

HB 1196 -- Equal Opportunity Education Contracts

Sponsor: Cooper (158)

Beginning with school year 2008-2009, equal education opportunity contracts will allow 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. 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.

A student in these districts is eligible if he or she has a family income of 125% of the eligibility level for the reduced school lunch program, is on an individualized education plan and has unreimbursed medical expenses of 7.5% or more of the parent's federal adjusted gross income, or has an incarcerated parent. 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 including attendance and participation in the statewide assessment program.

Private schools qualify to participate by meeting specified 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 on the Internet.

The contract amount will be 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 education. A qualified school whose tuition is less than the average expenditure per pupil must return any overage to the district.