

# SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT THIRTY-NINE

Amherst, Mont Vernon, and Souhegan Cooperative School Districts

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## **Open Enrollment - Souhegan Cooperative 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 the districts in which they live. 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 do the open enrollment warrant articles propose?*

Article 8 establishes an open enrollment policy for Souhegan High School, designating it as an open enrollment school and setting the number of students who may use tax dollars to transfer to other communities' schools at zero (0). The number of students who would be permitted to transfer from outside school districts would be set at no more than 2% of SCSD's enrollment. Fewer could be admitted.

Article 9 would apply only if Article 8 failed to pass. Article 9 would raise \$200,000 through new taxation to create a trust fund that would be used to pay tuition to outside districts to which SCSD resident students transfer.

### *Why has this warrant article been proposed?*

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

As the State Legislature continues to discuss changes to open enrollment, these warrant articles attempt to ensure that decisions about enrollment remain under the control of Amherst and Mont Vernon voters.

### *What does your vote mean?*

A **YES** vote means:

- Souhegan High School may accept up to 2% of its total enrollment (up to 14 students, based on current enrollment) 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 districts 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.
- SHS 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 three local school districts?*

Recently, the annual per-pupil cost has been about \$25,800 at Souhegan. 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 Souhegan High School would be \$20,700.

*Can any non-resident student enroll at SHS?*

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

*How will special education costs be handled?*

Students' home districts will remain financially responsible for special education services when working with SHS's team of special educators.

*Will class sizes increase?*

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

*Why would we want more students at SHS?*

Souhegan's philosophy and culture may appeal to non-resident students, generating additional revenue.

*Does this mean no one can transfer out of Souhegan High School?*

No. Traditional options still exist.