March 24, 2005

S 1060. STUDENT EDUCATION ELECTIONS. *TO ENACT THE STUDENT EDUCATION ELECTION PROGRAM, AN EDUCATIONAL OPTION PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN FROM LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME FAMILIES*. Adds new Article 41 of GS Chapter 115C to establish the Student Education Elections Program within and to be administered by the Dep't of Public Instruction. Program is to allow children from low- and middle-income families the option of attending the public or private school of their choice. Public school is defined to mean a public school outside of the local school administrative unit where the child resides. Private schools include private schools that decide to participate in the program. Qualifying students receive grants to pay all or part of the cost of attending the school of their choice. Eligible students are NC residents whose household incomes do not exceed 3 times the income standard used to qualify for reduced lunch. The amount of a particular child's grant varies based upon the total household income. Students who qualify for free lunch are eligible for a grant in the amount of 100% of the amount their resident school unit would receive to educate them, while those students from households with an income greater or equal to two and one-half times the amount required to qualify for free lunch are limited to grants in the amount of 20% of the allocation to their resident school unit. Student's resident school will receive 50% of the difference between the student's maximum grant amount and the actual per student allotment to the local school the student would have attended. Those funds must be used for supplemental instructional compensation that is merit based. Private schools that participate in the program are not required to limit tuition to the amount of the student's grant.

The program is be phased in over 13 years beginning with the kindergarten level during the 2005-06 school year and adding the next grade level each subsequent school year through the addition of the twelfth-grade level during the 2018-19 school year. The maximum number of students in the program is 25,000 for each grade level. If eligible students exceed maximum number for a grade level, the Dep't must select participants by random selection. All participating schools must administer annual State achievement tests or other nationally-recognized tests in math and language arts.

Allows the Legislative Research Comm'n to contract with researchers to study the program with funds other than State funds. The study must assess matters listed in the bill and must cover the 13-year implementation period. General Assembly may require periodic reports from researchers.

Intro. by Goodall.

Ref. to Education GS 115C, STUDY