

By Representatives Valdes, Cantens and Feeney

1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to education; providing for a
3 pilot scholarship program in Dade County;
4 providing for eligibility and amount of
5 scholarships; providing program requirements;
6 requiring annual reports and evaluations;
7 providing an effective date.

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9 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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11 Section 1. (1) The Department of Education shall,
12 beginning in the 2000-2001 school year, institute a 3-year
13 pilot scholarship program in Dade County to be administered by
14 the School Board of Dade County, which shall provide annual
15 scholarships for 1 percent of the students for 1 full year of
16 academic instruction at any public or eligible nonpublic
17 school. Students in grades 4 through 9 who qualify for a
18 dropout prevention program pursuant to s. 230.2316, Florida
19 Statutes, and who attend an inner-city school in Dade County
20 are eligible to receive a scholarship to a school of their
21 parents' or guardians' choice. Participation in the program
22 shall be voluntary and shall require parent or guardian
23 involvement.

24 (2) The award of scholarships shall be by a lottery of
25 all eligible students, with steps taken to ensure that
26 district racial and ethnic diversity is maintained in the
27 lottery process.

28 (3) Students who successfully complete an academic
29 year and progress to the next grade shall be guaranteed
30 continuation in the program.

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1 (4) Those students determined to be eligible shall be
2 notified by April 1 of the school year preceding participation
3 in the program.

4 (5) Eligible nonpublic schools shall comply with
5 compulsory attendance laws pursuant to s. 232.01, Florida
6 Statutes; file a database survey form with the Department of
7 Education pursuant to s. 229.808, Florida Statutes; meet all
8 health, safety, and sanitation requirements, pursuant to
9 chapter 381, Florida Statutes; have admission policies which
10 do not discriminate on the basis of race, national origin,
11 sex, or handicap; require criminal background checks of all
12 teachers and administrators; and ensure that disciplinary and
13 expulsion policies do not discriminate against educational
14 choice students.

15 (6) From funds allocated to Dade County through the
16 Florida Education Finance Program, the program shall provide
17 each student with a scholarship equal to the amount of funds
18 that would be allocated for the student for dropout prevention
19 pursuant to s. 236.081, Florida Statutes, or the regularly
20 charged tuition and fees, including transportation costs where
21 appropriate, at the nonpublic school, whichever is less.
22 Scholarships provided pursuant to this section are
23 grants-in-aid to children through their parents or guardians
24 and not to the schools in which the children are enrolled. The
25 selection of the school by parents or guardians shall not
26 constitute a decision or act of the state or any of its
27 subdivisions. The scholarships shall not constitute taxable
28 income.

29 (7) Each participating nonpublic school shall file an
30 annual report with the Department of Education which indicates
31 each student's academic and behavioral performance, including

1 progress in the areas identified as qualifying the student for
2 a dropout prevention program.

3 (8) The program shall include a component for annual
4 and cumulative evaluations of effectiveness. The Department
5 of Education shall select an independent entity to conduct the
6 evaluations which shall contain annual recommendations for
7 legislative and administrative change to the program. The
8 results of these evaluations shall be made available to the
9 President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of
10 Representatives by December 1 for each year of the program.

11 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 1999.

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HOUSE SUMMARY

Requires the Department of Education to institute a 3-year pilot scholarship program in Dade County, to be administered by the School Board of Dade County, for eligible students at public or nonpublic schools. Provides criteria for student eligibility and the amount of scholarships.