



WOULD INTERDISTRICT OPEN ENROLLMENT DISRUPT MISSOURI SCHOOL DISTRICTS?

By Avery Frank, Patrick Johann, and Cory Koedel



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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Critics of interdistrict open enrollment (IOE) argue that allowing students to cross district boundaries will disrupt district enrollments and, in turn, disrupt district finances.
 - However, we find no evidence that IOE increases enrollment volatility, and if there are no major enrollment disruptions, there can be no funding disruptions, because funding changes due to IOE follow from enrollment changes. Thus, our findings give no evidence to suggest IOE will disrupt district budgets.
 - We further find no evidence that the introduction of IOE leads to mass migrations of students into popular districts, or out of unpopular ones. This is partly explained by the fact that even in states with strong IOE policies, the overwhelming majority of families continue to enroll their children in their resident districts. Commonsense features of IOE policies also help—for instance, one reason that popular districts are not overrun is that they are not required to admit students beyond their capacity.
- Alternatively, proponents of IOE argue it can transform public education by sparking meaningful interdistrict competition for students. Our findings do not entirely rule this out, though they suggest it is unlikely, at least in the first five years.
- Holistically, our results suggest that IOE is not a systemic disruptor of the residentially based school assignment system. Instead, it appears to provide increased mobility for a relatively small but meaningful share of families for whom the local district is not a good fit. While IOE is unlikely to produce the sweeping changes anticipated by its strongest advocates—or feared by its strongest critics—it can still help many families have better educational experiences.