

2024 Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 191

BY REPRESENTATIVE FREIBERG

SCHOOLS/CHOICE: Creates and provides for a program to provide state funding for the education of certain students who have been victims of bullying and are not enrolled in public school

1 AN ACT

2 To amend and reenact R.S. 17:236(A) and 416.14(D)(3)(f)(i) and (v) and to enact Chapter

3 43-C of Title 17 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes of 1950, to be comprised of R.S.

4 17:4037.1 through 4037.8, relative to elementary and secondary education; to

5 provide relative to parental options under certain circumstances related to bullying

6 in public schools; to create and provide for the administration of a program to

7 provide state funding for the education of certain students who have been victims of

8 bullying and who are not enrolled in public school; to provide relative to the

9 eligibility of students, schools, and service providers participating in the program;

10 to provide relative to program funds; to provide relative to the testing of students

11 participating in the program; to require the state Department of Education to submit

12 annual reports to the legislature relative to the program; to provide relative to rules;

13 to provide relative to definitions; to provide for an effective date; and to provide for

14 related matters.

15 Be it enacted by the Legislature of Louisiana:

16 Section 1. R.S. 17:236(A) and 416.14(D)(3)(f)(i) and (v) are hereby amended and

17 reenacted and Chapter 43-C of Title 17 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes of 1950, comprised

18 of R.S. 17:4037.1 through 4037.8, is hereby enacted to read as follows:

1 §236. Definition of a school

2 A. For the purposes of this Chapter, a school is defined as an institution for
3 the teaching of children, consisting of an adequate physical plant, whether owned or
4 leased, instructional staff members, and students. For such an institution to be
5 classified as a school, within the meaning of this Chapter, instructional staff
6 members shall meet the following requirements: if a public day school or a
7 nonpublic school which receives local, state, or federal funds or support, directly or
8 indirectly, they shall be certified in accordance with rules established by the State
9 Board of Elementary and Secondary Education; if a nonpublic school which receives
10 no local, state, or federal funds or support, directly or indirectly, they shall meet such
11 requirements as may be prescribed by the school or the church. In addition, except
12 as otherwise provided in Subsection B of this Section, any such institution, to be
13 classified as a school, shall operate a minimum session of not less than one hundred
14 eighty days. Solely for purposes of compulsory attendance in a nonpublic school,
15 a child who participates in a home study program approved by the State Board of
16 Elementary and Secondary Education shall be considered in attendance at a day
17 school; a home study program shall be approved if it offers a sustained curriculum
18 of a quality at least equal to that offered by public schools at the same grade level.
19 Solely for purposes of compulsory attendance in a nonpublic school, a child shall be
20 considered in attendance at a day school if the child is eligible to participate in the
21 Education Savings Account Program pursuant to R.S. 17:4037.4 and the child's
22 parent has signed an agreement pursuant to R.S. 17:4037.4(A)(3).

23 * * *

24 §416.14. Bullying; definition; prohibition; notice; reporting; accountability

25 * * *

26 D. The State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in collaboration
27 with the state Department of Education, shall develop and adopt rules and
28 regulations to implement the provisions of this Section relative to the procedures and

1 processes to be used to report and investigate bullying and which shall include but
2 not be limited to:

3 * * *

4 (3) Investigation Procedure. The State Board of Elementary and Secondary
5 Education shall develop and adopt a procedure for the investigation of reports of
6 bullying of a student by another student. The procedure shall include the following:

7 * * *

8 (f) Parental Relief. (i) If a parent, legal guardian, teacher, or other school
9 official has made ~~four~~ two or more reports of separate instances of bullying, as
10 provided in Paragraph (2) of this Subsection, and either no investigation pursuant to
11 Paragraph (3) of this Subsection has occurred or no resolution that is acceptable to
12 the parent or legal guardian has been reached, the parent or legal guardian with
13 responsibility for decisions regarding the education of the alleged victim about
14 whom the ~~report or~~ reports have been made may exercise an option to apply for an
15 education savings account as provided in Chapter 43-C of this Title or to have the
16 student enroll in or attend another school operated by the governing authority of the
17 public elementary or secondary school in which the student was enrolled on the dates
18 when at least ~~three~~ one of the reports ~~were~~ was submitted as provided in Items (ii)
19 through (v) of this Subparagraph. Any student who has been the victim of bullying
20 that involved sexual assault as defined in R.S. 46:2184 where the perpetrator is a
21 student at the victim's school may exercise an option after the first such incident of
22 sexual assault to apply for an education savings account as provided in Chapter 43-C
23 of this Title or to have the student enroll in or attend another school operated by the
24 governing authority of the public elementary or secondary school in which the
25 student was enrolled.

