

Progressing Backward

2025

IDRA SEEN State-Level Legislative 2024 Recap and 2025 Preview

by Terrence Wilson, J.D.
IDRA Southern Education Equity Network
www.idra.org • idraseen.org

Children First
IDRA
Transforming Education

This update covers policy, research and current events that have an impact on education equity in the U.S. South. We review the outcomes of last year's state legislative sessions in the South and give a preview of 2025 legislative sessions.

IDRA's Southern Policy Update is just one way that IDRA supports the SEEN State Policy Collaborative. This collaborative is dedicated to building culturally-sustaining schools across the South. Members of the collaborative support each other to defend against attacks on culturally-sustaining schools and to promote a positive vision for what culturally-sustaining schools can be across our region.

Learn more about our [policy work here](#) and join IDRA's [Southern Education Equity Network](#). For more information about IDRA's regional work, contact Terrence Wilson, J.D., IDRA's regional policy and community engagement director, at terrence.wilson@idra.org.

Legislative Recap and Preview of Southern State Legislatures

Across the U.S. South, state legislatures are convening to enact laws that will impact public education. At the same time, students, parents and other advocates are working to pursue education justice. We'll start here with a look back at 2024 to inform expectations for 2025.

While marches toward censorship and privatization continued in 2024, advocates also strove to protect excellent, equitable public schools and won some hard-fought victories.

Note: The legislation highlighted in this report is presented for information purposes only. Inclusion in this list does not necessarily reflect either IDRA endorsement or opposition.

The **IDRA SEEN (Southern Education Equity Network)** is a forum for concerned parents and caregivers, students, community members, and organizational and coalition friends who advocate for public education and student success across the U.S. South. The network is built upon the belief that there is great power in communities coming together to create change. It is based on core principles upon which communities of action can be created across race and sector to support schools in improving education for all students. The IDRA SEEN website (www.idraseen.org) provides advocacy tools, the award-winning IDRA SEEN School Resource Hub and the IDRA SEEN Model Policy Shop.

February 2025

Inside

Legislative Recap and Preview of Southern State Legislatures

State-by-State Update

Southern Research Corner: Back to the Future - How Modern Voucher Schemes Maintain Inequality



Ensuring Fair School Funding for All Students

All students deserve to go to excellent, well-funded schools. Policies that base funding on community wealth and ignore the real costs of educating all students hurt everyone, especially students of color, students from families with limited incomes, and students who require additional programs, support and services.

Efforts that negatively impact fair school funding include the creation or expansion of private school vouchers and chronic underfunding of schools through outdated school funding formulas. See our [Fair School Funding](#) webpage for additional resources and information about how southern states can ensure fair school funding for all students.

2024 Highlights

Across the country, several states reassessed their approaches to funding public education during legislative sessions in 2024. Many studied the costs and logistics of modernizing their school funding formulas to better address today's needs.

- In Arkansas, advocates proposed the ["Educational Rights Amendment of 2024,"](#) which would require all schools receiving public tax dollars, including private institutions, to meet state accreditation standards.
- Alabama passed a resolution that required the legislature to conduct a study on modernizing its current K-12 school funding model (Act 2024-181 [[HJR 215/SJR 61](#)]).
- Mississippi overhauled its school funding model, now focusing on student-centered allocations that consider additional costs for students from low-income backgrounds, those with special needs, and emergent multilingual learners, among others (Chapter No. 484 [[HB 4130](#)]).

However, not all movement was toward modernizing and improving public schools' finance systems. In fact, several states have taken steps toward privatization, which will ultimately hurt public schools and students.

For example, both Alabama (Act 2024-21 [[HB 129](#)]) and Louisiana (Act 1 [[SB 313](#)]) created new voucher programs, while Tennessee (Public Chapter No. 328 [[SB 12](#)]) and Florida (Chapter 2024-163 [[HB 1403](#)]) expanded their current programs.

In Georgia, IDRA, along with students, parents, educators and advocates [stood staunchly opposed](#) efforts to pass Georgia's school vouchers in 2024. Although the voucher did receive final passage (Act 457 [[SB 233](#)]), IDRA advocates, along with community partners, [informed](#) legislators of the negative impact that vouchers would have on public schools in Georgia. Even after the bill's passage, IDRA [sought to ensure](#) that students and parents understood the potential ramifications of accepting the voucher. IDRA will continue to educate the community on the harms of vouchers.



