

Governor Ayotte:

We write as members of the Dover School Board to express concerns about open enrollment legislation that may soon come before you.

As one of the larger districts in the state, Dover enjoys economies of scale many of our smaller neighbors do not. As such, our cost per pupil is far under the statewide average. Dover families who may want to send their students elsewhere locally would almost certainly face a bill to cover the cost difference between our district and the receiving school, reducing the opportunity for many of our families. Transferring to Somersworth (\$2,674), Portsmouth (\$8,294), Rollinsford (\$5,282), Newmarket (\$4,790), Oyster River (\$4,606) or Newington (\$21,038) would bring an annual new expense many families could not afford.

After decades of delays, our district is finally underway with a major athletic complex redevelopment project that should be completed within a year, making Dover an exciting prospect for future student athletes. Our more rural neighbors often do not have the student population or district budget to support such large sports facilities which could make Dover schools fare favorably in this student population redistribution model. Despite the appealing potential for increased tuition revenue, our school board recognizes the significant financial strain this could represent for neighboring districts. Additionally, we disagree with the concept of concentrating athletic skill into fewer desirable locations around the state, and are concerned that an open enrollment model would turn NH athletics into a recruiting rat race.

Several months ago, Dover (like dozens of other districts around our state) received a completely unexpected \$1.7 million bill from our pooled risk health insurance provider. Over the past several months, we have struggled to absorb this new bill into a budget that had already been set and voted on. Open enrollment risks subjecting large and small districts alike with similar unexpected, unbudgeted expenses throughout each school year. Knowing how difficult that expense was for us to absorb, we worry about future uncontrollable open enrollment tuition costs.

For all these reasons, the Dover School Board urges you to push the pause button on all pending open enrollment legislation, and instead to consider HB1280, a bill that would create a study committee to explore the many unanswered questions that still remain, as well as give district leaders, legislators, taxpayers, the NH Department of Education and other stakeholders an opportunity to weigh in on this consequential and sweeping change to our public education system.

Respectfully,