



Board Policy 4.5

School Choice

Enrollment Implications - A Change in
Procedure



School Choice - What is School Choice?

School Choice generally allows parents to select a public school other than the one tied to their residence.

School Choice - Interdistrict: between districts: i.e Alma to Fort Smith or Fort Smith to Alma

School Choice - Intradistrict: between resident zones; i.e. Ballman to Fairview or Fairview to Ballman



School Choice: Interdistrict - District to District: Historical

School Choice allows for a citizen of Arkansas to move from one district to another.

Time frame: Annually Jan 1 to May 1

2015 - 2025: School Choice law set a staffing capacity of 90%.



School Choice: Interdistrict and Intradistrict Allowances

Changes to procedures for the 2026 School Choice Cycle are being driven by...

[Act 732 of 2025](#)

[Proposed Rule - School Choice Draft](#) -

[Board Policy 4.5](#) - School Choice Act



School Choice: Interdistrict - District to District: Jan 1, 2026

School Choice allows for a citizen of Arkansas to move from one district to another.

Time Frame: Annually January 1 - June 1

Complete the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education's School Choice Application

School Choice Law Set Staffing Capacity at 95%



School Choice: Intradistrict - School to School: Historical

Fort Smith's Intradistrict Option - known as Attendance Area Exception (AAE)

- Philosophy: neighborhood schools serve the residents of the attendance zone.
- If staffing capacity is not reached, an attendance zone non-resident may request an AAE to attend a different school.
- Operationally
 - High School (Grades 9-12) - January 1 through the first 20 days of the fall semester. Reopens first 20 days of the second semester.
 - Middle School (Grades 6-9) - First Monday in March through the first 20 days of the fall semester. Reopens the first 20 days of the second semester.
 - Elementary (Grades K-5) - Beginning on Day 11 through Day 30 of first semester. Reopens first 20 days of second semester. Elementary age students must reapply each year.



School Choice: Intradistrict-School to School: January 1, 2026

Step 1: Board Resolution - [4.5F](#) - School Choice Act - Staffing Capacity Resolution

Step 2: Elementary Attendance Area Exception (AAE)

- Parents will be notified that their student with an AAE who is attending an elementary school will be grandfathered in through the end of the 5th-grade year.
- Class-sized students who would like to stay in the class-sized school must complete a School Choice application and be approved.

Step 3: School Choice Application Window: January 1-June 1

- Complete the Division of Elementary and Secondary [School Choice Application](#)



School Choice: Key Takeaways Moving Forward

School Choice is no longer just available for Interdistrict students; it is now available for intradistrict transfers.

School Choice is now available from January 1 until June 1 each school year.

Parents/Guardians/Students (if 18 years of age or older) can request the transfer for the next school year, or they may request an immediate transfer during that time frame.

The district must notify the parents/guardians/student (if 18 years of age or older) regarding acceptance or rejection no later than 15 calendar days following the receipt of an application. This decision must also be sent to the student's resident district.

If a school is below 95% capacity at the time of the application, and no new program would have to be put in place then the request should be granted.



School Choice: Key Takeaways

If a school choice application is approved, this placement remains in place until the student graduates or leaves the district.

Applications may be rejected if the acceptance would necessitate additional classrooms; exceed the staffing capacity of a program, class, grade level, or school building; or cause the district to provide educational services not currently provided.

Petitioners may appeal rejected applications to the State Board of Education.

For students entering Grades 7-12 whose School Choice applications were approved will need to meet certain criteria in order to be eligible for athletics. There are various scenarios under these guidelines.

[Changing School Athletic Participation \(CSAP\) Varsity](#)

[Changing School Athletic Participation \(CSAP\) Junior Varsity](#)



Questions?