

STATUTORY ATTENDANCE OPTIONS

Prepared by the California Department of Education

CHOOSING YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL

A Summary of School Attendance Alternatives in California

California law [EC § 48980(h)] requires all school boards to inform each pupil's parents/guardians at the beginning of the school year of the various ways in which they may choose schools for their children to attend other than the ones assigned by school districts. Pupils that attend schools other than those assigned by the districts are referred to as "transfer pupils" throughout this notification. There is one process for choosing a school within the district which the parents/guardians live (intradistrict transfer), and three separate processes for selecting schools in other districts (interdistrict transfer). The general requirements and limitations of each process are described below.

Choosing a School Within the District in Which Parents/Guardians Live

The law (EC § 35160.5(b) (1) requires the school board of each district to establish a policy that allows parents/guardians to choose the schools their children will attend, regardless of where the parents/guardians live in the district. The law limits choice within a school district as follows:

- Pupils who live in the attendance area of a school must be given priority to attend that school over pupils who do not live in the school's attendance area.
- In cases in which there are more requests to attend a school than there are openings, the selection process must be "random and unbiased," which generally means pupils must be selected through a lottery process rather than on a first-come, first-served basis. A district cannot use a pupil's academic or athletic performance as a reason to accept or reject a transfer.
- Each district must decide the number of openings at each school which can be filled by transfer pupils. Each district also has the authority to keep appropriate racial and ethnic balances among its schools, meaning that a district can deny a transfer request if it would upset this balance or would leave the district out of compliance with a court-ordered or voluntary desegregation program.
- A district is not required to provide transportation assistance to a pupil that transfers to another school in the district under these provisions.
- If a transfer is denied, a parent/guardian does not have an automatic right to appeal the decision. A district may, however, voluntarily decide to put in place a process for parents/guardians to appeal a decision.

Choosing a School Outside the District in Which Parents/Guardians Live

Parents/guardians have two different options for choosing a school outside the district in which they live. The three options are described below:

1. Interdistrict Transfers

The law (EC §§46600 through 46607) allows two or more school boards to enter into an agreement, for a term of up to five years, for the transfer of one or more pupils between districts. The agreement must specify the terms and conditions for granting or denying transfers. The district in which the parent/guardian lives may issue an individual permit under the terms of the agreement, or district policy, for transfer and for the applicable period of time. The permit is valid upon endorsement by the district of proposed attendance. The law on interdistrict transfers also provides for the following:

- If either district denies a transfer request, a parent/guardian may appeal that decision to the county board of education. There are specified timelines in the law for filing an appeal and for the county board of education to make a decision.
- No district is required to provide transportation to a pupil who transfers into the district.

2. Parental Employment Transfers

The law (EC §48204(b)) provides that a school district may deem a pupil as having complied with the residency requirements for school attendance if one or both parents/guardians of a pupil are physically employed within the boundaries of the district for a minimum of 10 hours during a school week, or if a pupil lives at their parent/legal guardian's placement of employment outside of the boundaries of their school district of residence for a minimum of 3 days during the school week. A school district is not required to accept a pupil requesting a transfer on this basis, but a pupil may not be rejected on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex, parental income, academic achievement, or any other "arbitrary" consideration. Other provisions of the EC § 48204(b) includes:

- Either the district in which the parent/guardian lives or the district in which the parent/guardian works may prohibit the transfer if it is determined that there would be a negative impact on the district's court-ordered or voluntary desegregation plan.
- The district in which the parent/guardian works may reject a transfer if it determines that the additional cost of educating the pupil would be more than the amount of government funds the district would receive for educating the pupil.
- There are set limits (based on total enrollment) on the net number of pupils that may transfer out of a district in any school year, unless the sending district approves a greater number of transfers.
- There is no required appeal process for a transfer that is denied. However, the district that declines to admit a pupil is encouraged to identify, and communicate in writing to the parent/guardian the specific reasons for denying the transfer.
- Once a pupil is deemed to have complied with the residency requirements for school attendance based on one or both parents or guardians being employed within the boundaries of the district and the pupil is enrolled in a school in a school district whose boundaries include the location where one or both parents of the pupil is employed, the pupil does not have to reapply in the next school year to attend a school within that school district and the district shall allow the pupil to attend school through the 12th grade in that district if one or both of the pupil's parents or guardians continues to be employed within the attendance boundaries of the school district, subject to certain conditions.