of the States. (2008). *Open enrollment 50-state report*. Retrieved June 24, 2009, from <http://mb2.ecs.org/reports/Report.aspx?id=268>

transfer tuition rates, the most recent version of the bill (S.B. 491), introduced in the 2009 session, proposed to require the parents of students exercising interdistrict open enrollment to pay ‘actual and provable costs of the student attending the school’ up to \$500. Senate Bill 491 also altered the transfer process such that students could request a transfer and appeal to the State Board of Education if denied. Schools would have the right to reject transfer requests under the following conditions:

- violation of a court order,
- school overcrowding,
- student suspension or expulsion,
- a student transfer within the preceding two years, or
- transfer was for athletic reasons.

The passage of Public Law 146 in 2008 raised the possibility of a statewide open enrollment policy. Under the new law, the funding of school corporations from the Foundation Grant component of the school funding formula was shifted completely from local property taxes to state general tax revenues. With the abolition of the Minimum Guarantee and Variable Grant components of the school funding formula in previous legislative sessions, the Foundation Grant (as modified by the Complexity Index) is now the principal means of school financing, moving the state towards a system in which funds follow students (Toutkoushian & Michael, 2009). This major change in funding led to speculation that the new system would result in the end of transfer tuition fees. Some school districts were concerned that the new law dictated a statewide interdistrict open enrollment policy, with criticism focused on the ability of school districts to recruit star athletes from neighboring communities as well as the potential negative effects on the Indianapolis Public

Schools system of significant student enrollment decline (Indy Star, 2008). In addition, the ability to transfer between schools during the school year could lead to major administrative difficulties. At present, schools have a fixed date for reporting their enrollment figures to IDOE—numbers that determine the level of school district funding. If students were to transfer after the reporting date, schools would either have to absorb the costs of new students out of current revenue or the state would have to adopt a cumbersome process for re-distributing funds after school budgets have already been adopted.

Most districts’ concerns were addressed with the release of an Indiana State Board of Education (SBOE) memorandum in September 2008, providing guidance to school corporations concerning the funding change. According to Indiana State Board of Education Administrator Jeffery Zaring, “Indiana does not have open enrollment or free tuition.” School corporations generally still are not obligated to accept students unless they have legal settlement in the school corporation. School corporations maintain the authority to adopt policies concerning admission of students who do not have legal settlement in the corporation” (J. Zaring, personal communication, September 12, 2008).

The SBOE memorandum identified the greatest change to school corporations to be their inability to continue to charge their customary transfer tuition fee, but assured school corporations they still retain the power to accept or reject transfers. Transfer tuition may not become zero, but the cost will significantly drop because the funding of the school corporation General Fund will no longer be dependent on local property tax, but is now the responsibility of state government. The Indiana Department of Education

(IDOE) provided school corporations an online tuition calculator allowing administrators to determine an appropriate state-approved transfer tuition cost. The IDOE acknowledged in the memorandum its inability to precisely determine new transfer tuitions for all school corporations; however, it stated that it is the duty of the SBOE to “resolve disputes concerning legal settlement; right to transfer; right to attend school in any school corporation; and any amount of transfer tuition charged” (J. Zaring, personal communication, September 12, 2008).

The statement provided by the IDOE continues to leave school corporations wide autonomy. What is outlined by the memorandum only reiterates that no explicit open enrollment policies exist in Indiana. However, the memorandum does not address the potential increase in transfer requests possibly caused by the reduction in transfer tuition. School corporations in Indiana are given the task of determining transfer criteria that are in accordance with Indiana interdistrict transfer law presented previously. These criteria have the ability to be challenged and judged by the IDOE. In addition, the new system for funding schools does eliminate barriers to the creation of a statewide open enrollment system, should policymakers choose to move in that direction (see Table 2).

