

Good afternoon. I'm Jill Zurschmeide, a member of the Tigard-Tualatin School Board. I understand and appreciate the good intentions behind HB 3681, the open enrollment law. It provides a straightforward way to allow parents and students to choose out of a school that is not serving the student to best effect and into a school that offers a program that best fits the student's needs. Before open enrollment, some districts had policies on student transfers that were too strict. Districts needed to be nudged to be more liberal in their policies, and this law did provide this nudge. However, HB 3681 has had consequences which I'm sure were not intended by its supporters. I'd like to tell you today about the consequences I see in my district, and in particular in one of my elementary schools.

Bridgeport Elementary is an excellent, diverse school with a substantial Latino enrollment. About 60% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch, while many other students come from middle- and high-income families. This school accurately reflects the economic and racial diversity of its neighborhoods. It is a great school: it has been recognized by the Oregon Department of Education as both a "Closing the Achievement Gap" and a "Continuing Success" school. Its OAKS scores have been significantly above the state average.

Stafford Primary, in the West Linn-Wilsonville School District, is a predominantly white and higher income school that has also demonstrated impressive academic success. The Stafford boundary backs up to the Bridgeport boundary.

In the first year of open enrollment, a total of 17 students from within the Bridgeport boundary transferred to Stafford. None of the students who transferred qualified for free and reduced lunch and none were Latino. All were students from the school's wealthier neighborhoods.

Besides losing the students, Bridgeport also lost many families who care deeply about education and have the potential for contributing volunteer hours and support for the school.

Why would parents choose out of an award-winning school that does such a great job of educating kids?

I fear the answer is ugly. Some in our community now view Bridgeport as the “poor” school or the “Latino” school.

I have received email from parents at Bridgeport that is uncomfortable to read. One parent wrote, “I [have] a child entering kindergarten next year. After researching and touring our home school, Bridgeport Elementary, we are very disappointed to learn of the extreme disproportionate need for ESL services in this school.” On the Great Schools web site, another parent criticized Bridgeport because of its “abnormally large ESL student body.”

I worry that wealthier families are transferring or considering transferring out of Bridgeport because the school is perceived as “weak” simply because of the high numbers of students who live in poverty or who are learning to speak English.

In my district, open enrollment has resulted in families of means being able to choose their schools, while families that do not have the luxury of driving their children to a neighboring district lack this choice. This is fundamentally unfair. We should be working to make sure that every school in Oregon is high quality and high achieving, and we should not give advantages to some families, schools, or districts at the expense of others. Open enrollment, despite its best intentions, is exacerbating the problems of racial and economic stratification in my community.

This law needs to be fixed. If a school is in need of improvement, then parents obviously have a valid reason to choose a different school. Bridgeport is not such a school. Please enact HB 3008, which allows school administrators to set reasonable rules around interdistrict transfers. Don't let open enrollment help perpetuate stereotypes about our schools. Thank you.

A Study of Two Schools

	Bridgeport	Stafford
Total students	528 students	551 students
% Free & Reduced ("Poverty")	64%	4%
% ELL	42%	1%
% Hispanic	43%	2%
% White, non-Hispanic	51%	92%
% "Meets" or "Exceeds" in 5 th Grade Reading, Math in 2010	Math: 90% Reading: 87%	> 95% > 95%

Data sources: greatschools.org and *The Oregonian*