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Bump in transfer requests called good sign A Learning Community Council member says reaching the diversity targets will be a gradual evolution.

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Applications for open-enrollment transfers increased 6.5 percent this year in the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties. State lawmakers designed the transfer system to mix poor and more affluent students in every **public school** in the two counties.

The goal is to improve academic achievement for poor students, particularly those from high-poverty pockets of eastern **Omaha**.

Districts reported receiving 1,980 applications as of the Tuesday deadline, up from 1,859 last year, the first year of the transfer program.

The total student enrollment of the Learning Community is about 108,800.

The Millard **Public Schools** again led the 11 member districts with 595 applications. Douglas County West received the fewest with four.

The **Omaha Public Schools** received 92.

Because parents can submit applications to multiple districts, the count doesn't necessarily reflect the number of students seeking transfers. Districts will sort the applications, determine if there's room for the students and conduct lotteries when applicants exceed openings.

Lorraine Chang, a member of the Learning Community Council, said reaching socioeconomic diversity targets will be a "gradual evolution."

"I don't think that anyone thought it would happen in two years," Chang said.

Under open enrollment, parents may voluntarily apply to send their children to any **public** elementary, middle or high **school** in the two counties, if there's room, subject to eligibility rules designed to foster socioeconomic diversity.

The goal is to alter enrollment in every learning community **school** to reflect the overall balance of higher-income and lower-income students in the community.

The target changed this year because poverty, measured by eligibility for federal lunch subsidies, went up. The Learning Community this year has nearly 42 percent low-income students, up from 40 percent last year, according to the Nebraska Department of Education.

That percentage is important when applications are prioritized. First are siblings of students who will be enrolled as continuing students in the **school**. Then come students who contribute to the socioeconomic diversity of the **school** - that is, help achieve the target mix of affluent and poor kids. Last is everyone else.

Chang said focus **schools** have the potential to create greater movement of students. Focus **schools** have no attendance area. They are designed with a special academic focus to lure students of all economic levels from beyond the neighborhood. So far, the only focus **school** in the Learning Community is the Underwood Hills Focus **School**, which is not sanctioned as an official Learning Community focus **school**.

No others are currently proposed.

Council member John Synowiecki said this year's bump in the application total is "a good sign."

Synowiecki said the community needs a "robust" transfer system to address "very segregated" housing patterns in the metro **Omaha** area.

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