

State of Arkansas  
89th General Assembly  
Regular Session, 2013

# A Bill

HOUSE BILL 1507

By: Representatives Hammer, Clemmer

## For An Act To Be Entitled

AN ACT TO ESTABLISH THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE ACT OF 2013; TO AMEND THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE LAW; TO AMEND OTHER PROVISIONS OF LAW RELATED TO THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE LAW; TO DECLARE AN EMERGENCY; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

## Subtitle

TO ESTABLISH THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE ACT OF 2013; AND TO DECLARE AN EMERGENCY.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS:

SECTION 1. Arkansas Code § 6-15-430(b)(1), concerning student transfers from a school district that is identified as being in academic distress, is amended to read as follows:

(b)(1)(A) Subject to subdivision (b)(1)(B) of this section, ~~Any a~~ nonresident district shall accept the public school choice transfer request under the Public School Choice Act of 2013, § 6-18-1901 et seq., of a student attending a public school district classified as being in academic distress shall automatically be eligible and entitled pursuant to the Arkansas Public School Choice Act of 1989, § 6-18-206, to transfer to another geographically contiguous school district if the nonresident district:

(i) Is geographically contiguous to the resident district; and

(ii) Is not classified as being in academic distress during the time period that ~~a school~~ the resident district is classified as being in academic distress and, therefore, not be.



(B) The student is not required to file a petition by July 1 but shall meet all other requirements and conditions of the ~~Arkansas Public School Choice Act of 1989, § 6-18-206~~ Public School Choice Act of 2013, § 6-18-1901 et seq.

SECTION 2. Arkansas Code § 6-18-202(g), concerning the age and attendance requirements for attending public schools, is amended to read as follows:

(g) This section ~~shall not be construed to~~ does not restrict a student's ability to participate in a:

- (1) A tuition agreement with a nonresident school district; or
- (2) to officially transfer to another school district pursuant to the Arkansas Public School Choice Act of 1989, § 6-18-206 The Public School Choice Act of 2013, § 6-18-1901 et seq.

SECTION 3. Arkansas Code Title 6, Chapter 18, Subchapter 1, is amended to add an additional section to read as follows:

6-18-107. Continuity of education for public school choice students.

(a) As used in this section:

- (1) "Nonresident district" means a school district other than a student's resident district; and
- (2) "Resident district" means the school district where the student resides as determined under § 6-18-202.

(b) If a public school choice request is approved by a nonresident district under a provision of law that is later declared unconstitutional by a court or is repealed, the student may continue to attend school in the nonresident district until the student completes his or her secondary education.

(c) A present or future sibling of a student who continues enrollment in the nonresident district under this section may enroll in or continue enrollment in the nonresident district until the sibling of the transfer student completes his or her secondary education, if the district has the capacity to accept the sibling without adding teachers, staff, or classrooms, or exceed the regulations and standards established by law.

(d) The enrollment of a student in a nonresident district under this section is subject to:

(1) The nonresident district's written policies for renewal of the transfer; and

(2) Other provisions of law concerning attendance and enrollment in public schools.

SECTION 4. Arkansas Code § 6-18-206 is repealed.

~~6-18-206. Public school choice.~~

~~(a)(1) This section may be referred to and cited as the "Arkansas Public School Choice Act of 1989".~~

~~(2) The General Assembly finds that the students in Arkansas's public schools and their parents will become more informed about and involved in the public educational system if students and their parents or guardians are provided greater freedom to determine the most effective school for meeting their individual educational needs. There is no right school for every student, and permitting students to choose from among different schools with differing assets will increase the likelihood that some marginal students will stay in school and that other, more motivated students will find their full academic potential.~~

~~(3) The General Assembly further finds that giving more options to parents and students with respect to where the students attend public school will increase the responsiveness and effectiveness of the state's schools since teachers, administrators, and school board members will have added incentive to satisfy the educational needs of the students who reside in the district.~~

~~(4) The General Assembly therefore finds that these benefits of enhanced quality and effectiveness in our public schools justify permitting a student to apply for admission to a school in any district beyond the one in which the student resides, provided that the transfer by this student would not adversely affect the desegregation of either district.~~

~~(5) A public school choice program is hereby established to enable any student to attend a school in a district in which the student does not reside, subject to the restrictions contained in this section.~~

