

# Districts sue over charter school law. They also want money from it.

[Dan Sweeney](#)

South Florida school districts are suing the state over a charter-school-friendly law — but they're also trying to benefit from it.

A controversial education bill passed in the final days of the Florida Legislature's 2017 session covers a sprawling array of school regulations. Part of it requires school districts to share the money they get from property taxes with charter schools, which are public schools that are owned and operated by private companies.

That's the part that has the Broward, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade school boards — along with several others — voting to sue the state.

But the law also includes \$2,000 per student in funding through a program called Schools of Hope, which can be spent on special services at persistently failing traditional public schools. That includes after-school programs and counseling services.

That's in addition to funding the schools already get. A separate portion of the Schools of Hope program allows charter schools to move in and compete with failing schools. This money comes from the same program, but does not go to charter schools.

To qualify as a persistently failing school, a school has to have a D or F rating for at least three years.

According to the Department of Education, Broward has filed three applications to get money from the program for Dillard, Larkdale and Northside elementary schools, all in Fort Lauderdale.

Palm Beach has filed three applications for Grove and West Riviera elementary schools and Palm Beach Lakes High School, all in West Palm Beach.

And Miami-Dade has filed five applications for Lorah Park and Toussaint L'Ouverture elementary schools in Miami; Homestead Middle School and West Homestead K-8 and Miami Carol City Senior High School in Miami Gardens.

"I'm glad that they're seeing the opportunity to take advantage of the policy that's going to allow them to bring in more resources to those schools that need turn around," said state Rep. Manny Diaz, R-Hialeah, one of the key architects of controversial bill.

Palm Beach School Superintendent Robert Avossa said it was the Legislature's decision to cram so much policy in one bill that has led them to sue over one part of the bill while accepting another.

"Superintendents across Florida have accurately described [the bill] as a whole lot of vinegar and a little bit of honey. The taxpayers of Florida need to know that buried in this bill are millions of dollars for the most challenging schools that will support their students and teachers," he said.

"We have just as much of an obligation to compete for these funds for our students as we do to oppose the aspects of the bill that we believe were written to provide corporate welfare to charter schools, by

buying for-profit corporations properties and buildings with taxpayer dollars," he added.

That's an outlook mirrored in Broward. Although school boards have voted to sue over the law, the lawsuits have not yet been filed.

"We're going to comply with the law until dictated otherwise," said Broward Schools Director of Legislative Affairs John Sullivan. "We're going to leverage the good aspects of the bill to the benefit of our students and teachers."

At its Sept. 13 meeting, the state Board of Education will decide which 25 of the 50 applications received will qualify for the money.

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