

2019 Legislative Session: Voucher Bills

Voucher legislation has been introduced in both the Mississippi House and Senate. These bills use public funds to pay private school tuition and require no accountability from the private schools receiving taxpayer dollars.

Senate Bill 2675, authored by Sen. Gray Tollison of Oxford, is one of the voucher bills most likely to be taken up in committee. This bill:

- **opens vouchers to all students**, removing the requirement that vouchers be limited to students with special needs
- provides for approximately 2,350 vouchers in 2019-2020, adding an estimated **4,700 new vouchers to the program annually thereafter** at an estimated minimum cost of an **additional \$25-million every year**
- **more than quadruples funding for vouchers**, though nearly a third of the funds set aside for vouchers in the existing Special Needs ESA program currently goes unused; private schools have refused to admit many of the students who were assigned special needs vouchers, proving that it isn't parents who do the choosing, it is the private schools
- **funds each voucher at a higher rate than MAEP per student funding**, giving unaccountable private schools more – not less – money than public schools receive per student
- uses Education Savings Accounts (ESAs, aka vouchers) to pay for a number of services, including tuition at private schools, **for-profit virtual schools**, and fees for student assessments
- uses taxpayer dollars to **subsidize tuition at private schools**
- appears to **fund home schooling** by exempting voucher students from compulsory school laws
- allows parents to use a **mobile app to send state tax dollars** to any fly-by-night service provider or any "school" that buys an accreditation online, inviting fraud and abuse
- allows parents to **roll over unused voucher funds** from one year to the next
- requires **no accountability for private voucher schools**; taxpayers are kept in the dark about the quality of education being provided for their tax dollars; says private voucher schools "**shall not be required to report data** to the office or any other entity" except if they choose to administer assessments – parents can pick their children's assessments – and if the school has 30 or more voucher students; these already lax provisions are negated by language in Section 9(1)(a) that says private voucher schools cannot be regulated in any way
- **reduces funding for public schools** by changing how average daily attendance (ADA) is counted for funding purposes, **deleting the law allowing excused absences within ADA** for students on academic field trips or school-related events
- creates a new Office of Educational Opportunity within the Mississippi Department of Education