~~(b)(1)(A) Before a student may attend a school in a nonresident district, the student's parent or guardian must submit an application on a form approved by the Department of Education to the nonresident district by submitting the application to the superintendent of the school district. This~~

~~application must be postmarked not later than July 1 of the year in which the student would begin the fall semester at the nonresident district.~~

~~(B)(i) Within thirty (30) days of the receipt of an application from a nonresident student seeking admission under the terms of this section, the superintendent of the nonresident district shall notify the parent or guardian and the resident district in writing as to whether the student's application has been accepted or rejected.~~

~~(ii) If the application is rejected, the superintendent of the nonresident district must state in the notification letter the reason for rejection.~~

~~(iii) If the application is accepted, the superintendent of the nonresident district shall state in the notification letter:~~

~~(a) An absolute deadline for the student to enroll in the district, or the acceptance notification is null; and~~

~~(b) Any instructions for the renewal procedures established by the district.~~

~~(iv)(a) Any student who accepts a school choice transfer may return to his or her resident district during the course of the school year.~~

~~(b) If a transferred student returns to his or her resident district during the school year, the student's transfer is voided, and the student shall reapply for any future transfer.~~

~~(2)(A) The school board of directors of every public school district must adopt by resolution specific standards for acceptance and rejection of applications. Standards may include the capacity of a program, class, grade level, or school building. Nothing in this section requires a school district to add teachers, staff, or classrooms or in any way to exceed the requirements and standards established by existing law. Standards shall include a statement that priority will be given to applications from siblings or stepsiblings residing in the same residence or household of students already attending the district by choice. Standards may not include an applicant's previous academic achievement, athletic or other extracurricular ability, handicapping conditions, English proficiency level, or previous disciplinary proceedings except that an expulsion from another district may be included pursuant to § 6-18-510.~~

~~(B)(i) Any student who applies for a transfer under this section and is denied a transfer by the nonresident district may request a hearing before the State Board of Education to reconsider the transfer.~~

~~(ii) A request for a hearing before the state board shall be in writing and shall be postmarked no later than ten (10) days after notice of rejection of the application under subdivision (b)(1)(B) of this section is received by the student.~~

~~(3) Each school district shall participate in public school choice consistent with this section.~~

~~(c) The responsibility for transportation of a student from the student's resident school district to a nonresident school district shall be borne by the student or the student's parents. The nonresident school district may enter into a written agreement with the student, the student's parents, or the resident school district to provide transportation to or from any place in the resident district to the nonresident district, or both.~~

~~(d)(1) A nonresident district shall accept credits toward graduation that were awarded by another district.~~

~~(2) The nonresident district shall award a diploma to a nonresident student if the student meets the nonresident district's graduation requirements.~~

~~(e) For purposes of determining a school district's state equalization aid, the nonresident student shall be counted as a part of the average daily membership of the district to which the student has transferred.~~

~~(f) The provisions of this section and all student choice options created in this section are subject to the following limitations:~~

~~(1) No student may transfer to a nonresident district where the percentage of enrollment for the student's race exceeds that percentage in the student's resident district except in the circumstances set forth in subdivisions (f)(2) and (3) of this section;~~

~~(2)(A) A transfer to a district is exempt from the restriction set forth in subdivision (f)(1) of this section if the transfer is between two (2) districts within a county and if the minority percentage in the student's race and majority percentages of school enrollment in both the resident and nonresident district remain within an acceptable range of the county's overall minority percentage in the student's race and majority percentages of school population as set forth by the department.~~

~~(B)(i) By the filing deadline each year, the department shall compute the minority percentage in the student's race and majority percentages of each county's public school population from the October Annual School Report and shall then compute the acceptable range of variance from those percentages for school districts within each county.~~

~~(ii)(a) In establishing the acceptable range of variance, the department is directed to use the remedial guideline established in Little Rock School District v. Pulaski County Special School District of allowing an overrepresentation or underrepresentation of black or white students of one-fourth ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ) or twenty-five percent (25%) of the county's racial balance.~~

~~(b) In establishing the acceptable range of variance for school choice, the department is directed to use the remedial guideline of allowing an overrepresentation or underrepresentation of minority or majority students of one-fourth ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ) or twenty-five percent (25%) of the county's racial balance;~~