2025 Preview

Efforts to establish and expand school voucher programs have already been filed in several states.

- In Tennessee, legislators filed legislation for a new voucher with relatively few eligibility requirements in the “Education Freedom Act of 2025” ([HB 1/SB 1](#)). The current voucher is only for students receiving special education services and students from families with limited economic resources in Chattanooga, Nashville and Memphis.
- In South Carolina, legislators have filed several pieces of legislation to expand support for their existing voucher program. They have introduced legislation to create new income tax credits to support private school vouchers via [HB 3420](#), [SB 50](#) and [SB 108](#) and also introduced legislation to raise the income limit on the current voucher via [SB 62](#).
- Virginia legislators introduced a new voucher program with limited income requirements via [HB 2231](#). Legislators also introduced two new tax credits for parents who send their students to private schools ([HB 2639/SB 1085](#)). Virginia already has one tax credit program to support scholarships for students to attend private schools.

In Texas, IDRA has long led efforts to [resist public school vouchers](#), and Texas is one of the few states that do not have these programs. However, with pressure from the governor, legislation is moving quickly to establish a sweeping \$1 billion school voucher program in 2025 ([SB 2](#)).


Ensuring Safe Schools Free from Harmful, Punitive Discipline and School Policing

All students deserve safe and welcoming schools that do not use harmful discipline and school police to punish young people. To achieve this, schools must be able to invest in the people and programs that build strong campus climates and foster the relationships that keep everyone safe.

2024 Highlights

Several southern states took action in 2024 aimed at preserving and extending students’ rights when they are disciplined and enhancing violence prevention initiatives in schools.

- Georgia legislators passed a bill (Act 466 [[SB 169](#)]) that extends the timeline for disciplinary hearings and requires that academic work continue for students involved in disciplinary processes.
- In Louisiana, legislators passed Act 780 ([HB 107](#)), which prohibits taping a student’s mouth shut or otherwise restricting their airway as a form of punishment.
- In Tennessee, legislators passed Public Chapter No. 676 [[SB 1726](#)], which directs the Tennessee Department of Education to develop a conflict resolution program for grades K-12, using existing resources, to foster skills for nonviolent conflict resolution across schools.

- 
- In Virginia, Chapter 299 ([HB 626](#)) launches the Community Builders Pilot Program, targeting youth in Roanoke and Petersburg City Public Schools. This program is designed to reduce gun-related behaviors and increase community engagement by offering eighth-grade students opportunities for involvement in after-school and summer activities, including community engagement, workforce development, college exploration and social-emotional learning.

However, some states also passed legislation that will likely make schools less safe and less welcoming by exposing students to harmful discipline practices, criminalizing parents and allowing additional people to carry firearms on school campuses. Such policies likely will lead to more exclusionary discipline and exacerbate the school-to-prison pipeline.


- In Alabama, Act 2024-409 ([SB 157](#)), the “Teacher’s Bill of Rights,” poses serious risks to students by giving teachers unchecked authority over discipline, limiting students’ ability to contest mistreatment or unfair punishment. By focusing solely on teacher rights, the bill ignores students’ need for a supportive and safe learning environment, potentially making schools feel hostile and less inclusive.
- In Louisiana, Act 386 ([HB 629](#)) imposes harsh demands on parents of truant students, requiring them to arrange for their child to attend after-school or weekend sessions and attend monthly meetings, with the threat of criminal penalties for non-compliance. This law disproportionately burdens families already struggling with limited resources and adds punitive consequences rather than supportive solutions for students and parents alike.

2025 Preview

School safety and discipline have received significant attention in proposed legislation for 2025. Across the region, several states are looking to address the use of cell phones in school, with some choosing overly punitive exclusionary responses. States tackling this issue include Alabama ([HB 81](#)), South Carolina ([SB 65](#)), Tennessee ([HB 13](#), [SB 10](#) & [SB 18](#)), Texas ([HB 515](#)) and Virginia ([HB 1961](#) & [SB 738](#)).

Several states have continued to pursue additional investments in police responses to student behavior. Some of these responses overly rely on police intention and invasive technology, potentially problematic due to challenges and potential bias in application when compared to student-centered, supportive strategies aimed at building community and connection to increase school safety. The responses offered thus far include the following.

