



FUND STUDENTS. NOT SYSTEMS.

Senate Bill 1647

Let's make sure every student benefits from the funding intended for their education.

Summary

This bill will allocate a certain amount of per-student funds from the state to be given directly to families via digital accounts. These funds can be used by families to enroll their child in an accredited private school, or can be used on other qualified expenses such as education-related costs, special education or extracurricular activities.

Why We Need It

We know that every child has unique learning needs. We also know that children in different communities across our state may not have access to the same education opportunities and resources.

Currently, funding is allocated to public schools on a per-student basis. If a student participates in a schooling option other than public school, their state funds will still go to the public school they are not attending. Families who seek alternate education options to fit their student's unique needs are missing out on funding that could help improve their child's education.

Individualized funding can help fill education gaps for Oklahoma students by providing families with control of resources to give their children diverse educational opportunities via either private school or other education services – for example, access to speech-language therapy or enrichment like music, art or debate lessons.

The Solution

This legislation will provide per-pupil funds directly to parents/guardians who apply for a digital Oklahoma Empowerment Account. These funds can be used for a variety of education-related expenses, ranging from tuition to extracurriculars to standardized testing costs. Funds can accrue year after year, so they can be spent during the next school year if they aren't used, but any leftover funding will be returned to the state's general education fund following the student's graduation from high school.

This flexible funding will allow all families, regardless of income, to shape their child's learning environment. It will ensure that funding FOR students goes TO students – not to systems.

Why This Matters

Parents and guardians know their child's needs best, and should have the resources to shape their child's education for a successful future. This is especially important for parents of children in rural or remote areas, children who have special needs, families who have difficulty affording tuition, etc. – but every student can benefit from an education personalized to them.

Bill Details

- Any student who is a resident of Oklahoma and is eligible to enroll in public school in the state is eligible for an Oklahoma Empowerment Account
 - The annual household income for the student during the preceding tax year can not exceed 300% of the income standard used to qualify for a free or reduced-price school lunch, which is about \$154,000 for a family of 4
- Parents/guardians must fill out an application with the Office of the State Treasurer and sign an agreement to use the account only for qualified expenses
- Qualified expenses will be outlined by the Office of the State Treasurer, and can include: school tuition and/or fees, tutoring services, extracurricular activities and programs, learning materials such as textbooks or devices, learning software or apps, school uniforms, fees for standardized testing, summer education programs, services such as speech-language or behavioral therapy, concurrent enrollment fees, transportation fees and any other qualified expenses as approved by the Office of the State Treasurer
- The Office of the State Treasurer will reevaluate, renew, and randomly audit 10% of accounts on an annual basis
- Funds are not taxable to the parent/guardian, and the parent/guardian may not make deposits into the account
- Funds may accrue year after year, but the account will be closed when the student graduates from high school or reaches the age of 21, whichever comes first
- Nothing in this act shall be construed to expand the regulatory authority of the state, its officers, or any public school to impose any additional regulation of education service providers
- Nothing in this act shall limit the independence or autonomy of an education service provider or make the actions of an education service provider the actions of the state government. Education service providers shall be given maximum freedom to provide for the educational needs of empowerment students without governmental control
- An education service provider shall not be required to alter its creed, practices, admissions policy, or curriculum to accept payments as directed by parents from an Oklahoma Empowerment Account