

HB 393 -- Parent Empowerment and Choice Act or the Parent Trigger Act

Sponsor: Jones (89)

This bill establishes the Parent Empowerment and Choice Act or the Parent Trigger Act which allows parents under certain circumstances to invoke interventions for a struggling school. If more than 50% of the parents whose children attend the school or a combination of more than 50% of the parents of students attending the school and the elementary or middle schools that normally enroll in a middle or high school sign a petition asking for an intervention, the school district or charter school must implement the intervention requested within 180 days. The three school intervention models include a restart model, school closure, and educational choice. A restart model converts a school or closes and reopens it under a charter school operator or a charter or educational management organization. School closure occurs when a local educational agency closes a school and the students are enrolled in a higher-achieving district school in reasonable proximity, which may include charter schools or new schools for which achievement data are not available. If no such school exists, the district must implement the educational choice model, which is a voucher program.

Any student who attends or would normally enroll in a school triggered for the educational choice option must have the option of receiving a voucher for the cost of attendance at any private or other public school. For a student who chooses to attend a private school, an annual scholarship will be provided at the lesser of 75% of the triggered school's annual cost per pupil, including both operational and capital facility costs, or 75% of the amount the resident school district would have received from state and local sources if the student had enrolled there. No additional fee will be charged for a student of a triggered school who wishes to attend a different public school. The funds available are calculated using an average of the last three budget years and will be available until high school graduation or the student's twenty-first birthday, whichever occurs first. Students receiving a voucher are to be counted in their charter school or school district for the purposes of calculating future voucher moneys. If the voucher exceeds the cost of tuition in a private school, the student may place the excess in an educational savings account for tutoring, school materials, and other specified educational expenses.

The bill also contains provisions which specify that the educational voucher reform option does not expand the regulatory powers of the state, its officers, or any school district in any way.