26 * * *

27 (v) At the end of any school year, the parent or legal guardian may make a
28 request to the governing authority of the school at which the student was enrolled
29 when at least ~~three~~ one of the reports ~~were~~ was filed to transfer the student back to

1 the school. The governing authority shall make a seat available at the school at
2 which the student was originally enrolled. No other schools shall qualify for transfer
3 under this Subparagraph.

4 * * *

5 CHAPTER 43-C. EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNT PROGRAM

6 §4037.1. Definitions

7 As used in this Chapter the following terms have the following meanings,
8 unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

9 (1) "Account" means an education account established pursuant to this
10 Chapter and composed of state funds deposited on behalf of a student eligible to
11 participate in the program.

12 (2) "Account funds" means the funds deposited into an account on behalf of
13 a participating student.

14 (3) "Department" means the state Department of Education.

15 (4) "Parent" means a parent, legal guardian, custodian, or other person or
16 entity with legal authority to act on behalf of a student.

17 (5) "Participating school" means a nonpublic school participating in the
18 program pursuant to the requirements of this Chapter.

19 (6) "Participating student" means a student who has been determined to be
20 eligible to participate in the program and for whom an account has been established
21 pursuant to this Chapter.

22 (7) "Program" means the program created by this Chapter.

23 (8) "Qualified education expenses" means any of the following:

24 (a) Tuition, fees, and textbooks required by a participating school or service
25 provider.

26 (b) Instructional or tutoring services.

27 (c) Supplemental materials required by a course of study for a particular
28 content area.

1 (d) Technological devices used to meet the student's educational needs,
2 subject to approval by the department or a licensed physician.

3 (9) "Resident school system" means the public school system in which the
4 student would be enrolled based on his residence.

5 (10) "Service provider" means a person or an entity other than a participating
6 school that provides services that are covered as qualified education expenses.

7 (11) "State board" means the State Board of Elementary and Secondary
8 Education.

9 §4037.2. Program creation and administration; powers and duties of the State Board
10 of Elementary and Secondary Education and state Department of Education;
11 rules

12 The Education Savings Account Program is hereby created. The department
13 shall administer the program, and the state board shall adopt rules and regulations
14 for the administration of the program which shall, at minimum, provide for the
15 following:

16 (1) Determination of the eligibility of students, participating schools, and
17 service providers, including standards that schools and service providers shall meet
18 as conditions of participation in the program.

19 (2) Audits of the program and accounts.

20 (3) The authority of the department to deem any participating student
21 ineligible for the program and to refer a case involving the misuse of account funds
22 to the attorney general for investigation.

23 (4) The authority of the department to contract with a vendor or provider for
24 the administration of the program or parts of the program.

25 (5) A requirement that the program shall begin enrolling participating
26 students not later than the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year.

27 §4037.3. Account funds

28 A. The department shall allocate to each account annually, from funds
29 appropriated or otherwise made available for the program, an amount equal to the

1 state's average per-pupil allocation as provided in the minimum foundation program
2 formula, considering all student characteristics. The amount allocated to an account
3 shall be appropriately prorated if a student transfers into the program after the
4 beginning of a school year. The department may withhold up to five percent of
5 funds allocated for each account annually for program administration.

6 B. The department shall develop a system for parents to direct account funds
7 to participating schools and service providers by electronic funds transfer, automated
8 clearing house transfer, or another system. The department may contract with a
9 private financial management firm to manage the payment system.

10 C.(1) Account funds shall be used only for qualified education expenses for
11 the participating student. Unused funds in an account, up to fifty percent of the total
12 funds deposited into the account for the current school year, shall be retained in the
13 student's account for the following school year.