~~(3) A transfer is exempt from the restriction set forth in subdivision (f)(1) of this section if each school district affected by the transfer does not have a critical mass of minority percentage in the student's race of more than ten percent (10%) of any single race;~~

~~(4) In any instance in which the provisions of this subsection would result in a conflict with a desegregation court order or a district's court-approved desegregation plan, the terms of the order or plan shall govern;~~

~~(5) The department shall adopt appropriate rules and regulations to implement the provisions of this section; and~~

~~(6) The department shall monitor school districts for compliance with this section.~~

~~(g) The state board shall be authorized to resolve disputes arising under subsections (b)-(f) of this section.~~

~~(h) The superintendent of the district shall cause public announcements to be made over the broadcast media and in the print media at such times and in such a manner as to inform parents or guardians of students in adjoining districts of the availability of the program, the application deadline, and the requirements and procedure for nonresident students to participate in the program.~~

~~(i)(1) All superintendents of school districts shall report to the Equity Assistance Center on an annual basis the race, gender, and other pertinent information needed to properly monitor compliance with the provisions of this section.~~

~~(2) The reports may be on those forms that are prescribed by the department, or the data may be submitted electronically by the district using a format authorized by the department.~~

~~(3) The department may withhold state aid from any school district that fails to file its report each year or fails to file any other information with a published deadline requested from school districts by the Equity Assistance Center so long as thirty (30) calendar days are given between the request for the information and the published deadline except when the request comes from a member or committee of the General Assembly.~~

~~(4) A copy of the report shall be provided to the Joint Interim Oversight Committee on Educational Reform.~~

~~(j)(1) The department shall develop a proposed set of rules as it determines is necessary or desirable to amend the provisions of this section.~~

~~(2) The department shall present the proposed rules in written form to the House Interim Committee on Education and the Senate Interim Committee on Education by October 1, 2006, for review and consideration by the committees for possible amendments to this section and to the Arkansas Public School Choice Program by the Eighty-sixth General Assembly.~~

SECTION 5. Arkansas Code § 6-18-227(b)(1)(B) and (2)(A)(i), concerning the Arkansas Opportunity Public School Choice Act of 2004, is amended to read as follows:

(B) The parent, guardian, or the student, if the student is over eighteen (18) years of age, has notified the Department of Education and both the sending and receiving school districts of the request for a transfer no later than ~~July 30~~ July 1 of the first year in which the student intends to transfer.

(2)(A)(i) For the purposes of continuity of educational choice, the transfer shall operate as an irrevocable election for each subsequent entire school year and shall remain in force until the student completes high school or the parent, guardian, or the student, if the student is over eighteen (18) years of age, makes application no later than ~~July 30~~ July 1

for attendance or transfer as ~~provided for by §§ 6-18-202, 6-18-206, and 6-18-316~~ under § 6-18-202, § 6-18-316, and the Public School Choice Act of 2013, § 6-18-1901 et seq.

SECTION 6. Arkansas Code § 6-18-227(e), concerning the Arkansas Opportunity Public School Choice Act of 2004 is amended to read as follows:

~~(e)(1) The provisions of this section and all student choice options created in this section shall comply with § 6-18-206(d), (e), and (i) and shall not be subject to any other limitation or restriction provided by law.~~

~~(2)~~ If any part of this section conflicts with the provisions of a federal desegregation court order applicable to a school district, the provisions of the federal desegregation court order shall govern.

SECTION 7. Arkansas Code Title 6, Chapter 18, is amended to add an additional subchapter to read as follows:

Subchapter 19 – Public School Choice Act of 2013

6-18-1901. Title - Legislative findings.

(a) This subchapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Public School Choice Act of 2013".

(b) The General Assembly finds that:

(1) The students in Arkansas's public schools and their parents or guardians will become more informed about and involved in the public educational system if students and their parents or guardians are provided greater freedom to determine the most effective school for meeting the student's individual educational needs. There is no right school for every student, and permitting students to choose from among different schools with differing educational opportunities will increase the likelihood that some marginal students will stay in school and that other more motivated students will find their full academic potential;

(2) Providing more options to parents or guardians and students with respect to where the students attend public school will increase the responsiveness and effectiveness of the state's schools because teachers, administrators, and school board members will have added incentive to satisfy the educational needs of the students who reside in the school district; and

(3) The benefits of enhanced quality and effectiveness in our public schools justify permitting a student to apply for admission to a school in any school district beyond the one in which the student resides, subject to the restrictions contained in this subchapter.

