

# California State Senate

SENATOR  
BOB HUFF

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER  
TWENTY-NINTH SENATE DISTRICT



## SB 597 – DISTRICT OF CHOICE

### ***SUMMARY***

Preserves the 22 year old California School District of Choice program, which fosters public school choice by allowing parents to transfer their children to participating school districts without a transfer agreement. This program is set to sunset in July of next year (2016). SB 597 will provide a short extension to the program.

### ***THE ISSUE***

In 1993, the Legislature responded to the growing demand for school vouchers by passing AB 19, California's School District of Choice program, giving more public school choices to parents. This program permits districts, by board action, to declare themselves a District of Choice to help fill vacancies in their schools. This allows parents with kids in other districts to leave without their district of residence saying no. In return, if there are openings, the District of Choice cannot deny admission to any student, ensuring there is no cherry-picking of student talent. In the event a District of Choice has too many applicants, there must be a publicized public lottery for the open spots.

California's District of Choice program gives both parents and students the right to decide which school is best for them and their academic needs (especially helping those who want to get out of underperforming school districts). It also compels many schools and districts to regroup and make positive changes to ensure that both students and their parents desire to remain within the district they reside.

The District of Choice program makes it easier for parents and students to transfer to another district,

allowing them to encounter less administrative hurdles than when using the general district transfer process.

Any local property taxes paid by the parents or guardians remain in the school district of residence, while the transfer student's ADA follows him or her to the District of Choice.

Finally, many school districts across California enroll a good deal of students from outside of their district boundaries under the School District of Choice Program. Ending the District of Choice program right now could, and mostly likely would, send several small districts into a chaotic, downward spiral of declining enrollment. While the statewide issue of declining enrollment must be addressed, we should not add districts to the list of those in decline by suddenly ending this program.

### ***THE SOLUTION***

Currently, there is no statute which would prevent thousands of children who have transferred via the District of Choice program, from being sent back to their district of residence should this program sunset. This could prove devastating to thousands of students, their parents and various school districts.

The most recent extension of the program (SB 680 in 2009) tasked LAO to report back to the Legislature on the program effectiveness. They have not produced this report yet so in the meantime, a small extension for the program is necessary while the Legislature awaits the data. This bill would keep the program operating until July 2017.

### ***FOR MORE INFORMATION***

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