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H.263

Introduced by Representatives Hebert of Vernon, Strong of Albany, Batchelor of Derby, Branagan of Georgia, Burditt of West Rutland, Canfield of Fair Haven, Dame of Essex, Dickinson of St. Albans Town, Eastman of Orwell, Gamache of Swanton, Graham of Williamstown, Helm of Fair Haven, Higley of Lowell, Lawrence of Lyndon, Lefebvre of Newark, Lewis of Berlin, Marcotte of Coventry, Martel of Waterford, Morrissey of Bennington, Myers of Essex, Terenzini of Rutland Town, and Van Wyck of Ferrisburgh

Referred to Committee on

Date:

Subject: Education; school districts; secondary schools; elementary schools; tuition

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to expand Vermont's publicly funded tuition system by providing vouchers to all Vermont student to be used at any approved, nonsectarian independent or public school in Vermont or an adjacent state or country. Receiving public schools could not require that publicly funded students pay an additional amount as tuition, but could assess fees and other charges that nonpublicly funded students would also be required to pay.

1 An act relating to expanding Vermont’s publicly funded tuition system

2 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

3 Sec. 1. LEGISLATIVE INTENT

4 (a) Vermont has a unique and longstanding tradition of publicly funded
5 school choice, with over 90 elementary and secondary school districts
6 currently providing vouchers to resident students in some or all grades.

7 (b) Vermont’s rich variety of independent and public schools provides
8 students exemplary educational opportunities and meets a widely diverse range
9 of needs and interests, from ski academies to schools focusing on specific
10 physical, behavioral, or educational challenges.

11 (c) It is the intent of this act to expand Vermont’s publicly funded tuition
12 system by providing vouchers to any Vermont student residing in a district that
13 operates a school offering the student’s grade. These students, like students
14 residing in “non-operating districts,” will be able to use the vouchers to pay for
15 tuition charged by a different public school or an approved independent school
16 located in or outside Vermont — empowering students to enroll in the schools
17 that best meet their needs and interests.

18 (d) Recent national studies conclude that that opportunities for publicly
19 funded school choice can improve student academic outcomes, reduce
20 education costs, achieve equity and diversity in the classroom, and improve
21 student and parental satisfaction with the education experience.

1 Sec. 2. STATEWIDE VOUCHER AMOUNT; SPECIAL EDUCATION
2 GRANTS; STATEWIDE VOUCHER SYSTEM

3 (a) Statewide voucher amount. On or before July 1, 2016, and annually
4 thereafter, the General Assembly shall establish a statewide Base Voucher
5 Amount for the next fiscal year. The Base Voucher Amount shall be adjusted
6 as follows (the Adjusted Voucher Amounts):

7 (1) the Adjusted Voucher Amount for students in kindergarten through
8 grade 6 (elementary students) shall be 80 percent of the Base Voucher
9 Amount;

10 (2) the Adjusted Voucher Amount for students in grades 7 and 8 (middle
11 school students) shall be 110 percent of the Base Voucher Amount; and

12 (3) the Adjusted Voucher Amount for students in grades 9 through 12
13 (high school students) shall be 120 percent of the Base Voucher Amount.

14 (b) Special Education Grants. On or before July 1, 2016, the General
15 Assembly shall determine a formula by which it shall calculate grant awards
16 for special education services and a process by which the grants shall be
17 distributed. The Special Education Grants shall augment the Adjusted
18 Voucher Amount in order to provide special education services identified as
19 necessary in a student's individualized education program (IEP) as determined
20 by the student's IEP team.

1 (c) Total statewide education spending. On or before July 1, 2016, and
2 annually thereafter, the General Assembly shall establish the total amount of
3 education spending in Vermont for the next fiscal year. This amount shall be
4 calculated as:

5 (1) the three Adjusted Voucher Amounts for next fiscal year multiplied
6 by the appropriate number of elementary, middle school, or high school
7 students in the State as determined by the most recent school district
8 census data;

9 (2) plus the total amount of Special Education Grants projected to be
10 awarded in the next fiscal year.

11 (d) Education property tax rates and General Fund transfer. On or before
12 July 1, 2016, and annually thereafter, the General Assembly shall establish the
13 statewide education property tax rates and the amount of the General Fund
14 transfer that will be necessary to fund the total amount of education spending
15 in Vermont for the next fiscal year as determined in subsection (c) of this
16 section. Each year, the statewide education property tax rates for
17 nonresidential property and for homestead property shall be uniform
18 throughout the State. The State shall continue to apply homestead property tax
19 income sensitivity adjustments as provided in 32 V.S.A. chapter 154.

1 (e) Tuition vouchers.

2 (1) Annually, on a date to be established by the Secretary of Education,
3 each school district shall transmit the names and addresses of each resident
4 elementary, middle school, and high school student.

5 (2) Annually, on or before July 31, the Secretary shall provide each
6 Vermont student's parent or guardian with a tuition voucher equal to the
7 Adjusted Voucher Amount appropriate for the student's grade level. The
8 Secretary shall also distribute a list of all public schools and nonsectarian,
9 approved independent schools in the State and adjacent to the State
10 (collectively, an approved school).

11 (3) A parent or guardian shall present the voucher to the approved
12 school in which his or her student is enrolled. The school shall transmit all
13 vouchers to the Secretary of Education, who shall pay each school in the total
14 amount of the vouchers presented.

15 (4) A Vermont public school shall not require a Vermont student to pay
16 tuition in excess of the Adjusted Voucher Amount appropriate for the student's
17 grade level, but may assess fees and other charges related to the cost of
18 providing [what].

19 (5) An approved independent school or an out-of-state public school
20 may charge tuition in excess of the Adjusted Voucher Amount, which shall be

1 the responsibility of the student or, if the student is a minor, of the student's
2 parent or guardian.

3 (f) Budget for school district that operates a school. The total annual
4 budget for a school district that operates one or more schools shall be equal to
5 the combined amount of Adjusted Tuition Vouchers it receives, together with
6 any Special Education Grants received pursuant to subsection (b) of this
7 section and any endowments, parental fundraising, federal funds, or
8 nongovernmental grants:

9 Sec. 3. OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

10 On or before December 1, 2015, the Office of Legislative Council shall
11 provide to the House and Senate Committees on Education, the House
12 Committee on Ways and Means, and the Senate Committee on Finance
13 proposed statutory amendments necessary to accomplish the purpose of
14 this act.

15 Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE; APPLICABILITY

16 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2015 and shall apply to fiscal year 2018
17 (academic year 2017–2018) and after.