



LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Hon. Eric LaFleur
Chairman, Joint Legislative Committee on the Budget
P.O. Box 44294
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Hon. Cameron Henry
Vice Chairman, Joint Legislative Committee on the Budget
P.O. Box 44294
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

August 12, 2016

Dear Chairman LaFleur and Vice Chairman Henry:

As you know, each year the Legislature appropriates funding for students enrolling in public schools and for students enrolling in publicly funded nonpublic schools. In all likelihood, this year's state budget, passed in June, will underestimate the number of students seeking enrollment in both public schools and publicly funded nonpublic schools for the 2016-2017 school year. As a result, both public schools and nonpublic schools, whose budgets are based on the number of students they serve, will be underfunded in the budget.

Under the laws of our state, the Legislature must send additional funds to public schools to account for students not originally accounted for in the budget passed in June. This action typically occurs in the spring of the school year in question. However, the Legislature has no such obligation for publicly funded nonpublic schools; even when the budget underestimates the number of students seeking to enroll in these schools, the Legislature is not required to provide additional funds. Therefore, as of today, 362 low-income children whose parents chose a nonpublic school more than six months ago through the Student Scholarship for Educational Excellence Program sit on a waiting list.

The situation is made all the more tragic by this fact: if the parents of these children determine that they can wait no longer for funds to materialize and decide to send their children to public schools, the Legislature will and must provide funding to educate these children.

State funding, therefore, is not the barrier to honoring these parents' choices. The barrier is state policy. Rather than allowing these low-income parents to choose the school that is best for their children, our state's policies allow the government to make that decision for them by committing funds for every child in some schools while placing limits on the funds available to other schools.

This policy is undemocratic and unfair. It puts at grave risk the civil rights of families who are not wealthy enough to pay tuition at schools they believe will best educate their children.

As Louisianans, we cannot accept this situation. I write today to inform you that the Department of Education has initiated a plan whereby schools with students on the waiting list may enroll these students if the schools agree in writing to accept a potential "worst case scenario" of a nominal payment from the state of less than \$100 per child for the year. In the spring, when the Legislature analyzes how many additional students are in public schools and the additional funds thereby owed to public schools,

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I will request that the Legislature similarly analyze the number of additional students enrolled by these nonpublic schools and that the Legislature commit appropriate and full funding to those schools as well.

So as to not exceed the funding already in the budget, schools consenting to the plan will agree to risk not accepting anything more than a nominal payment from the state in exchange for serving these children. My hope is that, upon consenting schools enrolling these students, the Legislature will appropriate additional funds in the spring, as the Legislature would be required to do were the children ultimately to attend a public school.

Monday, August 22, the Department will have a list of schools that have agreed to serve students while accepting minimal revenue.

While the fiscal impact to the state of this plan is negligible, the moral impact is great. I appreciate the opportunity to share the plan with you, I appreciate your future consideration of fair funding for all schools and families, and I look forward to providing you an update on the 22nd.

Sincerely,



John White
State Superintendent of Education

CC:

Hon. Jay Dardenne

Hon. John Alario

Hon. Taylor Barras

Hon. Dan "Blade" Morrish

Hon. Nancy Landry

Hon. James Garvey