

May 14, 2014

Committee Testimony

Senate Education and Workforce Committee Members

Mark Hass, Chair

Tim Knopp, Vice-Chair

Lee Beyer

Jeff Kruse

Arnie Roblan

I am sharing my concerns about HB 2747. The concept sounds good but I am afraid the reality will be very different. I do not believe it will achieve its goal or purpose if it is to increase transfers, to make transfers “fair” or improve opportunities for underserved or under represented students.

I have been Superintendent of three school districts across the state and across the economic range. I have also been a High School and Middle School principal and an administrator in three districts. In addition I developed a shared time charter school program serving seven high schools and in four school districts. I know and understand the reality of inter-district and intra-district transfer policy and practice.

Let me share with you why this bill may backfire, what I see as some issues and how the current system works to student’s advantage:

- Backfire:
 - A prominent attorney has told school superintendents that this bill will most likely close down inter-district transfers as we currently know and practice them, because school will have to take any and all students without knowing their educational, social or behavioral needs and as such school will not be willing to take the risk.
 - The transfer student’s test performance and graduation rate will reflect the receiving district state and federal public performance data, for this reason districts may want to know they can serve or help a transferring student.
 - The bill provides that a district may declare that they will not take transfer students under this law, electing to do so will protect the district from unknown transfers or students they cannot help with programs they currently offer. (note: timelines and processes are different from other transfer timelines in other legislation)
- Issues:
 - This bill does not impact intra-district transfers, so districts with multiple schools or magnet school are not covered. Within a district there may still be an application and/or screening process. Sample of policy for intra-district transfer from PPS, *“Admission criteria shall be clear, objective and directly related to the educational goals of the option and the district. A school or program may require*

the family and student to indicate an understanding of program expectations prior to enrollment. (c) Middle and high school focus options may have admission criteria as specified in the operations plan ...” HB 4727 takes this away from inter-district transfers, in fact it prohibits a receiving school from even requiring a school visit. The transferring student and parent may never have seen or visited their new school. They may have no idea what is actually offered at the receiving school.

- Currently the transfer policy is in flux, we have three ways you move among schools and all three methods are under review or are currently being disputed. Open enrolment is a three year test; inter-district transfers are addressed in this bill and tuition in another hotly contested bill. I am sure you understand the complexity you create when there are multiple pieces of legislations controlling a single issue such as student transfers. I do not think it is good policy to change the process for students and parents in three pieces of related legislation. It seems that while we have a pilot process for open enrolment we should let it play out and evaluate it on its own merits before we start changing related parts of the practice.
- Why it works now:
 - Currently inter-district transfers are mutual agreements between the parting and receiving district. I have been involved in hundreds of these at every level from my children, grandchildren, school principal, charter school program director and district Superintendent. The blocking point has seldom been the accepting school; it has been the releasing school.
 - The current process requires a conversation with school officials, parents and students. The problem solving that goes on in these meetings is wonderful. The departing school can tell what it has done or how it might change what it is doing and the receiving school can say, here is what we have to offer. This legislation cuts this process out of the transfer. Every one of these hundreds of transfers has an individual story; many are about needing a fresh start, high school students needing a new peer group after drug rehab, children escaping bad situations or students seeking new and different opportunities. In the current system the door is open, under this legislation the exit door may be open but the entrances may well be closed.

I ask you please, to defeat this bill, not because children shouldn't have opportunities but because they should have opportunities and this bill will actually reduce options and hurt kids not help them.

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