



Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the St. Louis Student Transfer Program?

The St. Louis Student Transfer Program was established to increase the opportunities for racially integrated learning experiences in metropolitan area public schools under a Settlement Agreement reached in the St. Louis desegregation case and approved by the Federal Court in 1983. This Settlement Agreement allows African-American students residing in the City of St. Louis to voluntarily attend one of several participating school districts in St. Louis County, provided certain eligibility requirements regarding residency and behavior records are met. The program also provides for non-African-American students who live in participating suburban school districts to voluntarily transfer into St. Louis Magnet Schools in the City. Originally under the supervision of the Federal Courts, the St. Louis Student Transfer program is now managed by a non-profit corporation governed by a board of directors comprising superintendents of the participating school districts who decide policy and make decisions about the program in accordance with the provisions of the governing Settlement Agreement. Each board member's vote is weighted in proportion to the number of transfer students his/her district serves.

2. How long will the program continue?

The 2023-2024 school year was the final year for enrolling new students in the program.

In 1999, a revised Settlement Agreement was reached among the various parties which transformed the federally supervised voluntary program into a program run by a newly established 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation (VICC), with the agreement that suburban school districts would continue accepting new transfer students for at least a ten-year period ending in 2008-2009. This new agreement included language specifying that the program could be extended to accept new students beyond the 2008-2009 original ending date for new enrollments. An initial five-year extension pursuant to this provision was unanimously approved by the VICC Board in June, 2007, a second five-year extension approved in October, 2012, and a third extension approved November, 2016. As a result, new students were enrolled by districts through the 2023-2024 school year with the emphasis on siblings during the final five years. Once enrolled, students are allowed to continue their education in their participating suburban district through graduation. Due to certain legal limitations on the indefinite continuation of a race-based school integration program we have been gradually reducing the total number of students participating despite the mutual benefits for all students involved. One of our biggest challenges remains – how do we continue a program which has proven to be beneficial in light of the legal and financial challenges, given that racial segregation since the inception of the program has certainly not diminished and, in fact, has likely increased in many areas of metropolitan St. Louis? Our program has realized and demonstrated much success over the years as documented by empirical data as well as the many individual success stories of countless students. We need to work together as a community and a nation to identify opportunities to continue and expand upon the successes that our students have experienced.

3. How many students are currently served by the program?

About 2,500 students currently participate in the St. Louis Student Transfer Program, down from a peak of over 14,000 in the 1999-2000 school year.

4. How do the students get to school?

VICC provides and pays for the transportation of students participating in the program who meet the eligibility criteria for transportation services. Safety, efficiency and ride times are the major considerations in planning and operating VICC's student transportation services. Each day students receive one round-trip between home and school, including transportation home for students who stay after school for tutoring or other sponsored activities. At the start of the 2022-2023 school year, 134 bus routes and 105 cab routes were scheduled. Students are scheduled to ride cabs if there are fewer than ten children attending a school from a specific area or if ride times on existing school bus routes are a factor. Of the approximately 2,700 students in the program, about 92.4 percent ride on school buses. The goal is to schedule the majority of students on school buses. However, the number of cab routes have been increasing in recent years due to the combined effect of a growing homeless population and an increased number of relocated students who could not be placed at a school in the proper attendance area. The average one-way student ride time for the 2022-2023 school year was 58 minutes, with the majority of students (about 55 percent) having ride times of less than 60 minutes; 17 percent had ride times of up to 70 minutes in length, about 15 percent ride between 71 and 80 minutes and about 13 percent had rides of 81 to 90 minutes. Total transportation miles for 2022-2023 was about 3,330,000, which includes about 300,000 miles for activity transportation.

5. How is the program funded?

Virtually all of VICC's funding to support the transfer program is received from the State of Missouri through its normal public school aid sources. These state aid payments simply follow the students from their district of residence to the program. VICC receives no special or additional revenues so there are no extra costs to Missouri taxpayers. Funds are used to provide transportation service and to pay tuition amounts (see next question) to participating school districts based upon the local districts' costs of education.

6. Are county districts fully reimbursed for their local cost of education through these tuition payments?

Currently suburban school districts are paid the lesser of their actual average cost of education per pupil or the current reimbursement maximum of \$7,000 per student. Each school district carefully reviews its cost structure, enrollment numbers and staffing levels to insure that reimbursement payments are at least sufficient to cover the incremental costs of participating in the transfer program. For example, voluntary transfer students can often be placed in county schools and classrooms that have "available" space resulting in minimal increases in local costs to educate the new students.

7. How successful is the program?

The St. Louis Student Transfer program removes barriers to educational success and gives young people from a variety of racial and cultural backgrounds the tools that they need today to work together to meet the challenges of tomorrow. While no formal report on program effectiveness is required by the Federal Court or the State of Missouri, past studies conducted by VICC show a higher graduation rate higher achievement levels over time on state standardized tests (as measured by the Missouri Assessment Program—MAP—test index scores) and more positive attitudes and success in integrated environments.

8. How does having minority children from the city in their classes impact suburban students?

Not only does being in a diverse classroom help all students better prepare for life in a world that is becoming increasingly more diverse, a variety of studies have indicated students who have had a desegregated educational experience are more likely to have positive racial attitudes and success in integrated environments throughout their lives and often choose to live in more diverse communities. In addition, studies completed since 1990 show that in integrated classrooms there is no evidence of academic harm to any students and show benefits to students in math, science and language arts, especially at the middle and high school levels. Desegregated educational experiences also help to promote greater acceptance and understanding.

9. How does the transfer program impact the St. Louis Public Schools?

To the extent that voluntary transfer students would have otherwise attended City schools, St. Louis Public Schools' enrollment, and therefore state funding amounts, are likewise lower. However, funding reductions are in direct proportion to student counts so there is no negative impact on state or federal per pupil amounts received by SLPS and the City school system is permitted to retain the "local effort" (funds generated by local property taxes). Furthermore, analyses of student test scores each year suggest that the achievement levels of students just entering the transfer program are comparable to students remaining in City schools. In addition, the percentage of transfer students eligible for free and reduced-cost meals is also comparable to SLPS students. Therefore, while City schools' enrollment levels are reduced by students choosing to attend county schools through the VICC program (as well as the growing impact of charter schools and by the declining birthrate in St. Louis City), there is no adverse selection in terms of academic standing or socio-economic factors on the St. Louis Public Schools' student body.

Under the original 1983 Settlement Agreement, financial compensation paid by the State of Missouri in the amount of one-half of the state aid for each student who chose to transfer was provided to the sending district. As the home district with the largest number of transferring students, the St. Louis Public Schools were the annual recipients of significant sums of money, often referred to as "phantom tuition payments," until 1999. Additionally, under the terms of the 1983 Settlement Agreement, the St. Louis Public Schools received additional financial resources to fund improvements in the quality of education in all City schools and specifically to improve the quality of education of students remaining in one-race schools.

10. How can I find out more about the St. Louis Voluntary Student Transfer Program?

William H. Freivogel: "St. Louis: Desegregation and School Choice in the Land of Dred Scott, " Century Foundation Press, 9/18/2002

Gerald W. Heaney and Susan Uchitelle. Unending Struggle: The Long Road to an Equal Education in St. Louis. St. Louis, MO: Reedy Press (Distributed by University of Nebraska Press), 2004.

Amy Stuart Wells and Robert L. Crain. Stepping Over the Color Line: African-American Students in White Suburban Schools. Yale University Press. 1997.

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