



NEW HOPE-SOLEBURY SCHOOL DISTRICT
*Engaging, Enriching, and Empowering All Students
through a World-Class Education*

April 21, 2018

Dear NHSSD Community,

I am writing to you this morning with the expressed intent of making you aware that Educational Savings Accounts (aka vouchers) are moving forward with full steam at the state level. Nothing in this e-mail should construed as a directive for action or as a political statement.

SB 2 GENERAL INFORMATION

The Senate Education Committee is now scheduled to consider [SB 2](#) on Tuesday, April 24. Under the bill, parents of students in low-achieving schools can receive funds in the form of Education Savings Accounts (ESA) to attend a participating nonpublic school and for other expenses. "Low-achieving" is defined as the lowest performing 15% of elementary and secondary public schools, based on PSSA and Keystone Exam scores. (However, this does not include charter schools or CTCs.) Those districts with low-performing schools would see their basic and special education subsidies reduced by the amount calculated for each participating student, with that money put into an ESA account for parents to use for "qualified education expenses."

A CRITICAL COMPONENT

What is important to note, however, is that **the language as currently written would also provide these vouchers to all students entering kindergarten or first grade throughout the state** and to students who participated in the program in the prior year, regardless whether the student lives in a low-performing district:

A parent who may apply who:

- ✚ resides within the attendance area of a low achieving public school and has been enrolled in a public school in this Commonwealth for not less than one full semester;
- ✚ **is entering kindergarten or the first grade;** or
- ✚ participated in the program in the prior year and is renewing an agreement under subsection (h) by filing an application with the department, in a manner and on a form provided by the department

ANALYSIS

- ✚ The construction of the above language in the bill will expand ESA Vouchers to thousands of students beyond the 15% lowest performing schools.
- ✚ ESA Vouchers will drain desperately-needed funding from public schools and reduce access to educational opportunities for all students to fund the private education of a few. Estimates show that SB 2 could siphon more than \$500 million from the state's 500 school districts.
- ✚ ESA Vouchers allow discrimination against Pennsylvania's children into law. ESA Vouchers enable the

re-segregation of public schools and allow private schools accepting taxpayer dollars to discriminate based on gender, religion, and disability status. Students with disabilities, if they are permitted to enroll in a private school, give up their rights under Federal law to an appropriate education. Most parents don't understand this until it is too late.

- ✚ ESA Vouchers are expensive to administer and financial oversight and accountability are limited, leaving taxpayer dollars ripe for waste, fraud, and abuse. Arizona, which has had Education Savings Account Vouchers for six years, has seen families use ESA funding to make non-educational purchases and other fraud. Once families spend these taxpayer dollars, it is almost impossible to recover them. Taxpayers deserve to have oversight of all public dollars that are used for non-public education.
- ✚ ESA Vouchers can impact any school district, not just districts with low performing schools. Amazingly, a student who receives an ESA is eligible for an ESA for the rest of his K-12 school career, regardless of their school district of residence. When students with ESAs move to another district, their new school districts will have state funding reduced by the amount that is deposited into the student's ESA, even if they are not on the low performing school district list.
- ✚ There is little academic oversight or accountability for private schools that would receive public funding. SB 2 does not require private schools to administer the PSSA or Keystone exams or require any regulation or oversight over the education that private schools provide students.

NEXT STEPS

- ✚ The Senate Education Committee is scheduled to vote on this issue on Tuesday. When (not if) it leaves committee, it will go to the full State Senate for a vote. It is believed that this issue will pass when voted on in the State Senate. It will then go to the House for a vote. It is unclear what will happen in the House.
- ✚ Several agencies (PSBA, PASA, PSEA, PAESSP) are urging those so inclined to do so to contact your Senator ASAP on this issue and explain how SB 2 will negatively impact your school district and ALL school districts across Pennsylvania.

As always, please feel free to reach out if you have any questions.

My best,



Steven M. Yanni, Ed.D.
Superintendent