



PUBLIC SCHOOL OPEN ENROLLMENT INFORMATIONAL BULLETIN

Bulletin 14-01

February 2014

Public School Open Enrollment and Tuition Waivers Information for Home Buyers, Renters and Realtors

Public school open enrollment allows parents to apply for their children to attend nonresident school districts. However, a lack of understanding of procedures and deadlines can result in disappointment for parents who purchase or rent a home believing they can choose their children's school district without any problems. Realtors are in a pivotal position to help parents achieve their educational plans for their children.

Why Is This Important? A child is guaranteed a free education only in the school district in which the child resides. A family cannot simply purchase or rent a home in one school district and sign their children up to attend school in another district. The child must apply for open enrollment, which is subject to the availability of space in the desired school district, as well as other possible limitations. Often, though not always, planning ahead can allow the family to live where they want and have their children attend school in the desired school district. Thus, it is important to know—before irrevocable decisions are made—whether the desired result can be accomplished.

It is recommended that every parent check with the Department's open enrollment consultant or a school district open enrollment coordinator as an automatic part of planning any change in residence. [In fact, this recommendation applies any time there may be change in a student's residence: whether through a family move, a change in parental custody or placement, a change in foster care status, or any other situation where a student's residence changes.]

What To Do Before Purchasing A Home. It is crucial to confirm the school district in which the home is located. This is not as easy as it sounds. Except for Milwaukee, school district boundaries are not co-terminus with the boundaries of any other governmental unit. A school district's territory cannot be ascertained by community name, mailing address, phone number, fire number, or even by where the neighborhood children go to school. New housing developments are especially challenging, because property may be included in more than one district and, in the early stages, may not even have an address.

How Do You Find The School District In Which A Residence Is Located? It's a good idea to check at least two sources. If you think you know the school district in which the property is located, start there. Then verify the information by examining a property tax bill or by contacting the municipal clerk's office, which is the governmental unit responsible for apportioning tax payments (this information may be available on your city's or county's website). However, even if the realtor has done this, parents are

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encouraged to check it out themselves. It is their responsibility to know the school district in which their home is located and they will bear the consequences of misinformation. Taking these important first steps can avoid heartache.

If the home is not located in the desired school district, open enrollment may be an option. But understanding what open enrollment can and cannot accomplish is as important as knowing the district in which the home is located.

How Does Open Enrollment Work? There are two ways to apply for open enrollment:

- *Regular application procedure.* This is the preferred method of applying for open enrollment. The parent applies during the application period that begins on the first Monday in February and ends on the last weekday in April. If the application is approved, the pupil may attend the nonresident school district for the following school year.
- *Alternative application procedure:* If the parent was unable to apply during the regular application period, the parent may submit an application under an alternative procedure. Unlike an application submitted during the regular application period, the pupil must meet one of seven criteria. Most parents apply based on the best interests of the pupil. If the application is approved, the pupil may attend the nonresident school district during the current school year. However, it is important to know that an alternative application may be denied for the same reasons as a regular application and does not get any special consideration when it comes to the availability of space or other criteria.

The main reasons that applications are denied is because regular or special education space is not available in the nonresident school district. Although there are school districts across the state with space limitations, space is a particularly significant issue in the school districts surrounding Milwaukee.

Parents also need to know that they are responsible for transporting their children to and from school. No school district is obligated to provide transportation to open enrolled students. Some districts are willing to provide some transportation, but parents should not rely on this possibility.

Open enrollment has enabled many parents to choose their children's school districts. However, every parent needs to understand that where they live will affect where their children may go to school. Open enrollment is an option, but not a guarantee. There are specific deadlines and procedures. The application form must be filled out correctly. The application may not be approved. Every family needs to understand the procedures before they commit to purchasing a home.

Who Should I Call? Realtors can benefit their clients most by referring them to the *open enrollment coordinator* in the desired school district or to the *open enrollment consultant* at the Department of Public Instruction. The open enrollment web site is located at <http://oe.dpi.wi.gov>. The public school district directory can be found at <https://apps4.dpi.wi.gov/SchoolDirectory/Search/PublicDistrictsSearch>. The Department's open enrollment consultants can be reached by phone at 888-245-2732 or by email at openenrollment@dpi.wi.gov.