

Update on Scholarship Accountability bills

3/04

The St. Pete Times article is an excellent summary of what is going on regarding scholarship programs. It is a very complicated issue.

http://www.sptimes.com/2004/02/29/State/Support_grows_for_vou.shtml

The bill sponsored by Rep. Sullivan is the DOE bill that I worked on, along with John Kirtley, Patricia Hardman, Larry Keough, Skardon Bliss, Howard Burke, the Governor's office, the DOE and others, during September and early October.

The McKay Task Force recommendations were filed as SB 2882 on Friday. The bill will probably be heard in Committee next week, March 15 -20, but the agenda is not available.

When the bills are put on the committee agenda, I suspect they will move very quickly. Many decisions are being made behind the scenes at this time and I know that there will be a lot of debate over the testing requirement. The traditional private schools have finally acquiesced to nationally norm-referenced testing with the scores being sent to a third party research entity for release in aggregate. The Governor is insisting on some type of measurement of how these scholarship children are progressing. Some legislators (even conservatives) want the FCAT.

The Senate bill contains a provision to allow the DOE and the Auditor General to inspect private schools. The traditional private schools are very opposed to this provision and will probably push for accreditation as a third party oversight of private schools rather than the DOE or Auditor General.

The intention of FAANS and other pro-voucher supporters is to keep as much state regulation and oversight off private schools that participate in these programs as possible. No one knows where this will end up.

At the present time, we have been able through the drafting of HB 313 to keep regulations off ALL private schools and keep it in the scholarship programs law. This gives private schools the opportunity to elect to participate in the scholarship programs and comply with all the regulations or choose not to participate and have no extra accountability. I am not sure that given the demand for more accountability by the Governor, the Legislators and the press, that "600" private schools choosing to participate in the scholarship programs can continue to serve children unless they begin to look more like traditional schools. I am not sure that we can protect their right to participate in these scholarship programs. I have been, up to this point, trying to protect their right to exist as private schools in Florida. I think we have won that argument. But whether they can continue to participate in scholarship programs will be determined by what happens in the next couple of weeks. I have a few tricks up my sleeve, but it will take quite a bit of consensus building to pull this off and time is running out.

For now,

Brenda