6-18-1902. Definitions.

As used in this subchapter:

(1) "Nonresident district" means a school district other than a student's resident district;

(2) "Parent" means a student's parent, guardian, or other person having custody or care of the student;

(3) "Resident district" means the school district in which the student resides as determined under § 6-18-202; and

(4) "Transfer student" means a public school student who transfers to a nonresident district through a public school choice option under this subchapter.

6-18-1903. Public school choice program established.

(a) A public school choice program is established to enable a student to attend a school in a nonresident district if:

(1) The student seeks a transfer due to the employment of the student's parent under § 6-18-203;

(2) The student's place of residence meets the criteria under § 6-18-203, § 6-18-205, or § 6-18-307;

(3) The student is a victim of a violent criminal offense that occurred on the grounds of an Arkansas public elementary, secondary, or public charter school under § 6-15-432;

(4) The student is attending a persistently dangerous school under § 6-15-432;

(5) The student seeks a transfer under § 6-18-227 because the student's assigned school in the resident district has been designated as a level 1 school under § 6-15-2103 for two (2) or more consecutive years;

(6) The resident district is classified as being in:

(A) Academic distress under § 6-15-430(b); or

(B) Facilities distress under § 6-21-812;

(7) The student is a military dependent seeking a transfer under

state laws concerning educational access for military children;

(8) The transfer will promote greater integration in the nonresident district and will not adversely affect the desegregation of either school district when:

(A) One (1) of the districts has a minority percentage of any single race of more than ten percent (10%) of its total student population; or

(B) The percentage of enrollment for the student's race in the nonresident district is less than that percentage in the resident district;

(9) The student has performed at or below basic on state benchmark exams for two (2) consecutive school years while enrolled in the resident district; or

(10) The student has obtained the agreement of both the resident district and the nonresident district for the transfer based on the student's educational needs under § 6-18-316 or § 6-18-204;

(b) A transfer under this subchapter is subject to the restrictions under § 6-18-1905 and under a specific provision of law governing the transfer.

6-18-1904. Request for a transfer.

(a) A student may enroll in a school in a nonresident district if:

(1) The student or the student's parent submits an application for transfer:

(A) On the form approved by the Department of Education;

(B) To the nonresident district and to the resident district; and

(C) Postmarked not later than July 1 of the year in which the student would begin the fall semester at the nonresident district; and

(2) The application is approved by the nonresident district.

(b)(1) By August 1 of the school year in which the student seeks to enroll in a nonresident district under this subchapter, the superintendent of the nonresident district shall notify the parent and the resident district in writing as to whether the student's application has been accepted or rejected.

(2) If the application is rejected, the superintendent of the

nonresident district shall state in the notification letter the reason for rejection.

(3) If the application is accepted, the superintendent of the nonresident district shall state in the notification letter:

(A) A deadline by which the student shall enroll in the nonresident district and after which the acceptance notification is null; and

(B) Instructions for the renewal procedures established by the nonresident district.

(4)(A) A transfer student may return to his or her resident district during the course of the school year.

(B) If a transfer student returns to his or her resident district during the school year:

(i) The transfer is voided; and

(ii) The student shall reapply if he or she seeks a future transfer.

6-18-1905. Restrictions on a choice transfer.

If the provisions of this section result in a conflict with a desegregation court order or a district's court-approved desegregation plan, the terms of the order or plan shall govern.

6-18-1906. School district rights and responsibilities.

(a) Each school district shall participate in a public school choice program consistent with this subchapter.

(b)(1) The board of directors of a public school district shall adopt by resolution specific standards for acceptance and rejection of applications.

(2) The standards:

(A) May include without limitation the capacity of a program, class, grade level, or school building;

(B) Shall include a statement that priority will be given to an applicant who has a sibling or stepsibling who:

(i) Resides in the same household; and

(ii) Is already enrolled in the nonresident district by choice; and

(C)(i) Unless otherwise specified in this subchapter,

shall not include an applicant's previous academic achievement, athletic or other extracurricular ability, disability, English proficiency, or previous disciplinary proceedings.

