

Vouchers

Tennessee Organization of Superintendents does not stand by the belief that money generated by the local funding bodies for public schools should be directed to private schools -- this simply was not the intent of the locally elected officials when they generated the revenue. There are many important reasons TOSS does not support the use of vouchers in the state of Tennessee.

To begin, private schools may or may not administer our states TCAP tests to the entire student body which will inhibit the ability to compare academic performance on a level playing field with public schools.

Also, as parents make choices for private school options, there is currently no mechanism in place to insure they are placing their child in a school that performs any better or worse than home school. We are seeking to empower parents to make “good choices” for their children based on “better academic opportunities,” and this would work in opposition to that goal.

Next, the students targeted in this bill are already in the Achievement School District (ASD). It would seem that with the large amount of additional resources dedicated to those schools by the state, that we have already demonstrated a strong commitment to improving their circumstances. In order to accurately assess our return on that investment, should we not review what is working before diluting the ASD data stream by removing students?

Furthermore, this bill does not require private schools to provide students with special needs the services they are guaranteed in public schools. ELL and Special Education Services are not among the services that private schools offer, in which case, we will be asking families with students most at risk to waive services know to be critical to their success.

Success of the student is of utmost importance to TOSS and to the state of Tennessee. Changing schools when a student or family finds themselves in a failing school is not a new concept. In regards to this, the current FTT regulations allow a parent of a failing school to choose another school in the district with better performance. In these cases, the district must not only continue to provide any special services the child needs but also provide for the child’s transportation. We do not believe this to be a reasonable or acceptable consequence.

Finally, voucher legislation has a fiscal impact of diverting 16 million dollars the first year and almost 70 million dollars the fourth year away from public schools. TOSS finds that implementing a program that removes resources from our public schools counterproductive in this arena of reform and higher expectations