



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 racial integration 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 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 transfer into St. Louis Magnet Schools in the city.

2. How long will the program continue?

In 1999, a revised Settlement Agreement was reached amongst the various parties which transformed the federally supervised program into a "voluntary" program under the jurisdiction of 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 and maintain certain targeted enrollment levels 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, with a second five-year extension approved in October, 2012. As a result, new students are continuing to be enrolled by districts through at least the 2018-2019 school year. Once enrolled, students are allowed to continue their education in their chosen suburban district through graduation.

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 comprised of 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.



Rockwood mom Latisha Smith says, "As a graduate of Rockwood, I know the standards of excellence in education that is demonstrated throughout the district. My education opened many doors for me; I am eager to see how Rockwood will do the same and more for my children and so many others."

Ty and Tyla Smith, Bowles Elementary School, Rockwood School district, are shown above with their dad Ty Smith, who is an active parent volunteer.

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3. Which districts are still accepting new transfer students?

Districts continuing to accept new transfer students (for the 2013-2014 school year) include Affton, Bayless, Brentwood, Clayton, Hancock Place, Kirkwood (siblings only), Mehlville, Parkway, Rockwood, Valley Park, Webster Groves and the St. Louis Public Schools. Although not currently accepting any new enrollments, the Lindbergh and Pattonville school districts still have transfer students remaining in their districts. In addition, students continue to be served by the St. Louis County Special School District. Finally, non-African-American students who live in these

suburban school districts (or in the Ladue or Ritenour school districts) and meet eligibility criteria are able to apply to transfer into St. Louis Magnet Schools in the city.

The participating school districts may “opt out” of accepting new students but generally have not done so due to the success of the program and the benefits to their district and their resident students.

4. How many students are currently

served by the program?

About 5,100 students currently participate in the St. Louis Student Transfer Program, down from a peak of over 14,000 in the 1999-2000 school year. As of January, 2013, the program has 5,036 students from St. Louis City attending 14 suburban school districts and 87 students from 15 suburban school districts attending magnet schools in the city. However, each year there are thousands more applicants interested in making a transfer than there is space available, resulting in long waiting lists for admission.

5. 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 2012-2013 school year, 243 bus routes and 100 cab routes were scheduled. Students are only scheduled to ride cabs if there are fewer than eight children attending a school from a specific area as it is more cost effective to run up to two cabs rather than a single bus. Of the approximately 5,100 students in the program, about 96 percent ride on school buses. Ride time guidelines also factor into the decision to schedule a child on a cab. The goal is to schedule the majority of students on school buses. However, the number of cab routes has 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 2012-2013 school year is 54 minutes, with the majority of students (about 61 percent) having ride times of less than 60 minutes; fewer than 20 percent have ride times of up to 70 minutes in length, about 13 percent ride between 71 and 80 minutes and about six percent have rides of 81 to 90 minutes. Total transportation miles for 2011-2012 was 6,714,388, which includes 832,159 miles for activity transportation.

6. 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.



“Parkway has shown me that I am capable of success beyond imagination and that I can do anything I put my mind to do. The St. Louis Student Transfer program has had a profound effect on my high school success.”

*Tierra Wilson, Senior,
Parkway North High School*

7. 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 (\$7,200 beginning in 2013-2014). 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 which have "available" space resulting in minimal increases in local costs to educate the new students.

8. 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 (80—100 percent depending on county district versus 65.5 percent in the city), higher attendance rates (94 percent versus 93.1 percent), 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.

9. 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.



10. 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

"The St. Louis Student Transfer program gives my kids the opportunity to be educated in a diverse setting and meet different kids. They've been given a better educational experience because of this program."

Phelecia McClelland, Mother of Noah (shown above) and Phalen, Bierbaum Elementary School, Mehlville School District



“One of the things that attracted us to the Affton School District was the high level of academic achievement by state standards. Our daughters love their schools and are being well prepared for the future.”

Charlie and Myriame Robinson, Parents of Chiryame and Mawina, Affton School District

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.

11. What factors determine a student's priority for enrollment consideration?

Students currently enrolled in the transfer program but who have moved within the City of St. Louis but outside of their regular school's attendance area are given the highest priority to transfer to a new county school/district within their attendance area. Students who are siblings of an existing transfer student are given the second highest priority. Students who applied the previous year, but were not able to be enrolled are next in priority. Finally, if spaces remain after these initial three priorities are met, then new applications are processed in the order received. Eligible applications are sent to suburban districts in the proper attendance area according to grade and space availability based upon the receipt date of the application at the VICC office. Once the applications are sent to the districts, those districts review the applications and contact the families to initiate the enrollment process.

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

▶ Visit the VICC website:
www.choicecorp.org

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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.

**Contact: David S. Glaser,
CPA, MBA, RSBA**

Chief Executive Officer,
Voluntary Interdistrict Choice
Corporation (VICC)

314.721.8422, ext. 3013

dglaser@choicecorp.org

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@VICC_StLouis

