

2018 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.

House Bill 1339 and **Senate Bill 2623** are the voucher bills most likely to be taken up in committee. Both of these bills:

- **open vouchers to all students**, removing the requirement that vouchers be limited to students with special needs
- provide for approximately 2,400 vouchers in 2018-2019, adding an estimated **5,000 new vouchers to the program every year thereafter**
- use 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 their students to take assessments
- use taxpayer dollars to **subsidize tuition at private schools**
- appear to **fund home schools** by exempting voucher students from compulsory school laws
- allow 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
- allow parents to **roll over unused voucher funds** from one year to the next
- prohibit any entity (including the Legislative PEER Committee) from requiring data from the private schools that operate using our tax dollars; while public schools must report a myriad of data related to student performance, these voucher bills provide that private schools and service providers paid with vouchers "**shall not be required to report data** to the office or any other entity in order to prevent an undue administrative burden"
- **quadruple 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
- require **no accountability for private voucher schools**; taxpayers are kept in the dark about the quality of education being provided for their tax dollars
- diminish funding for public schools by changing dramatically 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
- create a new Office of Educational Choice within the Mississippi Department of Education