

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT THIRTY-NINE

Amherst, Mont Vernon, and Souhegan Cooperative School Districts

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Open Enrollment - Amherst School District Frequently Asked Questions

What is open enrollment?

Under New Hampshire law (RSA 194-D), open enrollment is a state-approved school choice option that permits students to transfer to schools outside their home districts. When a student transfers, their home district must pay 80% of its own per-pupil-cost to the student's new district as tuition.

The state Supreme Court ruled last October that unless a school district's voters approve an open enrollment policy, that district may not limit the number of its students who transfer to another school district, regardless of the total cost to the home district.

Also, districts without open enrollment policies cannot accept transfers from other districts or collect tuition for them.

What does the open enrollment warrant article propose?

Article 14 establishes an open enrollment policy designating the Clark Wilkins and Amherst Middle School as open enrollment schools, and sets the number of students who may use tax dollars to transfer to other communities' schools at zero (0). The number of students permitted to transfer from outside school districts would be limited to one (1).

Why have these warrant articles been proposed?

Without open-enrollment policies and designations in place, the school district would be at risk of having to use local taxpayer dollars to fund tuition for students who transfer out of the district. This will increase financial pressures on the community, create budgeting and enrollment-projection challenges, and jeopardize staffing levels and program continuity.

As the State Legislature continues to discuss changes to open enrollment, this warrant article attempts to ensure that decisions about enrollment remain under the control of Amherst voters.

What does your vote mean?

A YES vote means:

- The Amherst School District (Clark-Wilkins Elementary School & Amherst Middle School) may accept up to 1 student, if all eligibility criteria are met.
- Students cannot use school budget funds to pay tuition at another town's public school through the open enrollment process.
- District funding, planning, staffing, and course offerings are protected.

A NO vote means:

- An unlimited number of students may leave to attend other open enrollment schools, and District taxpayers would have to pay their tuition.
- The school district will lose 80% of the per-pupil funding for each student who leaves, even if the student's destination district has a lower cost per pupil.
- Clark-Wilkins Elementary School & Amherst Middle School will not have the option to admit non-SAU 39 students and receive tuition for them.

What is the current per-pupil cost in the Amherst School District?

Recently, the annual per-pupil cost has been about \$23,900 in Amherst. Transferring from the district would take 80% of that funding with them to their new district. The approximate amount of taxpayer funding per student leaving Clark-Wilkins Elementary School or Amherst Middle School would be \$19,100.

Can any non-resident student enroll at Clark-Wilkins Elementary School or Amherst Middle School?

No. Students will need to meet academic and other eligibility criteria established by the school through an application process yet to be determined.

How will special education costs be handled?

Students' home districts will remain financially responsible for special education services.

Will class sizes increase?

Students will be accepted only if space is available and services are not affected.

Why does the warrant article set the number of students who may transfer into the District at up to one student?

Despite concerns about space for additional students, allowing up to one student to transfer into the District appears to currently best satisfy the state statute, and keep the open enrollment decision locally.

Does this mean no one can transfer out of Clark-Wilkins Elementary School or Amherst Middle School?

No. Traditional options still exist.