

LB 753: A thinly veiled slight to Nebraska public education

Legislative Bill 753 (LB 753), or the “Opportunity Scholarship” Act, has become a battleground of proponents and opposing groups discrediting the other with accusations of misinformation. The bill



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works around the illegality of the state funding private institutions by incentivizing

“private donors” with tax cuts.

The Opportunity Scholarship Act was signed into law in 2023 and took effect on Jan. 1, 2024, despite the OpenSky Policy Institute releasing a poll showing that 55% of respondents would vote to repeal the law.

LB 753 helps incentivize private donations to help fund scholarships for low-income and middle-class families by allowing individuals and businesses to receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for up to 50% of their income tax liability.

The nonprofit group “Support our Schools” gathered 117,000 signatures for a referendum—well above the number necessary to add the measure to the 2024 general election ballot. Many opponents view the bill as a misallocation of funds favoring the wealthy. They argue that it redirects tax dollars that could otherwise support public schools, which are attended by 9 out of 10 school-aged children in Nebraska.

Former state senators, Greg Adams of York, Kathy Campbell of Lincoln, Curt Friesen of Henderson, Mike Gloor of Grand Island, John McCollister of Omaha, Paul Schumacher of Colum-



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The Rev. T. Michael Williams signs the petition to repeal LB753 during Support our Schools Nebraska petition drive kickoff at the state Capitol on Tuesday.

bus, and Matt Williams of Gothenburg, wrote to the Omaha World-Herald late January to discuss their opposition:

“These new tax credits far exceed the tax deductions provided to taxpayers who make contributions to other charities, such as local food banks, the Boys and Girls Clubs, the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, Alzheimer’s Association, and other groups. Under LB 753, a \$5,000 donation to these new private school scholarship organizations reduces tax liability by \$5,000, while donations to other charitable organizations save taxpayers only pennies on the dollar.”

This also means eligible taxpayers are sending money that they would have been owed the state, to private institutions. This leaves the responsibility of public education, roads, health, and safety to lower income taxpayers.

Outside of the incentives given to the rich and the financial burden pushed onto the middle and lower classes, there’s also plenty of evidence that the bill doesn’t benefit kids. This discrepancy undermines the very foundation on which the law stands.

is why schools in high-income areas like Gretna High School look different than schools in lower-income areas like Omaha North High School.

Leveling the playing field wouldn’t be creating private school options, it would be funding schools to the same degree to create equitable education for all students. Just to reiterate my point, Gretna Public Schools average math and reading proficiency is 64%, Omaha Public Schools math proficiency is 20%, with a 28% reading proficiency.

Revenue that isn’t property tax based and benefits all communities equally will narrow the education inequalities; shoveling kids out to private institutions will not help those that remain.

No public oversight: Public schools operate under strict regulations and oversight by the state government, while private schools enjoy more autonomy. Despite receiving taxpayer-funded incentives, private schools maintain independence in policy-making as they do not directly receive state funding.

This autonomy extends to hiring teachers without traditional teaching licenses, choosing standardized tests to participate in, and implementing discipline policies without state intervention.

Furthermore, private schools have looser financial guidelines, allowing them to manage taxpayer funds without a requirement to disclose expenditure details in a public forum.

While the bill operates under a guise of equality, by redirecting taxpayer money away from public schools, which serve the majority of Nebraska’s school-aged children, the bill perpetuates a system of inequality.

Why you should care:

Rule 10: All public schools are required to be accredited by the state and comply with provisions outlined in Rule 10.

This establishes equality among schools when it comes to quality of education. Private schools are not required to follow the regulations of Rule 10. This can be seen in areas like a lack of sex education, learning about evolution, learning about other religions, and programs like 504 accommodations for students with disabilities.

Rural Nebraska: According to Nebraska State Education Association 48 of Nebraska’s 93 counties have no private or parochial schools to see any sort of benefit from LB 753. Why would we not fund public schools, which are in every county and could potentially benefit every kid?

Nebraska already ranks 49th in the nation for sending state dollars to public schools: The state doesn’t spend much of its revenue on education, instead, it relies heavily on property taxes. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Nebraska averages 32% of public school funding from State sources, compared to a national average of 51%, this