

Vermont Department of Education

Public High School Choice

Frequently Asked Questions – December 2012

1. What is Public High School Choice?

The legislature passed a law in 2012 (Title 16, Section 822a) allowing students at Vermont's 61 public high schools to apply to attend any other high school in grades 9 - 12. Before the new law was passed, students could apply for school choice only within a region of which their high school was a member. Here is [current information about public high school choice](#).

2. How do students apply for school choice, and when is the application due?

Applications are available at middle and high schools' Guidance Office and are due not later than March 1st of each year.

3. Who signs the application?

If the student is under 18, both the student and a parent/guardian sign. Only the student signs if she or he is 18.

4. Do students have to qualify for school choice? Do they have to give a special reason for applying?

No. It's only necessary that one be students in good standing at a school, and in grades 8 – 11 when they apply.

5. What else is on the application, and do students have more than one choice?

Contact information for students and parents is needed, and the student's first choice – and second and third, if any – of high school he or she wants to attend.

6. Are there any limits on school choice?

Yes. A school may set limits on the number of students who may transfer from a school; and a school has to set limits on how many may enroll in the schools.

7. What are the transfer limits from schools, who sets them, and when are they set?

High school boards, each year by February 1st, may limit the number of students allowed to transfer to five percent of resident enrolled students or 10 students, whichever is lower. These figures are cumulative, until the school reaches an upper limit on the total number of students allowed to transfer. That limit is 10 percent of resident students or 40 students, whichever is lower. Schools are also allowed to set higher limits, so that more students may transfer. When calculating the number of students who are allowed to transfer, schools include those who have already transferred to other schools and who have not graduated. Please see the [December, 2012 memorandum, describing transfer limits](#).

8. What are the capacity limits on how many students may enroll in other schools, who sets them, and when are they set?

School boards are also required, each year by February 1st, to set limits on their capacity to receive students through school choice. While there is no formula, schools have to consider program, staff and grade, school building, adverse financial impact, or other factors, but they may not limit capacity based on the need to provide special education services. Please see the [December 2012 memorandum, on setting capacity limits](#).

9. How are applications handled?

After all applications are received by March 1st, Guidance Office staff members enter the student's choice, or choices of schools, in order of preference. Based on the transfer limits described in 7 above, the staff then determines whether the student will be allowed to transfer. If more students want to transfer than there are places available, a fair lottery is held, and students are assigned numbered places on a list.

The next step is for the Guidance Office to send names to all schools to which students are applying, including first, second, and third choices, if any.

Schools receiving requests to enroll shall – applying their capacity to receive a certain number of students – consider applications in order of preference. Students with first choice are considered first. If there are more first choice students than there are spaces available, a lottery is held. The step is repeated if there are spaces available after the first choice students are considered. Students not selected in lotteries shall be placed on a numbered waiting list.

The “receiving” schools, by March 27th, notify the “sending” schools of the results.

Students shall be notified in writing of the results of their applications not later than April 1st.

10. What is the connection between the transfer limit of one school and the capacity limit of another?

The connection is that a student may be allowed to transfer from a school – either because there were fewer students who applied than the transfer limit, or because the student was chosen through a lottery – and the student’s enrollment at the other school will be decided by that school’s capacity limit. As described above, if more students seek enrollment than there are spaces, a lottery is held.

11. Is anyone given preference in the application process?

Yes, in 2012, the law was changed to give preference to applicants who applied to transfer from a school in an earlier year, who were not chosen, and who apply again. If there is more than one such student, a lottery will be used to determine a numbered list. Those names from prior years are then placed on the applications list ahead of those applying for the first time. The selection process then proceeds as described in 9 above.

Although the legislature considered the question in 2012, brothers or sisters of students who enroll in other schools do not have preference in later years.

11. If accepted, when do students have to decide whether to attend the other school?

Students are required to accept or decline the school choice offer by April 15th. Depending on these decisions, places may open up on waiting lists.

12. If students transfer to another school, do they have to apply again each year?

No. Once students enroll in another school, they may remain until they graduate, unless they no longer live in Vermont or unless they are suspended or expelled. They may return to the school in their town of residence by giving notice to their home high school by July 15th of the year when they intend to return.

If you have questions or comments after reading the guidelines, please contact Peter Thoms, 828-5104 or peter.thoms@state.vt.us.