



The Bulletin Board



NEWSLETTER OF

CITIZENS FOR EDUCATIONAL CHOICE

VOLUME 49, No. 1
SEPTEMBER 2015

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2015 Legislature Addresses Budget, School Choice Measures

Confronted with an ongoing fiscal crisis, legislators and the governor spent the entire session struggling with balancing the state's FY 2015-16 operating budget. An agreement was finally reached in the waning hours of the session, and fortunately, nonpublic school programs fared relatively well. Following are a few school choice items of note en route to finalizing the budget.

Louisiana Income Tax Education Credit

The provision allowing a \$25 per child *Education Credit* against Louisiana income tax for dependents in grades K-12 was changed. The credit can be taken only if the filer does not claim the *Louisiana School Expense Deduction* from income for K-12 tuition and other educational expenses.

School Tuition Organization (STO)

In response to the state's fiscal gloom, legislators imagined new ways for increasing revenue that included reductions in tax rebates. Many proposals recommended a 20% reduction. These all-inclusive, omnibus measures would have meant a reduction in rebates for donations to *School Tuition Organizations*. In collaboration with other school choice advocates we sought and were granted an exemption from consideration of any such reduction in the STO program.

Louisiana Scholarship Program

The traditional foes of school choice attempted to disproportionately and unreasonably increase the measure of accountability required of nonpublic schools participating in the *Louisiana Scholarship Program*. They also tried to change program eligibility requirements of incoming kindergarten students that would have resulted in fewer students being eligible for participation in the program.



2015-16 Membership Campaign

As we kick off our 49th year, we ask schools and parent clubs to support CEC by remitting 2015-16 membership dues. Two memberships from each location will help us meet our \$75,000 budget--a small investment for the millions of dollars we advocate! A membership form is available on the CEC website.



Thank you for your support last year. The final 2014-15 Membership Roster is also on the website.

Citizens for Educational Choice is the voice of nonpublic schools before the Louisiana Legislature and state government, and represents the interests of those schools in legislative or policy matters that could impact their mission. CEC seeks state budget appropriations for secular educational purposes.

FY 2015-16 State Funding Remains Mostly Intact

After all the gamesmanship to finalize the FY 2015-16 budget (*Act 16*), the historic hard-fought secular education programs benefitting private and parochial school students remained mostly intact--a victory in itself. Following are the programs listed with their funding amounts.

FY 2015-16 STATE FUNDING FOR PRIVATE AND PAROCHIAL SCHOOL PROGRAMS

\$ 42,088,201	Louisiana Scholarship Program [1]
15,292,704	Required Services Reimbursements
7,917,607	Child Nutrition Salary Supplements
6,882,236	Early Childhood Development
2,911,843	Textbooks
2,180,574	Education Excellence Trust Funds
1,087,415	8(g) Program [2]
	• Diocesan Systems [\$698,096]
	• Independent Schools [\$389,319]
818,969	Scholarships for Students with Exceptionalities
<u>171,865</u>	Textbook Administration
\$ 79,351,414	SUBTOTAL

VALUE OF STATE TAX EXEMPTIONS

\$ 21,100,000	Tuition Tax Deduction [3]
2,400,000	Textbooks, Computers and Audio/Visuals
772,000	School Nutrition Programs
<u>61,108</u>	Scholarship Tuition Organizations
\$ 24,333,108	SUBTOTAL

\$ 103,684,522 GRAND TOTAL

[1] According to the Louisiana Department of Education, not all of last year's budgeted \$46.2 Million for the *Louisiana Scholarship Program* was expended so the FY 2015-16 appropriation reflects current enrollment figures.

[2] Funding for *Scholarships for Students with Exceptionalities* and dedicated funding for *8(g)* programs increased, while other programs remained constant.

[3] The value of state income tax deductions increased.

Thank-You to Outgoing Officials!

As their current terms in office come to an end, we thank legislators as well as Gov. Bobby Jindal for their support of private and parochial schools, students and parents.



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