(ii) However, an expulsion from another school district may be included under § 6-18-510.

(d) A nonresident district shall:

(1) Accept credits toward graduation that were awarded by another district; and

(2) Award a diploma to a nonresident student if the student meets the nonresident district's graduation requirements.

(e) This subchapter does not require a school district to add teachers, staff, or classrooms, or in any way to exceed the requirements and standards established by existing law.

(f) The superintendent of a school district shall cause public announcements to be made over the broadcast media and in either the print media or on the Internet to inform parents or guardians of students in adjoining districts of the:

(1) Availability of the program;

(2) Application deadline; and

(3) Requirements and procedure for nonresident students to participate in the program.

6-18-1907. General provisions.

(a)(1) A transfer student attending a nonresident school under this subchapter may complete all remaining school years at the nonresident district, subject to:

(A) The nonresident district's policies and procedures for renewal of the transfer; and

(B) Other provisions of law concerning attendance and enrollment in public schools.

(2) A present or future sibling of a transfer student under subdivision (a)(1) of this section may enroll in or continue enrollment in the nonresident district until the sibling of the transfer student completes his or her secondary education.

(b)(1) The transfer student or the transfer student's parent is responsible for the transportation of the transfer student to and from the

nonresident district where the transfer student is enrolled.

(2) The nonresident district may enter into a written agreement with the student, the student's parent, or the resident district to provide the transportation.

(c) The parent of a transfer student shall comply fully with the nonresident district's parental involvement requirements.

(d) For purposes of determining a school district's state aid, a transfer student is counted as a part of the average daily membership of the district of the nonresident district where the transfer student is enrolled.

(e) If a conflict exists between this section and the provisions of a law governing a specific choice option identified in § 6-18-1904, the specific provisions of law shall govern the transfer.

6-18-1908. Rules - Appeal.

(a) The State Board of Education shall promulgate rules to implement this subchapter, including without limitation a form of application for transfer that:

(1) Lists all public school choice program options identified in this subchapter; and

(2) Allows the student or student's parent to select the applicable option.

(b) A student who applies for a transfer under this subchapter and is denied a transfer by the nonresident district may request a hearing before the state board to reconsider the transfer.

(c) A request for a hearing before the state board shall be in writing and shall be postmarked no later than ten (10) days after the student or the student's parent receives a notice of rejection of the application under § 6-18-1904.

(d) If the state board overturns the determination of the nonresident district on appeal, the state board shall notify the nonresident district of the basis for the state board's decision.

SECTION 8. Arkansas Code § 6-21-812(a), concerning student transfers from a school district that is identified as being in fiscal distress, is amended to read as follows:

(a)(1) ~~Any~~ Subject to subdivision (a)(2) of this section, a

nonresident district shall accept the public school choice program transfer request under the Public School Choice Act of 2013, § 6-18-1901 et seq., of a student attending a public school district classified as being in facilities distress shall automatically be eligible and entitled under the Arkansas Public School Choice Act of 1989, § 6-18-206, to transfer to another geographically contiguous school district not if the nonresident district:

(A) Is geographically contiguous to the resident district;

and

(B) Is not classified as being in facilities distress during the time period that a the resident district is classified as being in facilities distress.

(2) The student is not required to file a petition by July 1 but shall meet all other requirements and conditions of the Arkansas Public School Choice Act of 1989, § 6-18-206 Public School Choice Act of 2013, § 6-18-1901 et seq.

SECTION 9. EMERGENCY CLAUSE. It is found and determined by the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas that certain provisions of the Arkansas Public School Choice Act of 1989 have been found to be unconstitutional by a federal court; that thousands of public school students are currently attending public schools in nonresident school districts under that law; that there is now uncertainty about the viability of those transfers and future transfers; that this act amends the disputed provisions of that law while preserving the opportunity for public school choice and encouraging diversity in public schools; and that this act is immediately necessary to resolve the uncertainty in the law before the 2013-2014 school year. Therefore, an emergency is declared to exist, and this act being immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health, and safety shall become effective on:

(1) The date of its approval by the Governor;

(2) If the bill is neither approved nor vetoed by the Governor, the expiration of the period of time during which the Governor may veto the bill; or

(3) If the bill is vetoed by the Governor and the veto is overridden, the date the last house overrides the veto.