

Senate Bill 90

By: Senators Johnson of the 1st, Rogers of the 21st, Hill of the 32nd, Unterman of the 45th,
Moody of the 56th and others

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

1 To amend Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to
2 elementary and secondary education, so as to provide the option for parents to enroll their
3 child in another school within the local school system, a school in another local school
4 system, or in a private school under certain conditions; to provide for definitions; to provide
5 for scholarships for public school students to attend participating schools; to provide for
6 eligibility and other requirements for students to participate in the scholarship program; to
7 establish certain requirements for schools that participate in the scholarship program; to
8 provide for the amount of scholarship and method of payments; to provide for rules and
9 regulations; to provide for limited liability; to provide for an annual report on the program;
10 to provide for related matters; to provide for an effective date and applicability; to repeal
11 conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

12 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

13 style="text-align:center">**SECTION 1.**

14 Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to elementary and
15 secondary education, is amended by adding a new article to read as follows:

16 style="text-align:center">"ARTICLE 34

17 20-2-2130.

18 As used in this article, the term:

19 (1) 'Board' means the State Board of Education.

20 (2) 'Department' means the Department of Education.

21 (3) 'Parent or guardian' means a biological parent, legal guardian, custodian, or other
22 person with legal authority to act on behalf of a child.

23 (4) 'Participating school' means a private school that has notified the department of its
 24 intention to participate in the program and that complies with the department's
 25 requirements.

26 (5) 'Prior school year in attendance' means that the student was enrolled and reported by
 27 a public school system or school systems for funding purposes during the preceding
 28 October and March full-time equivalent (FTE) program counts in accordance with Code
 29 Section 20-2-160.

30 (6) 'Private school' means a nonpublic school, sectarian or nonsectarian, which is
 31 accredited or in the process of becoming accredited by one or more of the entities listed
 32 in subparagraph (A) of paragraph (6) of Code Section 20-3-519.

33 (7) 'Program' means the scholarship program established pursuant to this article.

34 (8) 'Resident school system' means the public school system in which the student would
 35 be enrolled based on his or her residence.

36 (9) 'Scholarship' means a scholarship awarded pursuant to this article.

37 (10) 'Scholarship student' means a student who receives a scholarship pursuant to this
 38 article.

39 20-2-2131.

40 (a) Any parent of a student in a public school in this state may:

41 (1) Request a transfer for the student to attend another public school within the resident
 42 school system. It shall be in the sole discretion of the school, in accordance with an
 43 annual policy established by the school council, to accept students pursuant to this
 44 paragraph. If the parent chooses this option, then the parent shall be responsible for
 45 transportation to and from such school. The parent of a student transferring to another
 46 school pursuant to this paragraph shall be required to sign a contract with the receiving
 47 school agreeing that the parent and student will abide by all school rules and procedures
 48 and that the violation of any such rules or procedures may result in being removed from
 49 the school. If accepted, and unless there is a contract violation, the student may attend
 50 such public school pursuant to this paragraph until the student completes all grades of the
 51 school, graduates, or reaches the age of 20, whichever occurs first;

52 (2) Request a transfer for the student to attend a public school outside of the student's
 53 resident school system. It shall be in the sole discretion of the local board of education,
 54 with input from the school council of the desired school, to accept students pursuant to
 55 this paragraph. If the parent chooses this option, then the parent shall be responsible for
 56 transportation to and from such school. The parent of a student transferring to another
 57 school pursuant to this paragraph shall be required to sign a contract with the receiving
 58 school agreeing that the parent and student will abide by all school rules and procedures

59 and that the violation of any such rules or procedures may result in being removed from
 60 the school. If the school accepts the student, such system shall report the student for
 61 purposes of funding to the department. The department shall pay to each receiving
 62 school through appropriation of state and federal funds an amount equal to the sum of:

63 (A) QBE formula earnings, QBE grants, and federal grants earned by the school based
 64 on the school's enrollment, school profile, and student characteristics. QBE formula
 65 earnings shall include the salary portion of direct instructional costs, the adjustment for
 66 training and experience, the nonsalary portion of direct instructional costs, and earnings
 67 for psychologists and school social workers, school administration, facility maintenance
 68 and operation, media centers, additional days of instruction in accordance with Code
 69 Section 20-2-184.1, and staff development;

70 (B) A proportional share of state categorical grants, non-QBE state grants, state
 71 equalization grants, and all other state and federal grants; and

72 (C) An amount determined by the department for each student enrolled in such school
 73 equal to a proportional share of local revenue from the local school system in which the
 74 student attending the school resides;

75 The total allotment of state and federal funds to the resident school system of a student
 76 attending another school pursuant to this paragraph shall be calculated as otherwise
 77 provided in Article 6 of this chapter with an ensuing reduction equivalent to the amount
 78 of state and federal funds appropriated to the receiving school pursuant to this paragraph;

79 or

80 (3) Request and receive from the department a scholarship for the student to enroll in and
 81 attend a participating school in accordance with Code Section 20-2-2132.