14 (2) The account shall be closed and the funds in the account shall be returned
15 to the state general fund if the student is determined to be no longer eligible, if an
16 account has been inactive for two consecutive years, or if a parent fails to comply
17 with the provisions of this Chapter or state board rules pertaining to the program.

18 §4037.4. Student eligibility; initial and continuing

19 A. A student is initially eligible for an account if he is eligible to enroll in
20 kindergarten or was enrolled in a Louisiana public school during the previous school
21 year and meets all of the following criteria:

22 (1) He has been the victim of bullying under the conditions provided in R.S.
23 17:416.13(D)(3)(f)(i).

24 (2) The student's parent submits an application for an account to the
25 department in accordance with program timelines.

26 (3) The student's parent signs an agreement promising all of the following:

27 (a) To provide an education for the participating student in at least the
28 subjects of English language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science.

1 (b) Not to enroll the student in a public school while participating in the
2 program.

3 (c) To use account funds only for qualified education expenses of the
4 participating student.

5 (d) To comply with all program requirements.

6 B.(1) The signed agreement pursuant to Paragraph (A)(3) of this Section
7 satisfies the compulsory school attendance requirements of R.S. 17:221. However,
8 the parent of a participating student shall ensure that the student is complying with
9 the attendance requirements of the participating school or service provider. Each
10 participating student who fails to comply with such attendance requirements shall be
11 reported to the state director of child welfare and attendance by the participating
12 school or service provider and shall be subject to the provisions of R.S. 17:233.

13 (2) A participating student is eligible to continue to participate in the
14 program until he enrolls in a public school, he receives a high school diploma or its
15 equivalent, or his account is closed.

16 C. A participating student shall not participate in any of the following
17 concurrently with this program: any other education savings account program
18 provided in this Title, the Course Choice Program, the Student Scholarships for
19 Educational Excellence Program, the School Choice Program for Certain Students
20 with Exceptionalities, or the Tuition Donation Credit Program.

21 §4037.5. Schools and service providers; eligibility; participation

22 A. To be eligible to participate in the program, a school shall meet all of the
23 following criteria:

24 (1) It has been approved, provisionally approved, or probationally approved
25 by the state board pursuant to R.S. 17:11.

26 (2) It is in compliance with the criteria set forth in Brumfield, et al. v. Dodd,
27 et al., 425 F. Supp. 528 (E.D. La. 1977).

28 (3) It meets any other eligibility criteria set by the state board in program
29 rules.

1 B. The state board shall provide eligibility criteria for service providers in
2 program rules in a way that maximizes provider participation.

3 C. To be eligible to participate in the program, a school or service provider
4 shall apply to the department to participate in the program and, if determined to be
5 eligible, accept account funds for providing services covered as qualified education
6 expenses.

7 D. If the department finds that a participating school or service provider has
8 failed to maintain continuing eligibility criteria or has demonstrated gross or
9 persistent lack of academic competence, the department shall restrict its ability to
10 serve additional students and may terminate its participation in the program. Such
11 action shall be reported to the state board within three business days.

12 §4037.6. Student with exceptionalities

13 A. If a participating student enrolled in a participating school would have
14 been entitled to receive special education services in the resident school system, his
15 parent shall acknowledge in writing, as part of the program enrollment process, that
16 the parent agrees to accept only such services as are available to all students enrolled
17 in the participating school.

18 B. A parent may make a parental placement to receive special education and
19 related services from a participating school that has demonstrated the capacity to
20 offer such services.

21 C.(1) A participating school shall not discriminate against a child with
22 special educational needs during the program admissions process. However, a
23 participating school is required to offer only those services that it already provides
24 or such services as necessary to assist students with special needs that it can provide
25 with minor adjustments. A participating school may partner with the local school
26 system to provide special education services.

27 (2) Information regarding the services a participating school can provide and
28 the services the resident school system can provide to children with special needs

1 who are enrolled in a participating school shall be made available by the department
2 to parents prior to the enrollment process.

