

Office of the Governor
State of Louisiana

JOHN BEL EDWARDS
GOVERNOR



P.O. Box 94004
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70804-9004
(225) 342-7015
GOV.LA.GOV

June 18, 2022

VIA HAND DELIVERY

Honorable Page Cortez
Louisiana Senate President
Louisiana State Senate
Post Office Box 94183
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

RE: Veto of Senate Bill 203 of the 2022 Regular Session

Dear President Cortez:

Please be advised that I have vetoed Senate Bill 203 of the Regular Session of 2022.

This bill purports to create an "education savings account" for students not reading at grade level. This label itself is a misnomer, as the bill does not establish any accounts for parents to save money for education, but instead would potentially divert Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) funds for students to attend non-public schools. While I do not question the intentions of the author in that she is attempting to provide opportunities for students reading below grade level, I cannot support this bill.

First, and perhaps most importantly, this bill would potentially divert needed funds from public education without any consideration for need or income levels. As passed, this bill would allow the children of wealthy parents to attend private schools subsidized by taxpayer dollars. Further, as drafted, and dependent upon rules yet to be promulgated by the Department of Education, these funds may also be considered to be school expense deductions that would provide for a significant loss in state tax revenues. Thus, depending on how the rules are drafted, wealthy parents would possibly be allowed to deduct these expenses from their tax liability even though the funds were provided by the taxpayers.

Second, there is no real accountability provided to parents and the public for these non-public schools that will now be subsidized with taxpayer dollars. This has remained an issue with the existing voucher program, which also provides for taxpayer subsidization for non-public schools, some of which are the worst performing schools in the state. If the taxpayers are required to redirect funds to non-public schools, the public should be able to expect accountability and

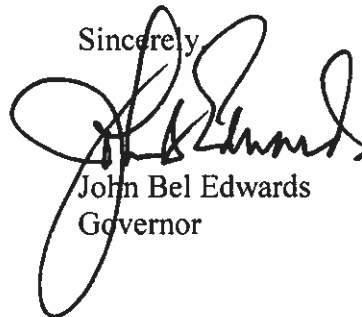
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performance from those schools. Further, because students in non-public schools are not required to take the same assessments as students in public schools, there is no true measure that accurately compares school performance between public and non-public schools.

Third, the bill does not clearly provide for the students who may qualify for this program. As an example, the bill provides for a student to be eligible if the student is “not reading on grade level.” However, this imprecise definition would technically allow for a student reading *above* grade level to be eligible. While this may have not been intended, this bill does have this effect.

These are just some of the concerns I have with this bill, so I cannot assure my support if these issues are able to be resolved in another bill next year. I have long been opposed to the diversion of MFP dollars to non-public schools. I believe we should do everything we can as a state to support public education, and this bill does not meet that standard.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Bel Edwards", written over the typed name and title.

John Bel Edwards
Governor

enclosure

cc: Honorable Clay Schexnayder
Speaker of the House of Representatives