

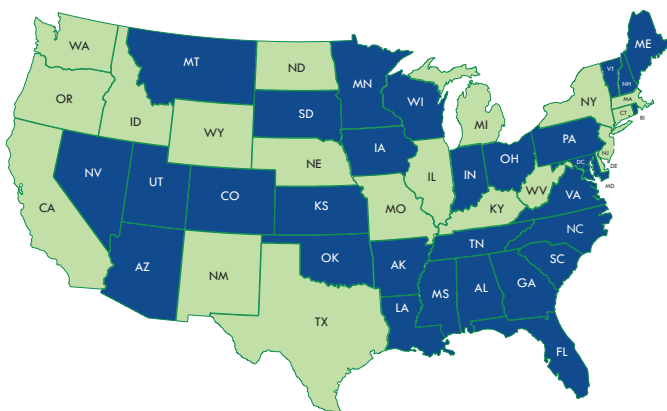


SB 2 / HB 253 : Opportunity through Parental Choice

Education is a parent's serious duty. Schools do not replace parents, they complement them. - Pope Francis

Summary. School choice refers to programs which allow families to enroll their children in an education beyond their local assigned school and receive financial assistance when they do so. Nationwide, such programs are helpful to families whose assigned school is not a good fit, perhaps because their son or daughter has a learning disability or other special need. School choice also opens opportunities to families so that they can freely enroll their children in programs that are consistent with their values. As Figure 1 illustrates, school choice programs exist in 30 states. Governor Abbott has charged the legislature with establishing school choice for special needs students, and the plan that has been put forth by the Texas legislature is called a tax credit scholarship (TCS).

Figure 1: States with Parental Choice, July 2017



Student Eligibility. Under the TCS bill, families are eligible to apply for financial assistance if their child is currently enrolled in public school and their child is eligible to participate in their school district's special education program *or* has a 504 disability.

Special education students can range from 3 to 21 in age and have one or more of the following disabilities:

- physical disability
- mental retardation
- emotional disturbance
- learning disability,
- autism,
- speech disability, or
- traumatic brain injury.

Students with a 504 disability are those with a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits their major life activities, such as breathing, walking, seeing, hearing, or learning.

Annual Allotment. Under the TCS bill, families would be eligible to receive an annual scholarship valued at \$10,000 or the full price of tuition, whichever is less.

Eligible Schools. Under the TCS bill, students may

use their scholarship to enroll full-time at a private school which is accredited by the Texas Private School Accreditation Commission (TEPSAC). There are about 840 private schools accredited by TEPSAC and 75 percent enroll children with some level of disability. Fifty-one schools accredited by TEPSAC exclusively enroll students with special needs.

Aid for special needs students. Under the TCS bill, students who remain in their public school may apply for \$500 of educational expense assistance, which can be used on tuition, transportation, textbooks, and other instructional supplies.

Cap on the Program. The TCS bill places several different limits on scholarship funding. The total limit for the program is \$75 million, and 10 percent of this amount will be used for administrative costs. Of the remaining 90 percent, about \$13.5 million will be used for educational expense assistance for public school students, while \$54 million will be used for private school scholarships. Therefore, each year the state can award:

- 5,400 private school scholarships valued at \$10,000, and
- 27,000 educational assistance grants valued at \$500.

Figure 3: Fast Facts on the Tax Credit Scholarship (TCS)



Eligibility. Children may apply for a scholarship if they require special education or have a 504 disability, and are enrolled in public school.



Private School Funding. Private school scholarships will be worth \$10,000 or the cost of tuition, whichever is less. About 5,400 scholarships are available.



Public School Funding. Additional public school assistance for special needs students will be valued at \$500. About 27,000 such grants are available.



School Accountability. A scholarship can be used for tuition at one of about 840 accredited private schools in Texas.



Source of Funds. Texas insurance companies may donate the funds they would have paid in taxes to the TCS scholarship fund.

