

CHANGE OF SCHOOL OR ASSIGNMENT-BEST INTERESTS AND MANIFEST HARDSHIP

The Superintendent is charged with assigning students of the District to schools and classes consistent with Board policies and procedures. New Hampshire RSA 193:3 recognizes that there are limited instances when the class or school to which a student might be assigned under a district's ordinary assignment policies and procedures, might not be in that student's best interests, or other factors might exist under which create a manifest educational hardship upon the student such that a change (referred to in this policy as "reassignment") in the student's class or school assignment is warranted. The Board has adopted this policy consistent with RSA 193:3 and to provide procedures for parents/guardians to follow when they believe a reassignment is appropriate.

A. Best Interest Re-Assignment – Determination by Superintendent.

Consistent with RSA 193:3, I, and subject to the provisions below, the Superintendent is authorized to reassign a student residing in the District to another class within the school, or to another public school or public academy in another district.

The authorization granted Superintendent to make reassignments under this policy applies only after application is made by the parent or guardian of the student or with the parent's consent, and upon a finding by the Superintendent that reassignment is in the student's best interests, after taking into consideration the student's academic, physical, personal, or social needs.

This policy, however, does not limit the Superintendent's discretion to make other in-District assignments consistent with applicable Board policies and administrative rules.

1. Procedure:

- a. In order to initiate consideration of a reassignment based upon the child's best interests, the parent/guardian shall submit to the Superintendent a written request stating why and/or how the child's best interests warrant reassignment. In order to facilitate a determination, such application may also include any additional information described in 4 below. The written request should be mailed or delivered to the SAU office, or emailed to the Superintendent at the email address provided on the District's website for the then current Superintendent.
- b. Upon such request, the Superintendent shall schedule a meeting (the "reassignment meeting") with the parent or guardian, to be held within 10 days of receiving the request.
- c. Prior to or at the reassignment meeting, the parent or guardian shall make a specific request that the student be re-assigned to another class/grade within the same school, to another public school or public academy within the district or to a public school or public academy in another district.

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- d. At the reassignment meeting, the parent or guardian may present documents, witnesses, or other relevant evidence supporting the parent's belief that reassignment is in the best interest of the student.
 - e. The Superintendent may present such information as he or she deems appropriate.
 - f. In determining whether reassignment is in the student's best interest the superintendent shall consider the student's academic, physical, personal, or social needs.
2. **Finding Reassignment is or is not in Best Interest.**
- a. Within five school days of the reassignment meeting, the Superintendent shall deliver to the parent/guardian a written determination as to whether or not reassignment is in the child's best interest. Delivery of the written determination should be done in a manner to produce evidence of the delivery (e.g., courier, email, fax).
 - b. If the Superintendent finds it is in the best of the interest of the student to change the student's school or assignment, the Superintendent shall initiate:
 - i. A change of assignment within the student's current assigned school;
 - ii. The student's transfer to another public school or public academy within the district of residence; or
 - iii. The student's transfer to a public school or public academy in another district.
 - c. If the Superintendent does not find that it is in the best interest of the student to change the student's school or assignment, the parent or guardian may request a hearing before the School Board to determine if the student is experiencing a manifest educational hardship as provided in Section B of this policy.
3. **Tuition Determination.** If a student is to be reassigned to another as a result of a best interest determination, the Superintendent shall work with the Superintendent of the receiving district to establish a tuition rate for such student. Pursuant to RSA 193:3, I (g), if the Superintendent has made a finding that it is in the best interest of the student to be reassigned, then the School Board shall approve the tuition payment consistent with the Board's ordinary manifest approval procedures.
- The Superintendent shall assure that the reassignment approval is placed on the agenda for the next regularly scheduled Board meeting.
4. **Transportation:** Transportation for a student reassigned to schools in another district under this section A (best interest) shall be the responsibility of the parent or legal guardian.

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5. **Tuition for Students Reassigned by Other Districts Pursuant to RSA 193:3, I.** It is the general policy of the Board that the tuition amount to be charged to another district for any student reassigned by that district to a school within this District under the best interest standard of 193:3, I, shall be the lesser of the tuition charged for non-residential students under Board policy JFAB or as computed under the formula set out in RSA 193:4. The Superintendent, however, is authorized to reduce the tuition amount below those thresholds or for other good cause shown (e.g., reciprocal assignments between the two districts).
6. **Other In-District Assignments.** Nothing in this policy is intended to limit authority otherwise extended to the Superintendent to make assignments or reassignments according to the policies, regulations, and ordinary practices of the District.

B. Manifest Educational Hardship – Determination by School Board and Appeal to State Board.

If, after following the procedure outlined in Section A of this policy, the Superintendent did not find that it was in the best interest of the student to reassign the student as requested by the student's parent/guardian, then the parent/guardian may request a hearing before the School Board to determine if the student is experiencing a manifest educational hardship.

