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*From The Morning Call*

## No matter what No Child Left Behind says, it's next-to-impossible to transfer

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When President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind law in 2001, it was hailed as evidence of how seriously he takes education reform. But flaws in the law have since become apparent. A Philadelphia Inquirer story Sunday reveals the latest: a school transfer provision similar to how vouchers are supposed to work.

NCLB gives parents the option of transferring their children out of low-achieving districts into ones with better resources and test scores. Yet, 30 parents in the troubled Chester Upland School District have discovered that while NCLB encourages transfers, it doesn't require neighboring districts to accept them. Chester Upland sent letters in August to the 14 other districts in Delaware County to see if any would accept its students; none would. Educators in the Norristown, Montgomery County, district received the same response from seven districts within a 10-mile radius.

When the 200,000-student Philadelphia School District put out an informal inquiry, it also encountered rejection. Of course, even if neighboring districts agreed, the home district still would have to pay tuition and transportation costs, making it even more difficult to fund improvements in the home district. Philadelphia has found space within its district to offer transfers to more than 1,000 children whose parents requested them, but that proved to be the only option.

The situation is not unique to Pennsylvania. Arnold Fege of the Washington-based Public Education Network isn't aware of a single case nationwide where a high-performing district agreed to the transfer of a low-performing student. The situation could take on greater importance in this state since the Achievement Report this fall of the state Department of Education showed that more than 50 percent of public schools failed to meet the modest requirements of the NCLB law.

It would be more realistic to focus on preschool education, full-day kindergarten, tutoring, smaller class sizes and special programs in Pennsylvania than to look fruitlessly for places to transfer low-achieving students. For example, the Allentown School District has expanded upon its summer school program for inner-city students since its inception in 2001. Summer school now is offered at all elementary schools for Allentown students identified as performing below grade level; test results prove the effectiveness of the five-week program.

Time and money are best spent on correcting specific deficiencies. NCLB's transfer provision is an empty promise.

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