- Investments in weapons detection technology like metal detectors or artificial intelligent surveillance that may overly target certain schools that disproportionately serve high populations of Black and Latino students (South Carolina [HB 3236](#), Virginia [HB 1818](#));
- Legislation to create “school guardians,” allowing non-police employees to carry weapons in schools, a proposal that may increase the danger of weapon use in schools (South Carolina [SB 115](#));
- Legislation that would make failure to report certain disciplinary offenses a misdemeanor for principals, a proposal that needlessly exposes school leaders to criminal liability (Virginia [HB 2295](#)); and

- 
- Actions by legislators in Virginia would use Commonwealth attorneys to prosecute cases involving compulsory attendance ([HB 2416](#)). These same Virginia legislators are also choosing a punitive response to students who incorrectly report threats and propose making this behavior a felony for students 15 or older and requiring a mandatory minimum month in jail ([HB 1855](#)).

IDRA urges that the practice of [corporal punishment be ended in schools](#). Complete bans have already been proposed in Mississippi ([HB 269](#)) and Texas ([HB 1415](#)). States across the South have also proposed several different approaches to the issue, including requiring parents to opt-in to the practice in Mississippi ([HB 794](#)) and focusing on data tracking and parent notification in Texas ([HB 1096](#)).

Promoting Culturally-Sustaining Schools Where All Students Feel Safe and Welcome

Students thrive in diverse, equitable, inclusive and culturally sustaining school environments. Censorship and the related chilling effects that limit classroom discussions and students' access to learning materials are hurtful. These policies whitewash the history and contributions of diverse communities. And they deny students content knowledge they need to critically analyze our society and learn how to act as empathetic leaders, advocates and allies in our democracy.

Students should have access to school environments that affirm all aspects of their identity, including their race, ethnicity, gender identity or expression.


2024 Highlights

Although classroom censorship bills that limit what students can learn have swept across the South, education equity partner advocates in South Carolina and Tennessee were able to defeat bills of this type in 2024.

- [HB 3728](#), South Carolina's version of a classroom censorship bill, made it through both the state's House and Senate but failed to receive a final vote before the session ended. The main provision that doomed the bill would have allowed parents to sue school districts if they disagreed with what was being taught.
- Advocates in Tennessee successfully opposed [HB 1948/SB 2350](#) that attempted to ban diversity, equity and inclusion offices, staff, and statements from students at public colleges and universities. Robust opposition led to the bill's unanimous failure in the House higher education subcommittee.

Unfortunately, advocates were not able to stop all bills in other states that would limit what students can learn.

- Alabama legislators passed Act 2024-34 ([SB 129](#)), which prohibits diversity, equity and inclusion programs as well as limits the teaching of accurate and truthful history under the guise of banning "divisive concepts."

- 
- Similarly, in Florida, Chapter 2024-141 ([HB 1291](#)) prohibits teacher preparation programs and courses that “distort significant historical events or include a curriculum or instruction that teaches identity politics... or is based on theories that systemic racism, sexism, oppression and privilege are inherent in the institutions of the United States and were created to maintain social, political and economic inequities.”

These efforts continuously censor the culturally-sustaining curricula and education practices that produce teachers and classrooms that serve students best.

State legislatures across the U.S. South also passed policies in 2024 that promoted specific religious staff, texts and practices. These measures could create school environments where students from minority faiths or who do not identify with a particular religion are marginalized or targeted for bullying and harassment.

Additionally, allowing religious officials without counseling experience and training to serve as counselors threatens to harm students who approach these individuals with legitimate mental health needs.

- In Florida, Chapter No. 2024-103 ([HB 931](#)) allows local school districts to authorize chaplains in public schools.
- In Louisiana, Act 293 ([SB 123](#)) allows cities, parishes and local public school boards to employ or accept as volunteers chaplains who are not required to be certified by the state board of education. It also provides these chaplains with immunity for actions taken or statements made in accordance with their role as counselors, unless their statements are malicious, willful and deliberately intended to cause harm or harassment.
- Louisiana legislators enacted Act 676 ([HB 71](#)), which requires each public school to display the Ten Commandments in each classroom. This act is already being challenged via a federal lawsuit from nine families who are represented by attorneys with the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation, Americans United for Separation of Church and State and the Freedom from Religion Foundation.

Another troublesome development across the region impacts LGBTQ+ students disproportionately as South Carolina and Tennessee passed legislation that would force “outing” of students’ gender identity or expression.