1. **"Manifest Educational Hardship" Defined.** As provided in RSA 193:3, II (a), "manifest educational hardship" means that a student has a documented hardship in his or her current educational placement; and that such hardship has a detrimental or negative impact on the student's academic achievement or growth, physical safety, or social and emotional well-being. Such hardship must be so severe, pervasive, or persistent that it interferes with or limits the ability of the student to receive an education.
2. **Procedure for Determination of Manifest Educational Hardship.**
 - a. Within thirty (30) days after receipt of the Superintendent's written determination described that reassignment is not in a student's best interest as described in paragraph A.2.C, above, the parent/guardian requesting a manifest educational hardship hearing shall submit a written application to the Superintendent detailing the specific reasons why they believe that the current assignment constitutes a manifest educational hardship.
 - b. The Superintendent shall duly notify the school board that the parent or guardian has requested a manifest educational hardship hearing, upon which the school board shall schedule a hearing to be held no more than 15 days after the request has been received by the Superintendent. The Board shall provide at least two full days' notice of the hearing. The Board will conduct the hearing in non-public session, unless the parent/guardian requests the hearing be held in public session, subject to RSA 91-A:3, II(c).

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- c. Prior to or at such hearing, the parent/guardian shall provide to the Superintendent a specific request in writing that the student attend a public academy in the District, or public school or public academy in another school district. The Superintendent shall provide such request to the School Board at the hearing. Although not required, the parent/guardian may include this request as part of the original hearing request.
 - d. At such hearing, the parent or guardian may present documents, witnesses, or other relevant evidence supporting their belief that the student is experiencing a manifest educational hardship. The Superintendent may present such information as he or she may deem appropriate to assist the School Board in reaching its decision. The parties (or their appointed designee) shall have the right to examine all evidence and witnesses. The formal rules of evidence shall not apply. The Superintendent will assure that the means for the Board to establish an adequate record of the hearing.
 - e. The parent or guardian shall have the burden of establishing the presence of a manifest educational hardship by clear and convincing evidence, which means that the evidence is highly and substantially more likely to be true than untrue, and the Board must be convinced that the contention is highly probable.
 - f. The Board will render its decision in writing within seven (7) days after the hearing, and will forward its written decision to the parents or guardians via means producing proof of delivery (e.g., courier, email, etc.). The decision will conform to the requirements of NH Dept. of Education Rule Ed. 320(c)-(e).
3. **Finding of Manifest Educational Hardship.** If the School Board finds that the student has a manifest educational hardship, the School Board shall grant the parent's or guardian's request to re-assign the student to a public academy in the District, or to another public school or public academy within the district or to a public school or public academy in another district.
4. **Finding that Manifest Educational Hardship has not Established – Appeal to the New Hampshire State Board of Education.** If the School Board finds that the parent or guardian has not met their burden of proof, the parent or guardian may appeal the local Board decision to the New Hampshire State Board of Education (“SBOE”), within thirty (30) days of receipt of the Board’s written decision in accordance with NH Dept. of Ed. Rule Ed. 204.01 (g). SBOE.
5. **Tuition for Students Reassigned Upon Finding of Manifest Educational Hardship.** If, after a finding of a manifest educational hardship - by either the School Board or the State Board - a student of the District is assigned to attend school in another district, or a student from another district is assigned to a school in this District, the district in which the student resides shall pay tuition to the district to which the child is re-assigned. Such tuition shall be computed according to RSA 193:4. The school board of the district in which the student

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resides shall approve the tuition payment consistent with its ordinary manifest approval process.

6. **Transportation**: Transportation for a student reassigned to schools in another district under this section B (manifest educational hardship) shall be the responsibility of the District unless otherwise ordered by the SBOE.
- C. **Admission Requirements**. Students reassigned under this Policy shall meet the admission requirements of the school to which the student is to be reassigned.
- D. **Statutory Reassignment Limit**. The total reassignments or transfer made under this policy in any one school year will not exceed one (1) percent of the average daily membership in residence of a school district, or five (5) percent of the average daily membership in residence of any single school, whichever is greater, unless the School Board votes to exceed this limit.
- E. **Count of Reassigned Pupils, Tuition Payment and Rate, and Transportation**. Pupils reassigned under this policy will be counted in the average daily membership in residence of a given pupil's resident school district. Said pupil's resident district will forward any tuition payment due to the District to which the pupil was assigned.
- F. **Notice to the Department of Education**. The Superintendent of the pupil's resident SAU will notify the Department of Education within thirty (30) days of any reassignment made under this policy.
- G. **Special Education Placements**. A placement made relative to a student's special education needs and services shall not be deemed a change of school assignment for purposes of this section.

Legal References:

RSA 193:3, III, Change of School Assignment

RSA 193:14-a, Change of School Assignment; Duties of State Board of Education

NH Department of Education Administrative Rule Ed. 320 (pending revision)

Adopted:	March 19, 2002
Reviewed:	April 6, 2010
Approved by NHSBA:	August 2011
Reviewed:	October 28, 2015
1 st Reading:	November 17, 2015
2 nd Reading:	December 8, 2015
Approved:	December 8, 2015
Reviewed:	October 18, 2016

SOMERSWORTH

Category: Priority/Required by Law

JCA

Related Policies: JFAA, & JFAB, JG

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Approved:	October 18, 2016
Reviewed:	April 1, 2019
1 st Reading:	April 9, 2019
2 nd Reading:	April 30, 2019
Approved:	April 30, 2019
Reviewed:	April 19, 2021
First Reading:	May 11, 2021
Second Reading:	May 25, 2021
Approved:	May 25, 2021