

HB 1519 -- Equal Opportunity Education Contract Program

Sponsor: Holand

Beginning with school year 2005-2006, equal opportunity education contracts will permit some students who attend schools with specified qualifications to use a contract payment from the school district to a private school to support that student's enrollment. School districts qualify for the program on mandatory and voluntary bases. Mandatory bases include a district's provisionally accredited or unaccredited status or designation of a school within a district as academically deficient or in school improvement. Districts may opt into the program when they have certain markers of excessively fast growth, declining enrollment, or failure to support the school district through levies.

Students in the districts become eligible through a family income of 125% of the eligibility level for reduced price meals or, for students on an individualized education plan, unreimbursed medical expenses of 7.5% or more. A child of an incarcerated parent is eligible. Income increases or changes to a district or school's status once a child has begun the program do not affect the child's ability to participate. The bill contains criteria for students and their parents to meet the obligations of the contract, such as attendance and participation in the statewide assessment program.

Private schools qualify to participate by meeting a series of educational, financial, and administrative criteria. The bill contains application procedures for students and schools and requires the Commissioner of Education to notify qualifying districts and private schools, to respond to applications, and to post a list of qualified schools.

The contract amount is 50% of the district of residence's average expenditure per pupil, except for students with individualized education plans, whose contracts may be in the amount of the cost of the education. A qualified school whose tuition is less than the average expenditure per pupil must return any overage to the district.