- In South Carolina, Act 203 ([HB 4624](#)) not only prohibits gender reassignment surgery for young people under 18 but also prohibits public school staff and officials from withholding knowledge of a student’s gender identity from the student’s parents and places an affirmative duty on them to report to a student’s parents if they express a different gender identity or if they request to be called by pronouns that align with their gender identity.



2025 Preview

In 2025, some state legislatures in the South appear primed to repeat the same attacks on truthful education, immigrant and LGBTQ+ students that we saw in 2024. Legislators have filed bills to restrict what students can learn at the K-12 level. Examples include the following.

- Legislation to prohibit instruction regarding sexual orientation and gender in Texas ([SB 86](#)); and
- Efforts to further regulate library materials in Texas ([HB 183](#) & [HB 177](#)) and Virginia ([HB 2190](#), [HB 2400](#), [SB 931](#)).

Legislators are continuing to seek to insert specific religious teachings and practices into public schools. Examples include the following.

- Legislation to incorporate the Bible into the curriculum in South Carolina ([SB 134](#));
- Legislation that would increase the presence of religious school chaplains who could counsel students in South Carolina ([SB 122](#)); and
- Legislation requiring South Carolina public schools to display the Ten Commandments ([HB 3217](#)).

Legislators are continuing to lean on parents as a mechanism to limit what students can learn and how they can express themselves. Examples include the following.

- Legislation focused on the parent right to challenge school materials in South Carolina ([HB 3118](#) & [HB 3011](#)) and Virginia ([HB 2373](#)); and
- Legislation requiring parent notification that could forcibly out transgender students in Virginia ([HB 2182](#)).

Some legislators have introduced measures aimed at making curricula more expansive and school environments more welcoming and supportive of students. Examples include the following.

- Legislation aimed at tracking and reporting the level of parent involvement and engagement in South Carolina to ensure that parents are being engaged ([HB 3562](#));
- Legislation seeking to make discrimination against hairstyles associated with race illegal in South Carolina ([HB 3341](#));
- Legislation seeking to include ethnic studies courses and teaching in curricula in Texas ([HB 178](#)) and Virginia ([HB 1824](#));



- Legislation seeking to offer regular mental health screenings and provide culturally-responsive and language appropriate mental health support in South Carolina ([HB 3478](#)) and Virginia ([HB 1947](#), [HB 2341](#)); and
- Legislation seeking to include gender identity and sexual orientation as prohibited bases of discrimination in South Carolina ([HB 3160](#)).

Legislators also introduced legislation to address the important topic of bullying and harassment. However, states have thus far taken different approaches to address the issue. In South Carolina, legislators have taken a punitive approach to track incidences of bullying in order to further penalize students who engage in bullying and teachers and students who fail to report it ([HB 3482](#)).

In contrast, Virginia legislators are addressing cyberbullying with legislation that would focus on prevention, encouragement of students to seek support, and supportive services and resources for those students who are victims of cyberbullying ([SB 908](#)).

IDRA has developed a wealth of resources and model policy on identity-based bullying. Read more about the issue and access the model policy at the [IDRA SEEN Model Policy Shop](#).



State-by-State Update

In 2024, state legislatures across the U.S. South considered and enacted policies that significantly impacted education equity. Our review of these key legislative actions focuses on four critical areas: securing fair school funding for all students, ensuring safe schools free from harmful discipline and over-policing, promoting culturally sustaining schools where all students feel safe and welcome, and holding schools accountable for preparing students for college success.

While some states took steps to modernize school funding and invest in student-centered support, others diverted resources away from public education by expanding private school vouchers.

Discipline policies varied widely, with some states emphasizing restorative approaches while others increased punitive measures.

Efforts to promote inclusivity faced ongoing challenges, including classroom censorship and policies targeting marginalized students.

Meanwhile, accountability measures for college readiness remained uneven.

The overview on the following pages highlights legislative actions in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia, underscoring the ongoing fight for education justice in the region.



Alabama

Need: Fair School Funding for All Students


Act 2024-181 (HJR 215/SJR 61) - Requires the Alabama Legislature to conduct a study on modernizing the current K-12 school funding model into a student-based funding model, including any additional costs associated with the transition, as well as any necessary changes in law that may be required to implement a new statutory framework that supports meaningful education to Alabama's K-12 students.