82 (b) Each local school system shall annually notify prior to the beginning of each school
 83 year the parents of each student by letter, electronic means, or by such other reasonable
 84 means in a timely manner of the options available to the parent under this article.

85 20-2-2132.

86 (a) A student shall qualify for a scholarship under this article if:

87 (1) The student's parent currently resides within Georgia and has been a Georgia resident
 88 for at least one year;

89 (2) The student has spent the prior school year in attendance at a Georgia public school;

90 (3) The parent obtains acceptance for admission of the student to a participating school;
 91 and

92 (4) The parent submits an application for a scholarship to the department no later than
 93 the deadline established by the department.

94 (b) Upon acceptance of the scholarship, the parent assumes full financial responsibility for
95 the education of the scholarship student, including transportation to and from the
96 participating school.

97 (c) For a student who participates in the program whose parent requests that the student
98 take the state-wide assessments pursuant to Code Section 20-2-281, the resident school
99 system shall make available to the student locations and times to take all state-wide
100 assessments. Test scores of private school students participating in the state-wide
101 assessments shall not be applied to the system averages of the resident school system for
102 data reported for federal and state requirements.

103 (d) Students enrolled in a school operated by the Department of Juvenile Justice are not
104 eligible for the scholarship.

105 (e) The scholarship shall remain in force until the student returns to his or her assigned
106 school in the resident public school system, graduates from high school, or reaches the age
107 of 20, whichever occurs first. However, at any time, the student's parent may remove the
108 student from the participating school and place the student in another participating school
109 or public school as provided for in Code Section 20-2-2131.

110 (f) The creation of the program or the granting of a scholarship pursuant to this article shall
111 not be construed to imply that a public school did not provide an adequate education for
112 a student or constitute a waiver or admission by the state.

113 (g) Any scholarship directed to a participating school is so directed wholly as a result of
114 the genuine and independent private choice of the parent.

115 (h) The parent of each student participating in the scholarship program shall comply fully
116 with the participating school's rules and policies.

117 (i) Any parent who fails to comply with the provisions of this article and department
118 regulations relating to the scholarship shall forfeit the scholarship.

119 20-2-2133.

120 (a) To be eligible to enroll a scholarship student, a participating school shall:

121 (1) Have a physical location in Georgia where the scholarship students attend classes and
122 have direct contact with the school's teachers;

123 (2) Demonstrate fiscal soundness by having been in operation for one school year or by
124 submitting a financial information report for the school that complies with uniform
125 financial accounting standards established by the department and conducted by a certified
126 public accountant. The report must confirm that the school desiring to participate is
127 insured and the owner or owners have sufficient capital or credit to operate the school for
128 the upcoming school year serving the number of students anticipated with expected
129 revenues from tuition and other sources that may be reasonably expected. The report

- 130 shall be limited in scope to those records that are necessary for the department to make
131 a determination on fiscal soundness and to make payments to schools for scholarships;
132 (3) Comply with the antidiscrimination provisions of 42 U.S.C. Section 2000d;
133 (4) Comply with all health and safety laws or codes that apply to private schools;
134 (5) Comply with all provisions of Code Section 20-2-690 and any other state law
135 applicable to private schools;
136 (6) Regularly report to the parent and the department on the student's academic progress,
137 including the results of pre-academic assessments and post-academic assessments given
138 to the student, in accordance with department guidelines; and
139 (7) Employ or contract with teachers who hold a bachelor's degree or higher degree or
140 have at least three years of experience in education and annually provide to the parents
141 the relevant credentials of the teachers who will be teaching their students.
- 142 (b) A home school operating under the provisions of Code Section 20-2-690 shall not be
143 eligible to enroll scholarship students.
- 144 (c) Residential treatment facilities licensed or approved by the state shall not be eligible
145 to enroll scholarship students.
- 146 (d) The creation of the program shall not be construed to expand the regulatory authority
147 of the state, its officers, or any local school system to impose any additional regulation of
148 nonpublic schools beyond those reasonably necessary to enforce the requirements of this
149 article.
- 150 (e) A participating school intending to enroll scholarship students shall submit an
151 application to the department by a date determined by the department preceding the school
152 year in which it intends to enroll scholarship students. The notice shall specify the grade
153 levels that the school has available for students who are participating in the scholarship
154 program. A school intending to enroll scholarship students in the 2009-2010 school year
155 shall submit an application no later than June 30, 2009.
- 156 (f) The board shall approve a participating school's application to enroll scholarship
157 students if the school meets the eligibility requirements of this article and complies with
158 board rules established pursuant to Code Section 20-2-2117. The board shall make
159 available to local school systems and the public a list of participating schools.
- 160 (g) The board may bar a school from participation in the program if it determines that the
161 school has intentionally and substantially misrepresented information or failed to refund
162 to the state any scholarship overpayments in a timely manner.
- 163 20-2-2134.
- 164 (a) The amount of the scholarship provided pursuant to this article shall be the lesser of:

165 (1) The costs of the educational program that would have been provided for the student
166 in the resident school system as calculated under Code Section 20-2-161, which shall not
167 include any federal or local funds; or

168 (2) The amount of the participating school's tuition and fees, including any assessment
169 fee required by the participating school.

170 (b) Scholarship students shall be counted in the enrollment of their resident school system;
171 provided, however, that this count shall only be for purposes of determining the amount of
172 the scholarship and the scholarship students shall not be included as enrolled for purposes
173 of state or federal accountability requirements, including, but not limited to, the federal
174 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act
175 of 2001 (P.L. 107-110). The funds needed to provide a scholarship shall be subtracted
176 from the allotment payable to the resident school system.

177 (c) Each local school system shall submit quarterly reports to the department on dates
178 established by the department stating the number of scholarship students in the resident
179 school system. Following each notification, the department shall transfer from the state
180 allotment to each school system the amount calculated under Code Section 20-2-161 to a
181 separate account for the scholarship program for quarterly disbursement to the parents of
182 scholarship students. When a student enters the program, the department must receive all
183 documentation required for the student's participation, including the participating school's
184 and student's fee schedules at least 30 days before the first quarterly scholarship payment
185 is made for the student. The department shall not make any retroactive payments.

186 (d) Upon proper documentation received by the department, the department shall make
187 quarterly scholarship payments to the parents of scholarship students on dates established
188 by the department during each academic year in which the scholarship is in force. The
189 initial payment shall be made upon evidence of admission to the participating school, and
190 subsequent payments shall be made on evidence of continued enrollment and attendance
191 at the participating school.

192 (e) Payment to the parents shall be made by individual warrant made payable to the
193 student's parent and mailed by the department to the participating school of the parent's
194 choice, and the parent shall restrictively endorse the warrant to the participating school for
195 deposit into the account of such school.

196 (f) A person, on behalf of a participating school, shall not accept a power of attorney from
197 a parent to sign a warrant, and a parent of a scholarship student shall not give a power of
198 attorney designating a person, on behalf of a participating school, as the parent's attorney
199 in fact.

200 (g) If the participating school requires partial payment of tuition prior to the start of the
201 academic year to reserve space for students admitted to the school, that partial payment

202 may be paid by the department prior to the first quarterly payment of the year in which the
203 scholarship is awarded, up to a maximum of \$1,000.00, and deducted from subsequent
204 scholarship payments. If a student decides not to attend the participating school, the partial
205 reservation payment must be returned to the department by such school. Only one
206 reservation payment per student may be made per year.

207 20-2-2135.

208 The board shall adopt rules to administer the program regarding eligibility and participation
209 of participating schools, including, but not limited to, timelines that will maximize student
210 and public and private school participation, the calculation and distribution of scholarships
211 to eligible students and participating schools, and the application and approval procedures
212 for eligible students and participating schools. The department shall develop and utilize
213 a compliance form for completion by participating schools. The department shall be
214 authorized to require any pertinent information as it deems necessary from participating
215 schools for the purpose of implementing the program. Participating schools shall be
216 required to complete such forms and certify their accuracy.

217 20-2-2136.

218 No liability shall arise on the part of the department, the board, or the state or of any local
219 board of education based on the award or use of a scholarship awarded pursuant to this
220 article.

221 20-2-2137.

222 The Office of Student Achievement, in conjunction with the department, shall provide the
223 General Assembly not later than December 1 of each year with a report regarding the
224 scholarship program for the previous fiscal year. The report shall include, but not be
225 limited to, numbers and demographics of students participating and numbers of
226 participating schools. Such report shall also be posted on the Office of Student
227 Achievement's website."

228 **SECTION 2.**

229 This Act shall become effective upon its approval by the Governor or upon its becoming law
230 without such approval and shall apply to the 2009-2010 school year and all school years
231 thereafter.

232 **SECTION 3.**

233 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.