

Normandy gives more students OK to transfer



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Shannon Harper returned to Horton Watkins High School in Ladue on Wednesday, after the Normandy Schools Collaborative reversed its decision to deny her a third year there as a transfer student.

Thirteen other Normandy students also were given authorization this past week to leave the district for more successful schools under the Missouri school transfer law. Normandy is giving latitude to parents who had either moved

into Normandy after the transfer application deadline passed, didn't have the required documents to prove residency last winter, or had missed a deadline to file paperwork.

In Shannon's case, her mother said she filed the forms early, but Normandy has no record of them, officials said last month.

Either way, "I am so excited," Shannon said earlier this week.

Shannon and her sister Keiara, a seventh-grader, were among more than 100 students whose requests to leave Normandy or remain in more successful schools had been denied by Normandy for a number of reasons, leaving them with no other option than to go to school in the state's most troubled system.

Shannon has thrived at Ladue over the past two years and has a GPA above 3.5. Keiara says she was bullied at Normandy Middle School and didn't want to return. She wanted to transfer to Ladue schools like her sister. Their story was the focus of a Post-Dispatch story earlier this month.

Superintendent Charles Pearson approved the administrative change that is allowing the students to leave. It did not require authorization from Normandy's governing board. It also provides parents with an appeals process if their transfer requests are denied.

Normandy officials are "just trying to be considerate to people," said Rod Wright, spokesman for the school system.

Joshua Schindler, an attorney who communicated with the district on behalf of the Harpers and the families of the 12 other children, has in the past questioned the legality of application deadlines and paperwork required to transfer.

He said he was pleased with the outcome.

"Normandy was willing to talk to us," he said. "That hadn't always been the case in the past."

The school transfer law allows children in unaccredited school districts, such as Normandy and Riverview Gardens, to attend school in more successful districts. Their home district must cover the cost of tuition and transportation.

About 580 students who live in the Normandy district are attending other schools this year under this law.

Diane Harper, the mother of Shannon and Keiara, said she feels relieved.

“They were so ecstatic about this,” she said of her daughters. “I was just hoping and praying things would work out.”