Act 2024-21 (HB 129) - Alabama Governor Kay Ivey achieved one of her signature goals by securing passage of a voucher program via an education savings account measure, *Creating Hope and Opportunity for our Students' Education Act* (CHOOSE). The legislature is required to allot a minimum of \$100 million to the program each year and can hold up to \$500 million for the program. The eligibility is initially limited to students from families making less than 300% of the federal poverty level. The first 500 spots are reserved for students with special education needs, regardless of the income level of their families. By 2027, the program will be open to every student without regard to family income.

Need: Safe Schools Free from Harmful, Punitive Discipline and Policing

Act 2024-409 (SB 157) - Teachers bill of rights that (1) authorizes teachers to exclude students from the classroom who engage in disorderly conduct or certain other behaviors; (2) provides procedures a principal must follow before returning the student to the classroom depending on the circumstances surrounding the exclusion; (3) requires each local board of education to establish a process for a teacher to appeal the principal's decision to return a student to the classroom; and (4) requires certain data relating to disciplinary action to be annually collected and reported.

This act also: (1) provides that education employees may not be held civilly or criminally liable for certain actions while addressing student behavior, with exceptions; (2) authorizes the Educators' Liability Trust Fund to reimburse education employees for reasonable legal expenses in certain circumstances; (3) requires the trust fund or applicable local board of education to reimburse education employees who successfully defend themselves; (4) creates a rebuttable presumption that teachers take necessary actions to restore or maintain the safety of the classroom; (5) prohibits teachers from reprimand or disciplinary action if they were acting in conformance with local board of education or State Board of Education policy; and (6) requires the board to adopt a model policy and each local board to implement a policy.



Act 2024-356 (SB 98) – Creates the School Security Program that requires periodic inspections of school security of public K-12 schools and facilities and other tasks related to hardening schools in consultation with the Alabama State Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA) and the state fire marshal.

Act 2024-262 (HB 188) – Provides a uniform system of procedural due process protections for students facing long-term suspension or expulsion for violating the student code of conduct or state law.

Need: Culturally-Sustaining Schools Where All Students Feel Safe and Welcome

Act 2024-35 (SB 48) – Requires the posting of classroom curricula on the website of the school; permits and provides a complaint process for parents or guardians of enrolled students, upon request, to request information on instructional and supplemental materials used in the classroom; and provides for the reporting of the number of complaints to the State Superintendent of Education and the legislature.

Act 2024-34 (SB 129) – Restricts the teaching of culturally-accurate history and restricts diversity, equity and inclusion in public schools. This act:

- defines the terms “divisive concept” and “diversity, equity and inclusion program”;
- prohibits state agencies, local boards of education and public institutions of higher education from (i) sponsoring or maintaining an office that promotes any diversity, equity and inclusion program; (ii) requiring a student, employee or contractor from affirming a “divisive concept” or participating in any diversity, equity and inclusion program, training or coursework; (iii) authorizing, expending or applying for funding for the purpose of compelling assent to a “divisive concept” or otherwise violating the act; and (iv) taking certain other actions related to diversity, equity and inclusion programs and divisive concepts;
- authorizes a state agency, local board of education and public institution of higher education to discipline or terminate an employee or contractor who knowingly violates the act, with exceptions;

- provides various exceptions relating to student, staff or faculty organizations, compliance with federal laws and regulations, research, and classroom instruction; and
- requires public institutions of higher education to designate multiple occupancy restrooms for use by individuals based on their biological sex.

Need: Accountable Schools that Prepare All Students to Access and Succeed in College

Act 2024-389 (HB 331) - Amends Section 16-6C-2, Code of Alabama 1975, to provide that the academic achievement of students who have transferred to a public school from a nonpublic school may not be considered in assigning a school or school system an academic achievement grade for the first three years of that student's enrollment.



Arkansas

Arkansas did not have a regular legislative session in 2024. However, advocates have been collecting signatures for a ballot initiative that would amend the Arkansas Constitution. The amendment is entitled the [“Educational Rights Amendment of 2024.”](#) It would require all schools that receive state funds, including private or religious schools, to meet the same academic accreditation standards as public schools. It also would further define the state's obligation for free public schools to include the following.

- universal access to voluntary, early childhood education for students 3 years old until they qualify for kindergarten;
- universal access to voluntary afterschool and summer programs necessary for the achievement of an adequate education;
- assistance to children who are within 200% of the federal poverty line so that they can achieve an adequate education and overcome the negative impact of poverty on education; and
- supports and services that fully meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities to allow them meaningful access to integrated education.

