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Normandy schools are in a holding pattern

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Normandy School District Superintendent Ty McNichols visits with seventh-grader Markel McCurry (right) and Ollie Bellamy during a tour of Normandy Middle School in September 2013. Photo by Robert Cohen, rcohen@post-dispatch.com

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Normandy schools task force would remake the district



Future students transfers would cease. Students who have already left

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NORMANDY • Normandy Superintendent Ty McNichols is in a quandary. At a time when other districts are hiring new teachers and preparing for fall, McNichols is uncertain whether Normandy can even afford summer school.

The Missouri Senate has agreed to send \$1.5 million to the north St. Louis County school district that's been drained of money by complying with the state's school transfer law. The infusion is just enough to keep teachers in classrooms through the last day of school. But it is not enough to keep the district running for much longer.

"We want to move forward and plan for summer school, but there are no guarantees," McNichols said. "It just creates this stifling holding pattern."

There are only uncertainties. With insolvency around the corner, it appears the Normandy district will become the first to come under the state's new authority to intervene in troubled school systems in a much more dramatic way.

A state-appointed task force is working to determine the district's future. But for parents and staff, it can't provide the answers quickly enough.

Will the district be dissolved? Will someone else run the schools? What will happen to the 3,000 students? And what will happen to the 1,000 transfer students whose tuition is paid by Normandy? Will they be forced to return?

Just this month, the 10-member task force began meeting weekly to come up with a long-term proposal for Normandy — should it continue as a district, or should it be carved up and pieces attached to neighboring school systems. A number of other possibilities exist, including turning Normandy into a system directly run by the state education department.

On Thursday, the task force heard from Chris Krehmeyer of Beyond Housing about how community partnerships could play a role in a remade Normandy school system.

Whatever the task force comes up with is expected to be delivered to the Missouri Board of Education in May.

Bankruptcy would trigger Normandy's dissolution. Or the state could choose to lapse the district before that happens.

Either way, children in the Normandy district would no

New state plan could be a roadmap for Normandy schools



Plan approved by state school board Friday offers a range of options for "lapsed" school districts.

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Team named to develop transition plan for Normandy School District



Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education appoints 10-member task force to help determine future of the troubled school district [Read more](#)

Normandy seventh-graders march in support of their district



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Transfer situation upends senior year at Normandy



Raquan Smith has assumed the role of ambassador to explain the plight of his school to policy leaders. [Read more](#)

School transfer compromise in the works in Missouri Legislature



Legislature appears closer to making the law easier on school districts, and

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longer have a statutory right to transfer, according to the school improvement plan the state Board of Education approved last week.

For many parents of transfer students, the prospect of having to put their children back into Normandy schools, even if the district was remade, is unsettling. That's particularly true for parents of high school students, who know they need to sign up now to get first choices for electives and courses next school year.

The district was the worst-performing school system in the state last year. Though about 80 percent of students stayed, many parents of those who left say they were desperate for a better education for their children.

"Not knowing, that's the horrible thing about it," said Keena Fredrick, whose son transferred to McCluer High School in the Ferguson-Florissant School District, and says he's thriving there.

Paul Davis isn't as pleased with his son's experience at Francis Howell High School. But if he's forced to return to Normandy, "We would move," said Davis, but not to St. Charles County. His son's new teachers haven't held him to the high standards Davis expected.

"We would move to a decent school district," said Davis, a taxi driver. "I would sacrifice the money, cut out the cable. We could rough it out three years somewhere else."

At the heart of the turmoil is a 1993 law that allows children living in unaccredited districts to transfer into better schools at their home districts' expense. In addition to Normandy, Riverview Gardens is paying tuition and transportation for about 1,100 students. But Riverview Gardens had a larger savings account than Normandy and will be able to shoulder transfer expenses into the next school year.

At hearings and in schools, many in Normandy have expressed the belief that state officials have set their district up for failure. After the education department asked the Legislature for \$5 million to keep Normandy running until the end of the year, the Senate reduced the amount to \$1.5 million. The amount would keep schools open this spring, but eliminate any reserve fund, putting the district in direct line of bankruptcy this summer.


Assistant Superintendent Candice Carter-Oliver said the situation has been distracting and has cut into the amount of time district staff spends focusing on improving schools.

Carter-Oliver is frequently asked by parents, teachers and school secretaries whether Normandy schools will be open next year — whether teachers will be employed, whether students will be forced to go somewhere else.

"It's unsettling not to have specific answers for people," Carter-Oliver said. "Especially when you start talking to children — many of them come from environments that aren't predictable. Their school is the most consistent place for them. It's unsettling that you can't say emphatically, yes the teachers will be here next year. Yes, the schools will be here next year."

In the meantime, kindergarten registration is underway at the four elementary schools. Students at Normandy High School are registering for classes.

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McNichols is planning for summer school and the 2014-15 school year — even though the district may not survive that long. He must make staffing decisions, such as how many teachers might be needed, and whether to close another school.

Two members of his top brass have announced they're taking jobs in other school districts. McNichols says he plans to advertise the job openings — even though there may not be a Normandy School District in three months.

Jessica Bock of the Post-Dispatch contributed to this report.

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