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OUR MISSION
*is to educate members and all South Carolinians about
state and local public policy based on the traditional
South Carolina values of individual liberty and
responsibility, free enterprise and limited government.*

Public Transfer Is Still Not Choice And Still Not the Answer to Failing Public Schools

Late in 2007, State Superintendent of Education Jim Rex released details of a proposed public school transfer program (later pre-filed as H 4391). Like the failed public transfer proposal he petitioned for last session (H 3124), this new bill offers parents nothing which existing state and federal law do not already mandate. More importantly, this proposal would create a complex system of overlapping local authorities, all of which have the ability to *prevent* transfers in and out of their districts. Sadly, students in the low-income and under-performing districts –those who have the most to gain from the mechanisms of choice—are the least likely to be granted entrance into neighboring schools through the proposal.

The plan is even more restrictive than last year’s plan because it places no obligation on schools or districts to accept any transfers at all.

Public School Choice Already Exists in South Carolina

According to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) component of federal law, students attending low-income and failing public schools already have the ability to transfer from one public school to another. South Carolina state law further extends this opportunity to any student whose parents are willing to pay the locally raised revenue portion of the per pupil costs.

Existing Federal Requirements

- Transfers granted to pupils at Title I Schools that fail to meet adequate yearly progress
- Transfers granted to victims of violent crime, and pupils attending schools which host crime

Existing State Law

- Allows districts to offer transfers if parents pay sum of locally raised revenue
- Districts have the option to waive this fee (SC 59-63-45)

The New Proposal Further Limits Existing Choices

During the 2007 session, a proposal was introduced which would have placed strict limits on the number of children who may transfer from one school to another. This bill (H 3124) would have allowed district level administrators to define and interpret the own terms in regulating these transfers, and provided them the opportunity to decline in-coming students for financial reasons. The new initiative (H 4391) is even worse than last year’s.

2007 Transfer Bill (H 3124)



- A 3% limit on the number of students transferring into neighboring schools
- Ability of local districts to define and interpret their own terms limiting transfers

2008 Transfer Bill (H 4391)

- *No specific requirements to offer choice to transfer at all*
- *No method for funding transfers*

South Carolina law already allows parents to request transfers within or out of their districts. The proposed plan would simply **create more administrative resistance** to this complicated process. It would not specifically address the fact that such transferring students are required to pay the locally raised portion of school operating costs out of pocket. Even if every district in the state were to adopt all the voluntary provisions in the bill (and somehow fund them) the larger problem of school quality and capacity remain:

South Carolina Lacks Public School Capacity for Transfers

- Only one-in-three students in South Carolina attend a school ranked “good” or “excellent.”
- Amongst these “best” schools only one high school in entire state had an average SAT score as high as the average entering freshman at Clemson University in 2006.
- In 2007, only 15,893 slots at non-failing school were open for the state’s 700,000 public students.

In its purest form, choice will offer an equality of opportunity to students across the State of South Carolina, but **public school transfer mechanisms are *not* school choice**. Real choice includes unfettered access to the full range of educational opportunities: magnet schools, charter schools, home schooling and private schools as well as public ones. Public transfer, and in particular limited transfer with heavy local discretion, is a costly distraction from meaningful education reform. It offers no real solutions to the parents of the 77,000 children attending failing public schools, or the 161,000 attending “D” graded schools.

If policymakers are sincere in their support for parental empowerment and a consumer-driven approach to education they ought to look at the successful programs in Arizona, Florida and Pennsylvania that offer real choices –both public and private– to their students.

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