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Missouri Schools and Parents Are Divided on Proposed Fixes to School Transfer Law

By [Denisa R. Superville](#) on June 16, 2015 3:30 PM

As Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon weighs whether to sign a student transfer bill passed by the state legislature, school districts and parents are flooding him with petitions that urge him to veto or, alternatively, sign the bill, the Associated Press reports.

Of the messages relayed to the Democratic governor between May 5 and May 27, 180 of them asked the governor to use his veto pen, while 145 came from supporters of the bill, according to the AP.

Nixon's office told the AP that he was still reviewing the bill, which will amend the state's controversial student transfer law that's been on the books since 1993. The law allows students enrolled in unaccredited school districts to move to higher-performing ones while their home districts shoulder the costs of transportation and tuition.

The law has become a financial strain on unaccredited districts and pushed some to the verge of bankruptcy as several hundred students transfer to better-performing districts.

The financial burden of student transfers was among the primary reasons why the [state took over](#) the troubled Normandy school district in 2014. (The district is now called the [Normandy Schools Collaborative](#).)

But proposed fixes to the law over the years have been equally troublesome. Nixon [vetoed](#) last year's proposal, primarily because of a portion of the bill that would have allowed students in unaccredited districts to transfer to private, non-religious schools.

The legislative solution proposed this year has been [criticized](#) by some, including by educators in the cities.

The Springfield, Mo., board of education on Monday passed a [resolution](#) asking the governor to veto the law, arguing that the law was essentially "a vehicle to expand charter schools and virtual education in St. Louis County and most of Jackson County without adequate accountability," according to [a statement on the district's website](#). "The bill also allows for school building accreditation and the possibility of student transfers in St. Louis City and districts classified as urban districts."

The superintendent John Jungmann said in the same statement:

"We do not believe this legislation is beneficial to the Springfield community or the public education system in Missouri. It does not fully solve the problems it was intended to address and creates new challenges for accredited school districts like Springfield Public Schools, including financial concerns about how to meet new unfunded mandates."

Some parents and charter school supporters have praised this year's version for expanding school choice, though some parents who live in unaccredited school districts and send their children to private schools could [get stuck in the middle](#).

This [year's proposal](#) would allow students who spend a semester in an unaccredited school to transfer within the district, from an unaccredited school to an accredited one, in an attempt to address the cost issue. (In this version of the bill, both individual schools and districts will be rated as accredited or unaccredited.)

The unaccredited district would only be on the hook for transportation and tuition costs for students who are leaving the district, according to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. And this year, students would be allowed to transfer to virtual and charter schools.

The bill does not have a tuition cap, which some districts contend will continue to drain financial resources away from the students who remain in unaccredited districts. The law does allow receiving districts to accept a lower tuition rate for transferring students.

The Associated Press reported that several charter schools and parents have expressed support for the proposed law, arguing that expanding charter and virtual school placements would provide students who are stuck in failing schools with better educational options.

The Missouri Public Charter Schools Association is in favor of the law. So is the Children's Education Alliance of Missouri, according to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

But a school board director from University City, an accredited school district, told the governor in one of the messages reviewed by the AP, that the proposed fix could amount to a "systematic dismantling of public schooling" in poor areas, according to the Associated Press.

Nixon has until mid-July to make a decision, but the proposal will become law if he takes no action, according to the AP.

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