

Regular Session, 2011

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 209

BY REPRESENTATIVE TUCKER

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

To direct the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to submit a report relative to the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program to the legislature and the governor prior to the convening of the 2012 Regular Session of the Legislature of Louisiana.

WHEREAS, the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program was established by Act No. 509 of the 2008 Regular Session of the Legislature; and

WHEREAS, the legislature found and declared that it is in the public interest that all Louisiana school children receive the best education that its citizens can provide, and the state of Louisiana has the right, responsibility, duty, and obligation to accomplish the objective of quality education for all Louisiana children, particularly for those children in school systems that have been declared to be academically in crisis; and

WHEREAS, the legislature further found and declared that nonpublic schools can offer a quality education to students that are academically in crisis, and it is in the public interest to offer students in such systems the means of accessing the educational opportunities offered by nonpublic schools by providing them with scholarships to attend such schools; and

WHEREAS, the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program began serving students in grades kindergarten through third grade, and one grade level has been added each year resulting in students in grades kindergarten through sixth grade being served during the 2011-2012 school year; and

WHEREAS, students must meet residency and family income requirements in order to be eligible for the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program, and unless entering kindergarten, must transfer from a failing school classified as Academically Unacceptable pursuant to the state's accountability program; and

WHEREAS, the legislature has supported children through the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program by making annual appropriations since 2008; and

WHEREAS, the average scholarship amount of four thousand five hundred ninety-five dollars is less than the Minimum Foundation Program per pupil amount of seven thousand five hundred sixty-two dollars, thereby resulting in a substantial savings to taxpayers; and

WHEREAS, hundreds of students in grades kindergarten through fifth have been served through the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program, with over one thousand eight hundred fifty to be served during the 2011-2012 school year; and

WHEREAS, demand for the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program has continued to increase, with new students applying to the program each year, students being placed on waiting lists each year, and a vast majority of enrolled students continuing in the program; and

WHEREAS, ninety-three percent of parents and guardians of students enrolled in the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program expressed satisfaction with the program through a parent survey in the fall of 2010; and

WHEREAS, approximately thirty percent of students enrolled in the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program have participated in the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program, all of whom transferred from Academically Unacceptable public schools; and

WHEREAS, many of the tested students have demonstrated improvement in academic achievement as evidenced by the growing percentage of students who scored basic and above in the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program; on average, their performance remains below the average scores of students enrolled in the Recovery School District-New Orleans, which includes both Academically Acceptable and Academically Unacceptable schools; and

WHEREAS, the state Department of Education has worked with nonpublic schools participating in the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program to review student test scores, identify areas of weakness, and make resources available to aid in curriculum alignment, remediation and student support, and test preparation; and

WHEREAS, participating nonpublic schools are currently developing plans to align curricula with state content standards and the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program, as well as to deliver targeted assistance and support to students receiving scholarships; and

WHEREAS, participating nonpublic schools have demonstrated their commitment to increasing the academic achievement of all students enrolled in the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program during the 2011-2012 school year; and

WHEREAS, the first kindergarten students who enrolled in the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program in 2008 will participate in the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program for the first time in the 2011-2012 school year as third graders, thereby providing the state with academic achievement data on the first cohort of students who have had the full benefit of this program; and

WHEREAS, current law, R.S. 17:4024, requires the state Department of Education annually to report to the House Committee on Education, the Senate Committee on Education, and the Joint Legislative Committee on the Budget regarding the implementation of the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program, including the number of eligible students receiving scholarships, a list of participating schools and the number of scholarship recipients each such school enrolled, and aggregate test result data for the scholarship recipients enrolled in each participating school; and

WHEREAS, it is essential that the legislature, the governor, and the taxpayers receive information with which they can evaluate the impact and effectiveness of state-supported programs in order to hold such programs accountable for desired outcomes; and

WHEREAS, parental choice educational programs are best implemented when parents and guardians receive information and evidence, including evidence relative to other public education options, on which to base decisions impacting their children's education.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby direct the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to submit a report relative to the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program to the legislature and the governor prior to the convening of the 2012 Regular Session of the Legislature of Louisiana.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that such report shall include the following information:

(1) An accounting of funds spent on the Student Scholarship for Educational Excellence Program during Fiscal Year 2012.

(2) Student enrollment data for each participating nonpublic school, including data for each grade level served.

(3) A detailed summary of the academic achievement of students enrolled in tested grades during the 2011-2012 school year, aggregated by participating nonpublic schools and compared to the academic achievement of students enrolled in similar grades in Recovery School District schools in Orleans Parish.

(4) Parent survey data on their satisfaction with their child's school and the program overall.

(5) Recommendations to improve the academic achievement of scholarship recipients, communication with parents and guardians about the performance of participating nonpublic schools as measured by the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program, and overall program quality.

(6) Any other item jointly agreed upon by the House Committee on Education and the Senate Committee on Education prior to October 1, 2011.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a suitable copy of this Resolution be transmitted to the governor, the president of the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the state superintendent of education, and the principal or headmaster and the governing authority of each nonpublic school participating in the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program.

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE