Benchmark report · October 2026

Easier to Ask: How America's 100 Largest School Districts Handle Former-Student Records Requests, and Where They Can Improve

We reviewed how each of the 100 largest US public school districts lets former students, colleges and employers request transcripts and records, using only what a former student can see on the district's public website.

By Data Decisions, makers of Transcend

- 75 districts publish no process for closed-school records
- 39 districts are only partly centralized or not centralized at all
- 3 districts offer request pages in three or more languages
- 23 districts have no district-level records vendor identified, serving 3.0 million students

Key findings

Where you went to school decides how hard it is.

39 of the 100 largest districts are only partly centralized or not centralized at all. Recent graduates are often sent back to their high school while older alumni go to a central office, sometimes with a different process, fee and payment method.

Closed schools and old records are a blind spot.

75 of 100 districts publish no clear instructions for getting records from closed schools. Where older records are covered, they often mean mail-only requests, long turnarounds (up to 30-60 business days) or records lost to disasters.

Check language access beyond the front page.

Only 3 districts published request forms or pages in three or more languages. Most rely on a Google Translate widget or English-only forms, in districts where a large share of families speak another language at home. A question for your own review: does translation continue through confirmation emails, text updates and staff replies?

Some districts have no district-level records vendor.

23 districts, serving about 3.0 million students, have no district-level records vendor identified in our review. This does not establish that they lack an in-house online system. The largest district in the country is one of them.

Employers pay more.

Among the 59 districts that publish a former-student transcript fee, it runs from $0 to $15 (median $5). Among the 37 that publish a price for employers and background-check firms, it runs from $5 to $35 (median $15), often through separate, slower verification steps.

Methodology

Districts

The 100 largest US public school districts by fall 2021 enrollment (NCES data, via the standard ranked list).

Data collection

Between October 8 and 9, 2026, we reviewed each district's public website (and any ordering pages it linked to) as a former student would. We recorded the request channel, centralization, fees, turnaround, closed-school handling, ID checks, electronic delivery, languages and third-party access.

Limits

We only used public pages. We didn't submit requests or contact districts. Websites change, and some pages wouldn't load or needed JavaScript. Each record has a confidence rating (51 high, 41 medium, 8 low). “Unknown” means the information wasn't published, not that the district lacks it. Results are reported in aggregate only.

Findings in detail

1. How former students make requests

Main request channel

Number of districts, out of 100. The vendor count includes Transcend at Los Angeles Unified.

Third-party vendor (district-wide)	58
Mixed (different routes by graduation year or record type)	19
School by school	11
Central office, printed form (email, mail or in person)	8
In-house online portal	4

2. Common sources of friction

- Printable PDF forms that need a wet signature or notarization
- Mail-in requests paid by money order, check or cash, with a self-addressed stamped envelope
- A different process at every high school, with inconsistent fees
- Separate steps for identity check, payment and request ("submit, then wait for a payment link")
- Limited office hours for in-person pickup

- No electronic delivery to colleges or employers for older records

What a good process looks like

A checklist for districts reviewing their own process:

- One front door for every former student, whatever their graduation year, school or record type
- Online identity check and e-signature, with no notarization and no wet signature
- Online payment, with fee waivers where policy requires them
- Secure electronic delivery to the student, colleges (in the PESC standard format) and employers
- A clear, published path for closed schools and archived records
- The whole request in the languages families speak: the form, emails, text updates and staff replies
- Rules and routing that match how the district actually works, and that can change when policy does
- A separate, auditable path for third parties, with the student's consent recorded
- Staff work from one queue with turnaround reporting, instead of a shared inbox

Disclosure

Data Decisions makes Transcend, a records request platform used by Los Angeles Unified (#2 by enrollment) . LAUSD's record in this benchmark reflects our own knowledge rather than web research.

About Transcend

Transcend is a records request platform for K-12 districts and colleges, built by Data Decisions. Los Angeles Unified uses it for former-student transcripts, adult-education and special-education records. Learn more at edutranscend.com .

Sources

- Public websites of the 100 districts, reviewed October 8-9, 2026.
- Enrollment: NCES, fall 2021.

Free 20-minute workflow review

Bring one difficult records process. We will walk through how we would configure it for your district.

Request your review at edutranscend.com/benchmark