



K-12 Public School Open Enrollment

Prepared for: Kansas Policymakers

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My name is Jude Schwalbach, and I'm a senior education policy analyst with Reason Foundation, a national 501c(3) nonprofit policy research organization. I'm testifying on Kansas [Senate Bill 387](#).

Kansas S.B. 387 ensures that every Kansas school district participates in the state's cross-district open enrollment program, letting students transfer to any school district with available capacity. The proposal also guarantees that transfer students can remain in their new school district until they graduate.

However, the language in Section 1(f) and (g) of S.B. 387 can be improved. Policymakers should clarify how school districts determine if a transfer student is in good standing. Specifically, a student's good standing should not be determined by their academic record or performance.

Additionally, Kansas policymakers should adopt a statewide within-district open enrollment policy which requires all school districts to participate. While current law requires cross-district transfers, it doesn't require within-district open enrollment. Students could use within-district open enrollment to transfer to any school with open seats inside their district of residence. These changes would ensure Kansas' students have access to every open seat in public schools and help them find the best public schools for them.

There is evidence that within-district open enrollment benefits student achievement. A 2023 report by the [Becker-Friedman Institute for Economics at the University of Chicago](#) found that students participating in Los Angeles Unified School District's within-district open enrollment

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program saw positive results in achievement and college enrollment, especially when transfer students were compared with nonparticipants. In addition, school quality in LAUSD's lowest-performing schools improved the most. The authors concluded that these positive effects were due to the competitive pressures put on public schools by open enrollment.

Open enrollment is also widely popular among voters. A Jan. 2024 [Morning Consult-EdChoice](#) poll of 1,295 adults found that 74% of parents with children in school supported open enrollment, and only 16% opposed it. It also enjoys bipartisan support: 77% of Democrats, 78% of Republicans, and 68% of Independents with kids in schools say they favor allowing families to attend schools across school district lines. Moreover, robust open enrollment laws signed into law in Idaho, Montana, and West Virginia during the 2023 legislative sessions enjoyed [significant bipartisan support](#).

Strengthening Kansas' open enrollment policy would help ensure that public schools are available to all students and further empower families to find public schools that are the right fit for their kids.