3 D. The department shall determine whether a participating school has a
4 demonstrated capacity to offer special education services. A participating school
5 that desires to offer special education services shall inform the department of the
6 types of student exceptionalities as defined in R.S. 17:1942 that the school is able to
7 serve. The department may authorize the school to provide such services only if the
8 school has existed and provided educational services to students with exceptionalities
9 as defined in R.S. 17:1942, excluding students deemed to be gifted or talented, for
10 at least two years prior to participation in the program, and such provision of services
11 is pursuant to an established program in place at the school that includes instruction
12 by teachers holding appropriate certification in special education or other appropriate
13 education or training as defined by the department and that is in accordance with a
14 student's Individual Education Plan.

15 §4037.7. Testing

16 A. The department shall develop a process for the annual administration of
17 either of the following to participating students:

18 (1) Any examination required pursuant to the school and district
19 accountability system at the prescribed grade level.

20 (2) A nationally norm-referenced test or statewide assessment.

21 B. The department shall develop a process for the collection and aggregate
22 reporting of results and shall ensure that the results of such assessments are provided
23 to parents of participating students.

24 §4037.8. Reports

25 Not later than April thirtieth of each year, the department shall submit a
26 written report to the House Committee on Education, the Senate Committee on
27 Education, and the Joint Legislative Committee on the Budget regarding the
28 implementation of the program. The report, at a minimum, shall include the
29 following information:

- 1 (1) The total number of students participating in the program.
- 2 (2) A list of all participating schools and service providers.
- 3 (3) The total student enrollment of each participating school, the number of
4 participating students enrolled in each school, and the percentage of the total
5 enrollment of each school represented by program participants.
- 6 (4) Aggregate test result data for participating students.
- 7 (5) The percentage of funds used for each type of qualified education
8 expense.
- 9 (6) An analysis of the program's fiscal impact on the state and on local public
10 school systems.
- 11 (7) The results of a parental satisfaction survey.
- 12 (8) The amount withheld by the department for administration of the
13 program, including the amount retained by the department, the amount paid to
14 vendors for the administration of the program, and the amount paid to vendors for
15 managing the payment system.

16 Section 2. This Act shall become effective upon signature by the governor or, if not
17 signed by the governor, upon expiration of the time for bills to become law without signature
18 by the governor, as provided by Article III, Section 18 of the Constitution of Louisiana. If
19 vetoed by the governor and subsequently approved by the legislature, this Act shall become
20 effective on the day following such approval.

DIGEST

The digest printed below was prepared by House Legislative Services. It constitutes no part of the legislative instrument. The keyword, one-liner, abstract, and digest do not constitute part of the law or proof or indicia of legislative intent. [R.S. 1:13(B) and 24:177(E)]

HB 191 Original

2024 Regular Session

Freiberg

Abstract: Creates and provides for the administration of a program for the purpose of providing state funding for qualified education expenses for certain students who have been victims of bullying and who are not enrolled in a public school.

Bullying

Present law provides specific protocols for reporting and investigating incidents of bullying in public schools. Grants a parent the option to have a student moved to another school if there have been at least four reports of separate instances of bullying and no investigation

has occurred. Proposed law broadens the terms under which parents are granted this option as follows:

- (1) Lowers the threshold from four reports of bullying to two reports of bullying.
- (2) For a student who has been the victim of bullying in which the bullying involves sexual assault and the perpetrator attends the victim's school, lowers the threshold from four reports of bullying to one incident of sexual assault; defines sexual assault as defined in present law (R.S. 46:2184).
- (3) Provides that the lack of an acceptable resolution is a trigger for this option in addition to the lack of an investigation.

Proposed law, under the conditions provided in (1) through (3) above, provides the additional option of applying for an education savings account as provided in proposed law below.

Education Savings Account (ESA) Program; creation and administration

Proposed law creates the Education Savings Account (ESA) Program for certain students who have been victims of bullying and provides for program administration by the state Dept. of Education (DOE) in accordance with State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) rules which shall, at minimum, provide for:

- (1) Determination of eligibility of students, participating schools, and service providers.
- (2) Audits of the program and accounts.
- (3) DOE's authority to:
 - (a) Deem any participating student ineligible for the program and to refer cases of misuse of account funds to the attorney general for investigation.
 - (b) Contract with a vendor or provider for the administration of the program or parts of the program.
- (4) A requirement that the program begin enrolling participating students by the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year.

