

# BILL GREATLY EXPANDING NC'S PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHER PROGRAM ADVANCES IN SENATE



*Posted on April 27, 2023 by Elizabeth Yelverton*

State lawmakers in the Senate Education/Higher Education Committee on Wednesday approved, mostly down party lines, a bill purported to be the largest expansion of NC's "Opportunity Scholarship Program" in state history. Senate Bill 406, sponsored by Senate Education Committee Co-Chairs Sens. Michael Lee (R-New Hanover) and Amy Galey (R-Alamance), would open the private school voucher program to all students, regardless of family income level, in the 2024-2025 school year. The bill, as summarized by legislative staff, would allocate almost \$4 billion to the program over the next 10 years and would provide qualifying students with "scholarship grants" on a sliding scale based on family income.

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2024-2025 school year. The bill, as [summarized](#) by legislative staff, would allocate almost **\$4 billion** to the program over the next 10 years and would provide qualifying students with "scholarship grants" as follows:

- All students would receive **up to 45% of the average State per pupil allocation** for average daily membership in the prior fiscal year, unless the student qualifies for a higher amount.
- Students in households with an income level not in excess of the amount required for the student to qualify for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) would receive **up to 100% of the average State per pupil allocation**.
- Students in households with an income level up to 200% of FRPL would receive **up to 90% of the avg. state per pupil allocation**.
- Students in households with an income level between 200% and 450% of FRPL (~\$250,000 for a family of 4) would receive **up to 60% of the avg. state per pupil allocation**.

The bill's committee hearing was held shortly after a [press conference](#) featuring comments from the bill sponsors, who stood alongside supportive legislative leadership, including House Speaker Tim Moore (R-Cleveland) and Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger (R-Rockingham). Sen. Lee, who shared he had children attending private school, noted the need to expand the program's eligibility criteria for students that would otherwise "never have the opportunity to attend private school." House Education Committee Co-Chair and former public school principal Rep. Tricia Cotham (R-Mecklenburg), who sponsors the [House companion bill](#) to S406, also spoke in favor of the Senate bill, stating the proposal "is about families being able to make the

best decisions for their child."

While the bill was met with great enthusiasm from Republican supporters, many Democrats on the Senate Education Committee shared their numerous concerns with the proposal, including questions on why funding was needed at all for wealthier families. In response to these funding concerns, Sen. Lee shared the proposal was a step toward "backpack funding," referring to a national shift towards a "weighted student funding model" in which families, rather than school systems, would receive funding to spend on their child's education as they see fit. Sens. Lee and Galey also sponsor a [separate bill](#) that would replace the state's current school allotment funding formula with a new weighted student funding model; although bill sponsors have shared with NCASA that this bill would *not* go into effect during the next school year, as currently proposed in the bill.

Senate Bill 406 now moves to the Senate Appropriations/Base Budget Committee, where it could either be rolled into the Senate's state budget proposal or continue to move forward as a free-standing bill. While the bill faces several more steps before it could become law, NCASA members are strongly encouraged to reach out to Senate and House lawmakers now to share concerns about the legislation's likely impact of pulling students and funding away from LEA schools.