



# Open Enrollment

## Frequently Asked Questions | 2024

### What is open enrollment, and why is it needed?

Open enrollment offers families the flexibility to choose schools beyond their local district boundaries. These policies represent a significant shift in the traditional approach to public education, breaking the link between a student's address and where they attend school. Open enrollment allows students to take advantage of the plethora of options within the public school system.

### What are the two main types of open enrollment?

Policies can allow students to transfer within their current school district (intra-district), or into another school district (inter-district).

### How does open enrollment work?

To use inter-district open enrollment, a parent would choose a school outside the current district and apply for a transfer. If space is available, that student would be enrolled just like a resident student.

For intra-district transfers, the process can be even easier. Some states allow families to apply directly to any school in the district. Others administer a common application system, where families choose their school, and if the school is not oversubscribed then the student is directly admitted. If more students apply than seats are available, the school will run a lottery to choose the students to enroll.



### Spotlight on Florida

**Florida** leads the pack with the largest open enrollment program in the country, serving 273,000 children statewide. All districts are required to participate and accept students outside their boundaries. They also must create a mechanism for students to choose another school in their home district. Districts must calculate how many seats are available for each grade level and post that information to their website. Additionally, no student is charged tuition to transfer.

### How do officials limit access to open enrollment?

Nearly all states allow some form of open enrollment, though states and localities may restrict these programs. Some have short application windows, while others require that both the sending and receiving districts agree to the transfer. Thankfully, there are a variety of ways to improve these programs.

## Who pays for students to attend a school outside their home district?

Ideally, the state pays the tuition directly to the other district, but some states obligate the sending district to pay the receiving district. However, states should not allow receiving districts to charge tuition directly to families. Public schools should remain free and open to every child, ensuring equitable opportunities from open enrollment programs.



### Spotlight on Wisconsin

Wisconsin has over 70,000 students participating in inter-district open enrollment. No student is charged tuition to participate in the program. The state sets a uniform per-pupil tuition amount that follows every student to the school of their choice. This mechanism financially incentivizes school districts to accept as many out-of-district transfers as possible.

## What other state policies can help ensure the success of open enrollment?

To ensure that programs are implemented with fidelity, states have created best practices for others to follow. For example, a long application window gives families flexibility to decide. Reporting capacity by grade level stops districts from declaring their schools full, and creating a per-pupil funding amount incentivizes districts to accept students from outside their boundaries for the financial benefit their enrollment brings.

### What are additional ExcelinEd resources?

To read and learn more: [Educational Opportunity and Student Success Should Not Have Boundaries](#), [What are the Benefits of Open Enrollment in K-12 Public Schools?](#), and [Open Districts: Model Policy](#)

## Contact

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