



PUBLIC SCHOOL OPEN ENROLLMENT INFORMATIONAL BULLETIN

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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. *Tuition waivers* apply to students who move out of a district after the open enrollment application period, and who wish to remain in that district. 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 family cannot simply purchase or rent a home in one school district and sign their children up to attend school in another district. There are limitations and inflexible deadlines that must be followed for a successful result. Usually, 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 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, the governmental unit responsible for apportioning tax payments (this information may be available on your

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city's or county's website). However, even if the realtor has done this, parents should be encouraged to check it out themselves. It is their responsibility to know the district in which their home is located and they will bear the consequences of misinformation. Taking these important first steps can avoid a lot of 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? All open enrollment begins with an application submitted to the *nonresident school district* during a three-week application period each February. There are *no exceptions* to this requirement for any reason.

If parents know in February that they will be moving before the beginning of the next school term, they may apply for open enrollment as if they had already moved. However, if they do not know the district to which they will be moving, it is very difficult to apply for open enrollment. Filling out the application form incorrectly will jeopardize the open enrollment.

Families who are moving out of a district and wish to have their children remain in the district are usually eligible for a "tuition waiver" that allows the children to continue to attend the district long enough to apply for open enrollment. A tuition waiver is only temporary, the student must apply for open enrollment at the first opportunity following the move. And when the open enrollment application is submitted, it may be denied. Even students who are attending a district when an open enrollment application is submitted may be denied, although they are given preference for available spaces. This applies to siblings as well. The only way to *guarantee* that any student will be able to attend school in a specific school district is to live in that district.

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. 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. A school district directory can be found at <http://dpi.wi.gov/schldist.html>. The open enrollment web site is located at <http://dpi.wi.gov/sms/psctoc.html>. The Department's open enrollment consultants can be reached by phone at 888-245-2732 or by email to maryjo.cleaver@dpi.wi.gov or merry.larsen@dpi.wi.gov.