

HCS HB 2491 -- VIRTUAL SCHOOL PROGRAM

SPONSOR: Christofanelli

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Elementary and Secondary Education by a vote of 13 to 0.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 2491.

Currently, for purposes of calculation and distribution of state school aid, all students enrolled in the Missouri Course Access and Virtual School Program shall be included in the student enrollment of the school district in which the student physically is enrolled. This bill specifies that, full-time equivalent students shall not be included in the student enrollment of the school district in which such student resides and that scores on the statewide assessment for full-time equivalent students shall be attributed the Missouri Course Access and Virtual School Program which will function as an local education agency. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) will pay 100% of its average per-pupil expenditure for each full-time equivalent student.

Currently, costs associated with such virtual courses are to be paid by the school district or charter school directly on a pro rata monthly basis based on a student's completion of assignments and assessments. The bill specifies that, costs shall be paid by the school district or charter school, or by DESE for full-time equivalent students, to the provider on a pro rata basis once per semester based on a student's completion of assignments and assessments.

Currently, school districts or charter schools are required to consider recommendations from DESE and evaluate the progress of enrolled students who are enrolled in any course or full-time virtual school, and may terminate or alter the course offering if it is found that the course or full-time virtual school is not meeting the educational needs of the students. The bill grants DESE the authority to terminate or alter the course offering for full-time equivalent students, and the responsibility of school districts and charter schools to monitor full-time student progress and success is now granted to the virtual school providers.

School districts or charter schools are required currently , to inform parents of their child's right to participate in the virtual schools program. The bill specifies that, any school district or charter school that fails to notify parents of his or her child's

right to participate in the program shall be subject to civil penalties in an amount equal to \$100 for each day such school district or charter school is in violation of this requirement, including reasonable attorney's fees.

This bill is similar to SB 996 (2020).

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that while the Missouri Course Access and Virtual School Program is a good step, and a forward thinking opportunity, there are currently too many restrictions and limits, and this bill will help address some of those to provide parents with opportunities. Too often the only recourse for parents of students who are denied an opportunity is to hire a lawyer, this bill will encourage vendors that are not currently offering a course to come to our state.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Christofanelli; Colleen Cook, National Council of Public School Options; Pearson Education; and Missouri Education Reform Council.

OPPOSERS: Those who oppose the bill say that this will remove local control away from elected boards of school districts, and that there is no accountability for online providers. They indicate that often students with individualized education plans are underserved by these courses. Too often companies are being manipulated into leaving the public school for the virtual programs with offers of free wifi and laptops, without any monitoring for the best interest of the student.

Testifying against the bill were Missouri National Education Association; Dale Herl, Independence School District; Missouri State Teachers Association; Keith Powell, Missouri School Board Association; Kristi Shinn, Columbia Public Schools; and Andy Turgeon, Knox County R-1 School District.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say they are aware of the potential changes for their department.

Testifying on the bill was Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.