



FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

BACKGROUND

MCKAY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

SUPPORT: SB 1080 (Baxley); HB 829 (Plasencia)

BACKGROUND:

The McKay Scholarship Program provides an opportunity for Florida students with certain special needs to attend participating private schools. This year, there are 3,562 students in 146 Catholic schools who are participating. There are 29,582 McKay students (kindergarten to 12th grade) in 1,451 private schools statewide.

McKay serves students with several different types of disabilities including dyslexia, speech or language impairment, hearing impairment, visual impairment, autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and other categories.

To Qualify for a McKay Scholarship, students must have spent a previous academic year in a Florida public school. Upon the request of parents, public schools test students to identify whether they have disabilities. If so identified, then a team of school professionals collaborate to develop a written resource called the "Individual Education Plan" (IEP). The plan covers the support services needed and expected outcomes for a given student.

BILL PROVISIONS:

1. Provides an alternative to the IEP process, allowing a licensed physician or psychologist to diagnose the child and provide documentation to parents.
2. The Senate version is preferred as it removes the so-called "prior-public-school-attendance" requirement for kindergarten to 5th grade.
3. The House version is also supported by the FCCB though it is less robust than the Senate version. The House proposal would only reduce the prior-year requirement to a semester or less.

RATIONALE:

A parent of a student with a special need such as dyslexia or autism spectrum disorder has strictly limited choices if the child starts out in a private school. The child can obtain a McKay scholarship only if a transfer is undertaken to the public sector. Short-term transfers are often disruptive for the children and their families, as well as both the public and private schools.

***For additional information, please contact --
James B. Herzog, Associate Director for Education
jherzog@flaccb.org (850) 205-6823***