

As a district, our budget is affected by many things, including our student enrollment. The River Valley School District works very hard to offer incredible opportunities for our students in and out of the classroom. But, there is a limit to our resources. One factor that can complicate our budget in Wisconsin is open enrollment, which allows students to attend public schools outside of their designated “home” district. There are several reasons why families choose to enroll their students elsewhere through open enrollment. It may be for the following:

- Access to Specialized Programs/Resources
- School Quality
- Better School Climate or Culture
- School Size
- Course or Class or Extra-curricular Options
- Family Circumstances

The River Valley School District has 158 students who are open enrolled out to neighboring districts or to online schools. Yet, we also have 52 students who choose to leave their home district and come to River Valley. In order to analyze these numbers, each year I send a survey to families who have chosen open enrollment and at times I also call. In the survey, I ask families to provide me with honest feedback and indicate why they open enroll and how we can improve. Here are three summarized notes from survey respondents:

“As students, my husband and I attended the neighboring district and we live right on the border between districts ... as both of the grandparents both work and live in the neighboring district it makes it easier for emergency contacts/picking up sick kids, etc.”

“I work in the neighboring district and we live closer to the other school than we do River Valley. Originally, we chose open enrollment because we didn't want them riding the bus for an hour each way every day at such a young age...now it is an easy 10 minute commute to school.”

“If it weren't for the needs of a sibling, they would both go to River Valley ...I don't want my children going to different schools and I'm afraid that by changing the school and routine he would possibly regress, so we chose open enrollment.”

From the survey of families this year, 53% of all respondents chose a different district due to geographic reasons (they live closer to another district); 62% chose a different district as it is closer to their work; and 30% chose another district because it is closer to their daycare needs. I consider these to be “family circumstances.” Other respondents shared that a bigger district provided their students with more opportunities or they had recently moved out of a district but wished to continue attending there.

In addition to open enrollment, homeschooling also affects our enrollment. River Valley has 80 students who are homeschooled. I respect their choice, but as an educational leader, I welcome the chance to provide these students with an exceptional public education.

Ultimately, our legislators have chosen to build a system that allows over 70,000 students in Wisconsin to be involved in the open enrollment program. Some would say that the system creates competition and accountability. But locally, geography and family employment are the two largest factors and are beyond the scope of what we can change. River Valley is a great place to gain an education, and we will continue to focus on self-analysis to improve what we can control.

Sincerely,

Loren Glasbrenner, District Administrator
River Valley School District