edtrust TENNESSEE

Public Dollars, Public Accountability

Why Tennessee's Voucher Program Can't Be Exempt from Transparency

Support HB 1889/SB 1978

The Education Freedom Scholarship (EFS) program is entirely funded by state dollars, which are public funds. It should have to adhere to the same degree of accountability and transparency as other public services that receive public funds.

HB 1889/SB 1978 requires EFS schools to participate in an audit and mandates public reporting on school finances, admissions, demographics, and student outcomes.

The Education Savings Account Program Requires Standardized Testing. The Education Freedom Scholarship Program Should Too.

Tennessee's second largest voucher program — Education Savings Account (ESA) — requires the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP). This assessment program allows families to see how student outcomes compare between public schools and ESA participating schools. That data empowers families to make the best choice for their children, and Tennessee's universal voucher program should be required to report that data.

⚠ **HB 1889/SB 1978** requires scholarship recipients take the same TCAP tests administered to public school students enrolled in the same grade level or course subject.

HB 1889/SB 1978 Demands Transparency So Families, Schools, and the State Can Make Informed Decisions.

More data means better decision making for families, the state, and schools. Currently, private schools participating in Tennessee's voucher program are not required to report key information, like enrollment and outcomes, to the extent public schools do. Without this data, the state is diverting funds from public schools without data to evaluate the program. Accountability starts with transparency, and transparency starts with requiring schools that accept vouchers to report key data.

⚠ **HB 1889/SB 1978** requires the Department of Education to submit an annual report of the program for the General Assembly. The report would include information such as: the private schools that enrolled recipients, the number of recipients enrolled at each school, the outcomes of the tests, the county of residence of the parent/guardian that applied for the scholarship and whose student received a scholarship, the amount of scholarship funds each recipient spent, and the type of allowable expenditures the recipients spent funds on.

Tennessee's ESA program reports student outcome data annually and was recently evaluated by the state comptroller to share learnings on the program's performance. The annual reports have routinely revealed that ESA participants generally underperform compared to their public school peers. That information is vital for understanding whether the state's educational investment is working, and the universal EFS program should be held to the same standard.

⚠ **HB 1889/SB 1978** requires the comptroller to evaluate the EFS program and submit a report to the General Assembly with data including: the educational outcomes of recipients, the cost of administering the program, and the effect of the program on LEAs.

Learn more about the history and harm of vouchers in Tennessee at
edtrusttn.org/public-dollars-should-fund-public-schools-exclusively/