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Politics and turmoil surrounding school transfers intensifies

June 23, 2014 5:15 am • By Elisa Crouch ecrouch@post-dispatch.com > 314-340-8119

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Naomi Goodloe, 12, a sixth-grader at Saeger Middle School, gets off the school bus after arriving at her Northwoods home on Thursday, May 29, 2014. "I made the A honor roll," Naomi said about the past year at her new school. "I also won an award for making good grades and working hard." Photo by Roberto Rodriguez, rrodriguez@post-dispatch.com

[Enlarge Photo](#)

Missouri senator upset about DESE actions regarding school transfer law



Sen. Maria Chappelle-Nadal released a statement today pointing to

numerous problems she has found in DESE's recent actions [Read more](#)

Nixon vetoes student transfer bill



He also criticized the Francis Howell School Board for "turning their back"

on students who wanted to stay in their new schools. [Read more](#)

Tax increase helps Pattonville schools avoid deep cuts



Pattonville School District officials say the passage of the Proposition P tax

increase enabled them to avoid heavy cuts in the 2014-2015 budg... [Read more](#)

Mo. lawmaker: call your school board members

Sen. Maria Chappelle-Nadal, D-University City, wants to call their school board members to ask which transfer student

Yanking hundreds of transfer students from their new schools is a scenario most education leaders said all year that they wanted to avoid.

And yet, hundreds of transfer students from the Normandy School District learned last week they will not be allowed to return to their new schools in the Francis Howell district this fall.

The politics surrounding the transfer situation has led to a series of decisions that are beginning to dismantle Missouri's yearlong experiment with school choice — one that began last summer with a state Supreme Court ruling that offered children in failing schools the promise of better ones.

On Friday, Kellie Kelly, a childcare specialist, ended up on the receiving end of those decisions when she opened her email. A letter from the Francis Howell School District said her son, Robert, would not be welcomed back this August, after spending a year at Hollenbeck Middle School.

Such is the case for about 350 Normandy transfer students in the St. Charles County district who had signed paperwork to return in the fall.

"These kids have to go back into Normandy classrooms," Kelly said. "It's not fair to them."

In the past couple of months, the politics surrounding transfers have intensified, along with the uncertainty.

The Legislature's attempt to fix the transfer law has stalled with a veto threat from Gov. Jay Nixon. That stalemate has thrust the issue back to the Missouri Board of Education, which has sought to reduce the financial impact of transfers for two north St. Louis County districts in a way that disrupts as few students as possible.

About 2,000 children from the unaccredited Normandy and Riverview Gardens school districts transferred to higher performing schools this past year, with their home districts responsible for tuition and transportation costs.

Meanwhile, the vast majority of children stayed in schools with fewer staff and resources. Superintendents in both districts were hit with about \$1.5 million in monthly tuition and transportation bills from the transfers. By February,



tuition rate they will use. [Read more](#)

Mo. Senator says veto override attempt of transfer bill likely in Senate

JEFFERSON CITY • Sen. David Pearce, R-Warrensburg, intends to try to override the school transfer bill veto in the Senate this September. [Read more](#)

University City schools turn back Normandy transfer students



District is second to reject lower tuition rate. [Read more](#)

Normandy restarts as new school district



Old district lapsed at midnight; new governing board to meet this afternoon.

[Read more](#)

Normandy schools get a fresh start



The state 'may own the railroad,' but the new board drives the train. [Read more](#)

Normandy parents sue Missouri, area districts in attempt to keep transfer children in new schools

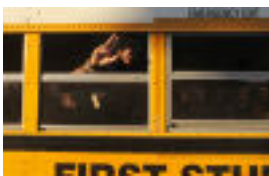


The lawsuit in St. Louis County Circuit Court argues the law still allows transfers from the Normandy Schools Collaborative [Read more](#)

Missouri education department hires transition officer for Normandy

Peter Krachis is a former superintendent of Special School District of St. Louis. [Read more](#)

Kirkwood school board maintains tuition for transfer students



Riverview Gardens students won't get state-recommended tuition reduction

[Read more](#)

Normandy again starts school year at center of turmoil



Students returning Monday face an uncertain year under state oversight, changing rules in transfers, and dealing with Michael Brown's death. [Read more](#)

Francis Howell officials say 'no'

most receiving districts reported they had spent none of the tuition money on additional staff or other services to address any academic deficits of transfer students.