Funds

Proposed law requires DOE to:

- (1) Allocate to each account annually, from funds appropriated or otherwise made available for the program, an amount equal to the state's average per-pupil allocation as provided in the minimum foundation program (MFP) formula, considering all student characteristics.
- (2) Develop a system for parents to direct account funds to participating schools and service providers by electronic funds transfer, automated clearing house transfer, or another system.

Proposed law authorizes DOE to withhold up to 5% of funds allocated for each account annually for program administration.

Proposed law further provides as follows:

- (1) Limits authorized use of funds to qualified education expenses.

- (2) Unused funds in an account, up to 50% of the total funds deposited into the account for the current school year, shall remain in the account for the following school year.
- (3) The account shall be closed and the funds in the account shall be returned to the state general fund if a student is no longer eligible, if an account has been inactive for two consecutive years, or if a parent fails to comply with program requirements.
- (4) Requires that the amount allocated to an account be prorated if a student transfers into the program after the beginning of the school year.

Eligibility; students

Proposed law provides that a student shall be initially eligible for an account if he is eligible to enroll in kindergarten or was enrolled in a La. public school during the previous school year and meets all of the following criteria:

- (1) The student has been the victim of bullying, at least two separate reports have been made of separate instances of bullying, and either there has been no investigation or no resolution acceptable to the parents has been reached.
- (2) The student's parent submits a timely application.
- (3) The student's parent signs an agreement promising all of the following:
 - (a) To provide an education for the participating student in at least the subjects of English language arts, math, social studies, and science.
 - (b) Not to enroll the student in a public school while participating in the program.
 - (c) To use account funds only for qualified education expenses of the participating student.
 - (d) To comply with all program requirements.

Proposed law further provides that a participating student:

- (1) Is eligible until he enrolls in a public school, he receives a high school diploma or its equivalent, or his account is closed.
- (2) Is prohibited from participating concurrently in the ESA program and the Course Choice Program, the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program, the School Choice Program for Certain Students with Exceptionalities, or the Tuition Donation Credit Program. Further prohibits concurrent participation in more than one ESA program.
- (3) Shall be considered in attendance at a day school for purposes of compulsory attendance; proposed law requires parents to ensure students comply with attendance requirements and requires schools and service providers to report students who fail to comply to the state director of child welfare and attendance.

Students with exceptionalities

Proposed law requires, if a student would have been entitled to special education services in his resident school system, his parent to acknowledge in writing that he agrees to accept only such services as are available to all students enrolled in the participating school. Requires participating schools to meet certain criteria to be eligible to offer such services.

Eligibility; schools and service providers

Proposed law provides that a school shall meet all of the following criteria to be eligible to participate:

- (1) Be approved, provisionally approved, or probationally approved by BESE.
- (2) Comply with criteria set forth in federal nondiscrimination requirements.
- (3) Any other criteria set by BESE.

Proposed law requires BESE to set eligibility criteria for service providers in a way that maximizes provider participation. Provides that to be eligible to participate in the program, both schools and service providers shall apply to DOE and, if determined to be eligible, accept ESA funds for providing services covered as qualified education expenses.

Testing

Proposed law requires the department to develop a process for the annual administration of either of the following assessments to participating students:

- (1) Any examinations required pursuant to the school and district accountability system at the prescribed grade level.
- (2) A nationally norm-referenced test or statewide assessment.

Also requires the department to develop a process for the collection and aggregate reporting of results and to ensure that the results of such assessments are provided to parents of participating students.

Reporting

Proposed law requires DOE, by April 30th annually, to submit a report to the House and Senate education committees and the Jt. Legislative Committee on the Budget regarding program implementation. Provides for required report content, including the results of a parental satisfaction survey and certain financial information relative to the program.

Effective upon signature of governor or lapse of time for gubernatorial action.

(Amends R.S. 17:236(A) and 416.14(D)(3)(f)(i) and (v); Adds R.S. 17:4037.1-4037.8)