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LEGISLATIVE ACTION ALERT

GOP senator wants to bring next generation of school vouchers to Pa.



By Jan Murphy August 7, 2017

Will Pennsylvania become the next state to offer the latest iteration of a school voucher program? Freshman Sen. John DiSanto, a Republican from Dauphin County, on Tuesday intends to do his part to make that happen by unveiling his legislation to establish education savings accounts for those who live in attendance areas served by low-achieving public schools.

See complete article at:

http://www.pennlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2017/08/gop_senator_wants_to_bring_nex.html

The way these accounts work is the government deposits funds in an account for parents to use to customize their child's education. The handful of states that have established these programs target them, at least initially, to a specific group of students just as DiSanto's proposal would do.

Senate of Pennsylvania

Session of 2017 - 2018 Regular Session

MEMORANDUM

Posted: July 7, 2017 09:21 AM
From: Senator John DiSanto and Sen. Joseph B. Scarnati, III, Sen. John H. Eichelberger, Jr.
To: All Senate members
Subject: Education Savings Accounts for Students in Underperforming Schools

Too many Pennsylvania children are relegated to persistently underperforming schools based on nothing more than a home address. Pennsylvania's existing school choice programs—charter schools and scholarship tax credits—are vital lifelines for many of these children. But demand for

these options greatly outpaces supply, as evidenced by heartbreaking stories of charter lotteries and scholarship organizations forced to turn away thousands of deserving applicants every year.

Chronic low performance and abysmal graduation rates fail to prepare our students for college or careers. Clearly, there is an urgency to serve families who do not have the means or the good fortune to enroll in a high-quality school.

In the near future, we will be introducing legislation to help students attending low-achieving schools through the establishment of education savings accounts. Families approved to participate in the ESA program agree to withdraw their students from public school and receive the average state funding per pupil—deducted from the local district’s state education subsidies—as a grant in an account held by the Department of the Treasury. Special education students will receive this amount multiplied by the appropriate category weight as specified in the special education funding formula.

The Treasury Department will develop an electronic funds transfer system that allows parents to pay Department of Education-approved education providers directly. All transactions will be closely monitored to ensure funds are spent solely on legitimate educational services.

ESAs provide flexible funding allowing parents to customize an education for their child. Qualifying education expenses include: 1) Tuition and fees at a participating private school; 2) Payment for a licensed or accredited tutor; 3) Fees for nationally norm-referenced tests and similar exams; 4) Industry certifications; 5) Curriculum and textbooks; and 6) Services to special education students such as occupational, speech, and behavioral therapies.

Unused ESA money may be carried over from one year to the next—encouraging frugal and responsible use. Upon graduation from high school, remaining ESA funds may be used for higher education expenses.

Our state must provide students and parents living within the boundaries of underperforming schools with additional options to meet their educational needs. Please join us in co-sponsoring this very important legislation.