



# TESTIMONY

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## HOUSE BILL 1814: ESTABLISHES TRANSFER PROCEDURES TO NONRESIDENT DISTRICTS FOR STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*By Susan Pendergrass*

Testimony before the Missouri House Elementary and Secondary  
Education Committee

### **TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THIS COMMITTEE**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Susan Pendergrass, Ph.D., and I am Director of Research and Education Policy for the Show-Me Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, Missouri-based think tank that advances sensible, well-researched, free-market solutions to state and local policy issues. The ideas presented here are my own and are offered in consideration of proposals that will affect charter schools in Missouri.

Forty-seven states and the District of Columbia have policies that allow students to enroll in a school that is outside their home district. In

some states district participation is mandatory, and in others it is voluntary. These policies give students access to schools and curricula that may not be available in their home district or that may be of higher quality than in their home district. In addition, open enrollment policies allow families to choose schools closer to work, relatives, childcare, or other considerations beyond their home address.

In rural areas, open enrollment can provide much-needed options for high school students in particular. In the 2019–20 school year, Missouri had over 60 high schools with fewer than 10 students in the 12th grade and another 100 high schools with fewer than 25 seniors. These schools are often too small to

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offer a comprehensive education to their students. Not surprisingly, in 2017–18 (latest available) just 2 percent of rural high school students took calculus, 7 percent took physics, and 9 percent took an advanced placement course, well below the state and national averages. Students who graduate from these high schools will enter the workforce or postsecondary education with peers who have had substantially more preparation opportunities.

Although transportation is often cited as a hindrance to open enrollment, rural students in other states do not seem to have been deterred. A 2016 Ohio State University study of Ohio's open enrollment found that rural students were the most likely to participate in the program.

Approximately 7 percent of rural students chose to cross district lines, compared to one percent of suburban students and 3.5 percent of urban students. Similarly, more than 15 percent of rural students in Michigan participate in that state's interdistrict open enrollment program. A recent study by the Brookings Institute found that 54 percent of students, nationally, have access to a school in another district within 5 miles of their home and 73 percent have access to them within 10 miles.

Open enrollment policies also open rural areas to collaborative high school programs. The Texas Rural Schools Innovation Zone (RSIZ) is a collaboration between three rural school districts and two postsecondary institutions. Students in the RSIZ can attend classes at any of six specialized academies in the zone—including arts, career and technical education, health and science,

and STEM—while maintaining enrollment in their home district. The legislation created by HB 1814 could provide the foundation for these types of efforts.

## CONCLUSION

If the COVID-19 pandemic proved anything it's that students need to keep learning, and that often requires providing them at least one alternative to their assigned public school. By allowing Missouri students to cross district lines, the legislature could give families access to additional programming and additional learning environments without requiring them to move out of their homes.



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