INDIANA DISTRICT NON-RESIDENT TRANSFER CRITERIA

Generally, school districts’ non-resident transfer policies tend to be similar throughout Indiana. School districts usually apply the same basic criteria to determine the acceptance of a non-resident transfer request, varying only in the amount of detail attached to

each requirement. However, some Indiana school districts choose not to participate by declining any non-resident transfer requests. Below is a list of the general criteria found in most Indiana district non-resident transfer policies:

1. Non-resident enrollment is for educational reasons
2. Students will never be accepted for athletic reasons
3. Students must be in good standing with their previous school, referring to a student's attendance, academic, and disciplinary records
4. Transportation to the transfer school will not be provided
5. Schools take into consideration the physical accommodation of a new student
6. Transfer tuition will be required when applicable
7. The financial impact of a new enrollment on the corporation
8. The availability of curricular or program offerings that a transfer student is specifically interested in and is unavailable in his home district

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

While the study of private school vouchers has been a rich area of inquiry, there have been comparatively few quality empirical studies of the effects of open enrollment on student achievement or school reform.

Recommendations

As with the recently completed study on charter schools, a systematic approach should be taken to the study of the advantages and disadvantages of open enrollment policies. Previous choice studies tended to investigate the effect of choice on student achievement on standardized tests exclusively. New studies must widen the investigation to include graduation rates and student postsecondary outcomes and should study the longitudinal effects of open enrollment on school reform.

Conclusion

Competition is a potential vehicle for overall educational improvement, but is not without commensurate risks. Open enrollment has the potential to introduce competition into the educational system while being less vulnerable to the criticisms leveled at private school vouchers. Under a competitive system, schools would have an incentive to institute new policies in order to retain enrollment. However, competition could also lead to seg-

regation, selection bias, and class stratification. In addition, if a sufficient number of transfer opportunities are not available, students without the means to transfer or relocate could be trapped in schools without the resources to improve. Other concerns include the necessity of easily accessible information and the risk that schools could advertise non-academic success to recruit students.

Recommendations

When implementing public school choice plans, policymakers should carefully craft legislation so as to reduce the potential for economic and ethnic segregation. A sufficient number of schools must be willing to accept transfers if the system is to be viable. Furthermore, regulations must restrict the ability of schools to use athletics or other prominent but non-academic success as a means for attracting students. Finally, parents should not just be given access to information on schools, but must be educated about the best methods for evaluating school quality. Notice of student's right to transfer and information about educational alternatives should be provided to all parents in a comprehensible format, not just to students from consistently low-performing schools.

Conclusion

Recent changes to Indiana's funding of public schools give it the capacity to become a national leader in school reform through the implementation of a carefully crafted statewide system of open enrollment. The reduction in transfer tuition fees and the move towards student-based financing have removed several key barriers to a statewide open enrollment system, although others remain.

Recommendations

Given substantive and implementation concerns regarding open enrollment, the state government would be advised to move incrementally. Should policymakers choose to embark on an aggressive statewide open enrollment system, they should institute a mandatory policy. The state could create uniform guidelines for interdistrict transfer and require the participation of all districts. A careful approach would implement the reform in phases, beginning with an intradistrict system in order to resolve administrative difficulties inherent in any open enrollment policy before addressing problems specific to interdistrict policies. The state should restrict transfer between schools to the period before enrollment figures are reported to the state in

Table 2. The Effect of Property Tax Law on Open Enrollment

Prior to the Passage of House Bill 1001 (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indiana school corporations' operating budget is funded in part with property tax of residents within their district
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funds are shared intradistrictly among schools within the corporation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students transferring outside of their "geographically bound" district (interdistrict transfer) may be required to pay transfer tuition
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer tuition provides schools accepting interdistrict transfers monetary reimbursement for students that they are not receiving property tax from
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This offsets the problem of a rising student population without an increase in a school's budget
Public Law 146	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School corporation General Fund budgets are no longer based on property tax of district residents
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state of Indiana funds 100% of schools' operating budgets

order to avoid excessive budgetary and administrative difficulties. Note that an intradistrict system would have the greatest effect on those districts that have the greatest number of schools—smaller districts would likely experience less change under an intradistrict system. Transportation costs must be addressed in the budget allowing for those with financial limitations to still participate in the program. Once the system has been refined at the intradistrict level, it could be expanded into a statewide interdistrict policy.

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