Addressing the consequences of the transfer law dominated much of the legislative session. The 1993 statute promised hope to children in the state's most troubled, high-poverty districts, but wasn't quite delivering. It offered children in unaccredited districts a shot at better schools, with their home districts covering tuition and transportation. It also allows receiving districts to set tuition. As a result, more money followed the average transfer student from Normandy and Riverview Gardens than was coming in.

In May, with Normandy nearly bankrupt, the Missouri Board of Education voted to replace the district with a different one to avoid having to dissolve it entirely and assign 4,000 children to other schools.

Now, the state board is poised to remake a failed district and oversee the operations of a school district for the first time. The Normandy Schools Collaborative will have an appointed board and a longer school year. It will carry a nonaccredited status, effectively removing it from under the school transfer law.

The eight state board members reviewed budget projections last week as they set the financial framework for the new district. Projections showed that maintaining the status quo for student transfers would be impossible for the Normandy Schools Collaborative. It would no sooner start than fold.

"To do nothing is to close the district in — you can pick your month," said Peter Herschend of Branson, state board president. "Somewhere in October, November, December, it will cease to function."

So, board members decided to prohibit new student transfers from the district.

They put a cap on what the Normandy Collaborative would pay the 20 districts that enrolled Normandy transfer students.

They also voted to deny 131 transfer students the right to remain in their new schools because they hadn't attended Normandy during the 2012-13 school year.

The result should allow Normandy a balanced budget.

"It's always about competing equity rights," said Michael Jones of St. Louis, vice president of the board. "We made the least bad decisions out of a range of bad options."

Several Normandy parents watched as state board members talked about the fate of their children.

SheRon Chaney said the decisions could potentially alter the course of her children's lives. One daughter attends Jefferson Elementary in Normandy. The other transferred to Maplewood-Richmond Heights Middle School. As of now, it looks like both will remain where they are.

"We missed the bullet," Chaney said.

But the transfer situation is fluid.

For example, most every decision the state Board of Education has made recently would be negated if the bill

to Normandy students



District turns away hundreds of students who attended its schools

last year. [Read more](#)

State tightens eligibility for students wanting out of Riverview Gardens

Guidance from state requires new transfer students to have attended Riverview schools last year; asks receiving districts to knock down tuition [Read more](#)

End of some Normandy transfers leaves parents in the lurch



State Board of Education vote disqualifies children who have not

attended school in district at least a semester. [Read more](#)

Normandy will be first school system under direct state oversight



Missouri Board of Education will establish a new Normandy on July

1. [Read more](#)

approved by the Legislature became law. Though Nixon has said he plans to veto the bill, he has not done so — adding to the uncertainty.

Meanwhile, Riverview Gardens — the other unaccredited district — is about to begin a school year that could leave it in severe financial shape from transfer tuition expenses. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has asked receiving districts to knock down their per-student annual tuition to about \$7,200 — around the same amount most districts charge St. Louis Public Schools for transfer students under the voluntary desegregation program.

It will be up to school boards to decide whether they will accept students at the reduced tuition.

The state education

department has asked districts to decide by June 30.

Francis Howell was the first to decide against continuing participation.

The Pattonville School Board meets Tuesday. Mehlville's and University City's meet Thursday. The Kirkwood board's next meeting is July 21.

In the case of Riverview Gardens, those votes will determine how expensive transfers will be in 2014-15.

In the case of Normandy, the votes will determine how many more transfer students will be turned away. Or not.

Last week, supporters of the transfer bill continued to blast Nixon for not allowing it to become law. The bill would return Normandy to its unaccredited status, allow transfers to remain, and allow children to use public money to transfer to nonreligious private schools. Nixon has until July 14 to veto the bill, or it becomes law.

On Wednesday, he said he still intends to kill it. The state board's actions have created a better future for the new Normandy district, he said, despite the turmoil.

“The fact there is a path forward is a lot better than the precipice they were facing,” he said at an energy conference in Clayton. “While there will be bumps and there will be challenges ahead, I do think that the process the state board is going through is a cleaner framework than the legislation

that was passed by the Legislature.”



Robert Cohen

Normandy High government teacher Alfonso Cotton gives senior Romalus Tabb some help with his robe prior to graduation at Viking Hall on Thursday, May 22, 2014. Photo by Robert Cohen, rcohen@post-dispatch.com

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