

Open Enrollment Testimony: HB 3843 in South Carolina

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Presentation Outline

- I. Introductions
- II. Research on the benefits of open enrollment policies
- III. Our 50-state analysis of open enrollment policies
- IV. Comments on HB 3843
- V. Q&A



About Us

Reason Foundation is a national 501(c)(3) public policy research and education organization with expertise across a range of policy areas, including education, public sector pensions, transportation, infrastructure, and criminal justice.

Vision

We envision an education system with robust learning opportunities that meet the unique needs of all families.

Mission

The education team at Reason Foundation supports policymakers in pursuing reforms that tie funding to individual students, promote locally-responsive decisions that drive innovation, and provide robust financial transparency. We do this through policy research, technical support, and thought leadership.

For more information about Reason Foundation, e-mail aaron.smith@reason.org.

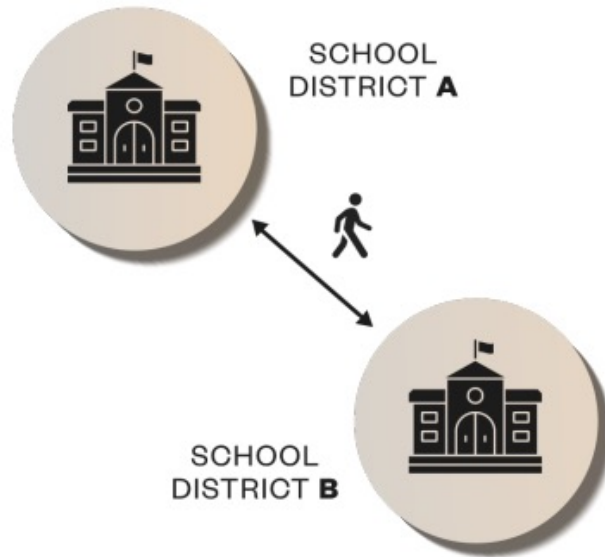
Also see Reason Foundation's [Student-Centered Funding Roadmap for Policymakers](#).



What is Open Enrollment?

- **Open Enrollment:** The ability of a student to enroll in any public school if it has open seats, regardless of that child's district of residence or residential assignment zone.

Cross-District



Within-District





Why Support Open Enrollment?

- Regardless of income or residence, families should be able to access a school of their choice.
- School quality and property wealth should not be related.
- Open enrollment policies have bi-partisan support, with 70% of Democrats, 67% of Republicans, and 76% of school parents supporting it.



Research on Benefits of K-12 Open Enrollment



Research Findings

- Students tend to transfer into higher-performing school districts. (Smith & Campbell, 2021. Ragland & Hulse, 2018)
- Students participate in open enrollment for a variety of reasons, i.e. access specialized course offerings, escape bullying, decrease commute times. (Taylor, 2016. Lavery & Carlson, 2014).
- Consistently participating students see academic gains, especially low-income students. (Carlson & Lavertu, 2017)
- Districts losing students take efforts to engage communities and parents to regain students. (California Legislative Analyst's Office, 2021)



Further Reading

- [Open Doors, Open Districts: School Choice in Colorado's Traditional Public Schools.](#) *Ready Colorado.* Luke Ragland, Craig Hulse, 2018.
- [Analysis of Texas School District Open Enrollment Data.](#) *Reason Foundation.* Jordan Campbell, Aaron Garth Smith, 2021.
- [K-12 Open Enrollment in Wisconsin: Key Lessons for Other States.](#) *Reason Foundation.* Will Flanders, 2023.
- [Follow Up Evaluation of the District of Choice Program.](#) *California Legislative Analyst's Office,* 2021.
- [Interdistrict Open Enrollment in Ohio:](#) Participation and Student Outcomes. *Thomas B. Fordham Institute.* Deven Carlsin, Stephane Lavertu, 2017.

[*Research review for further resources](#)



Reason's 2022 50-State Analysis of Open Enrollment Policies

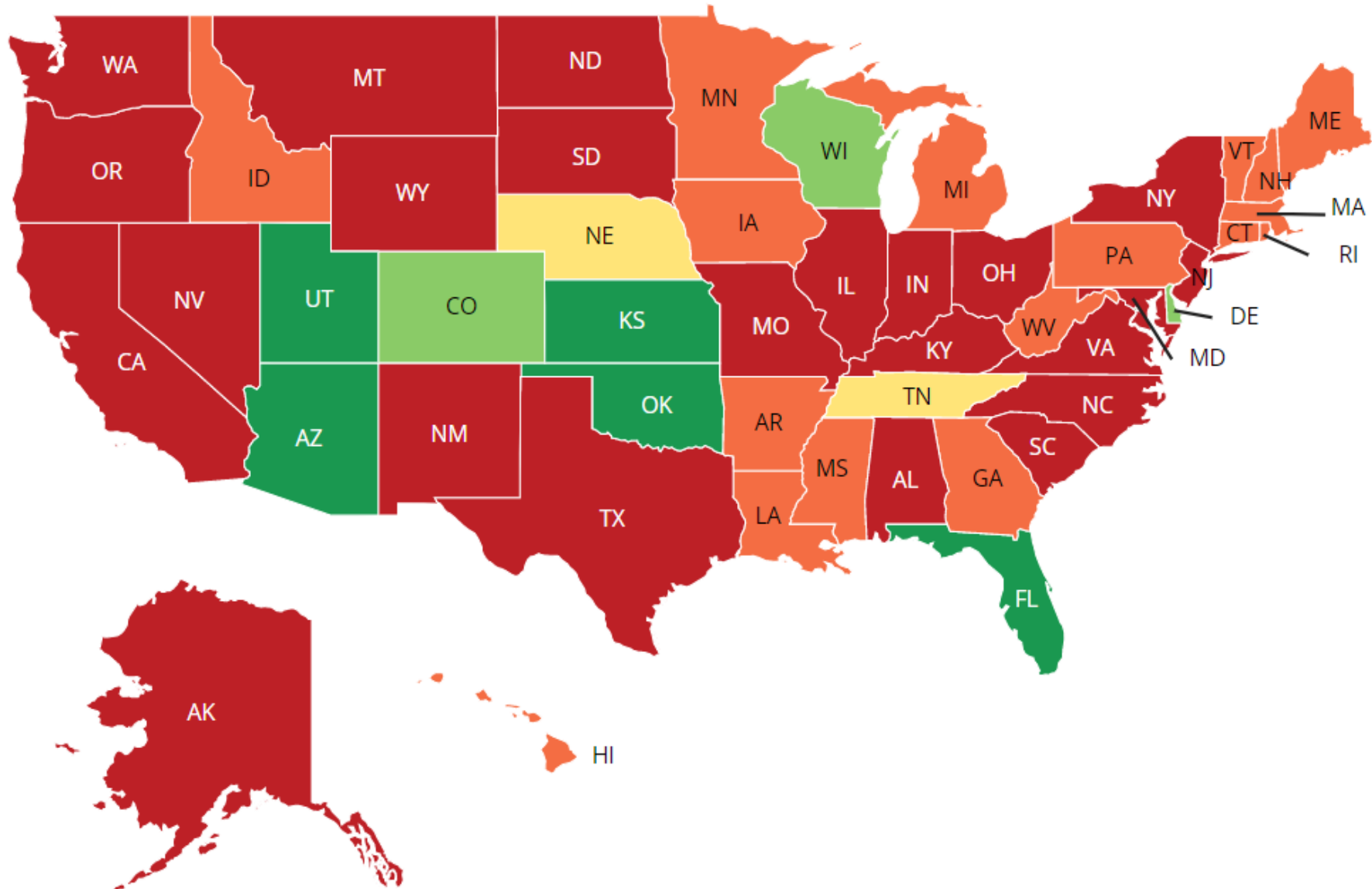


Our Best Practices Checklist

- 1. Mandatory Cross-District Open Enrollment**
- 2. Mandatory Within-District Open Enrollment**
- 3. Transparent Reporting by the State Education Agency (SEA)**
- 4. Transparent School Capacity Reporting**
- 5. Children Have Free Access to All Public Schools**



Open Enrollment Best Practices by State





Summary Findings

1. **9 states** have mandatory cross-district open enrollment policies.
2. **7 states** have mandatory within-district open enrollment policies.
3. **3 states** have transparent state education agency reporting on key data.
4. **7 states** require school districts to report seat capacity.
5. **24 states** forbid charging families tuition for open enrollment.



Comments on HB 3843



Strengths of Bill

- **Strong protections for applicant families.** Limited, specified reasons for denial.
- **Establishes both inter and intra-district open enrollment.**
- **Good district transparency requirements.** Policies must be published and include information on capacity, application evaluation timelines.
- **Preserves local authority.** Districts have discretion to determine application and communication processes and are permitted, not required, to provide transportation and waive any capacity limitations.
- **Resident students and siblings of transfers aren't displaced.** Bill requires districts to first give consideration for current students, siblings of transfers, and within-district transfers.



Recommendations

- **Strengthen transparency requirements.** It's helpful for the public and policymakers to have accessible, state level data on:
 - The number of open enrollment applicants
 - The number of acceptances and denials, and reasons for denial
 - The number of transfers in/out of each district
 - School capacity
- **Consider adding an alternative application window for students in special circumstances.** Research in Wisconsin indicates that an additional application window from February to April can benefit students who are victims of bullying, violent crimes, or who recently moved from another state.



Q&A