The measure also seeks to ensure that an adequate education means, without limitation, that every child educated in the school should develop to full capacity a minimum of literacy, mathematical ability, knowledge of government sufficient to equip the individual to make informed choices as a citizen, self-knowledge sufficient to intelligently choose life work, vocational or advanced academic training, recreational pursuits, creative interests, and social ethics.



Florida

Need: Fair School Funding for All Students

Chapter 2024-163 (HB 1403) – Continues to expand Florida’s program providing taxpayer dollars to private religious schools and diverting resources from public schools. According to Step Up For Students, in the 2023-24 school year, 82% of all students with voucher scholarships in the state attended a religious school.

Need: Culturally-Sustaining Schools Where All Students Feel Safe and Welcome

Chapter No. 2024-141 (HB 1291) – Most recent installment of the governor’s censoring educational topics in Florida’s classrooms and limiting what teachers can teach and what students can learn. It censors “curriculum or instruction that teaches identity politics... or is based on theories that systemic racism, sexism, oppression and privilege are inherent in the institutions of the United States and were created to maintain social, political and economic inequities.”

Chapter No. 2024-103 (HB 931) – Further eroding the concept of separation of church and state, the act allows local school districts to authorize religious school chaplains in Florida’s public schools.

Need: Schools that Prepare All Students to Access and Succeed in College

Chapter No. 2024-161 (SB 7032) – Creates the Graduation Alternative to Traditional Education Program, GATE Scholarship Program, GATE Startup Grant Program, and GATE Program Performance Fund. All four programs are aimed at re-engaging students who have withdrawn from high school by providing opportunities to earn career education credentials while also completing a standard high school diploma or equivalent credential. The bill adds information about the GATE program to the required notifications to 16- and 17-year-old students who withdraw from high school.

Chapter No. 2024-159 (SB 7002) and Chapter No. 2024-160 (SB 7004) – Deregulates several aspects of teacher recruitment, school innovation, testing and retention. These bills decrease the minimum required standard for teacher qualification and student performance for graduation.



Georgia

Need: Fair School Funding for All Students

Act 457 (SB 233) - Creates an additional school voucher program in Georgia that provides \$6,500 vouchers for students in under-resourced schools that likely most need additional support. While the voucher is initially limited to families under 400% of the federal poverty limit (\$124,800 for a four-person household), the voucher is available to anyone if eligible applicants do not use all of the appropriated funds.

Need: Safe Schools Free from Harmful, Punitive Discipline and Policing

Act 466 (SB 169) - Creates additional processes to ensure reasonable time frames for extensions of school disciplinary hearings. It also mandates that students be provided instructional materials while they are waiting for their disciplinary hearings.

Need: Schools that Prepare All Students to Access and Succeed in College

Act 553 (HB 970) - Expands eligibility for the Realizing Educational Achievement Can Happen (REACH) scholarship to include victims of human trafficking.

Act 559 (SB 440) - Creates an Accelerated Career Diploma Program and supporting grant programs that allow students to receive a high school diploma with different course requirements when they also pursue a certificate of license in Georgia Technical College System.




Louisiana

Need: Fair School Funding for All Students

Act 1 (SB 313) - Creates an educational savings account voucher in Louisiana called the LA GATOR scholarship. This is Louisiana's fifth voucher program. The program is subject to appropriation each year, and there is no enrollment cap.

In Phase I, a student can either be entering kindergarten, enrolled in a public school the previous year, from a family with a total income not exceeding 250% of the federal poverty level, or who participated in the Student Scholarship for Educational Excellence Program the previous year. Students in that program have to be from families whose income does not exceed 250% of the federal poverty level, must be entering kindergarten, must attend a public school rated as a C, D or F in the previous year, or were enrolled in the Recovery School District.



In Phase 2, students can qualify if they are entering kindergarten, enrolled in a public school the previous year or from a family household with income not exceeding 400% of the federal poverty level.

During Phase 3, eligibility is universal. The timeline for these phases is not outlined in the legislation.

Need: Schools that Prepare All Students to Access and Succeed in College

Act 247 (HB 8) – Removes the ability for students to become eligible for graduation through the submission of a portfolio when the student has not met the achievement level required to pass the state-administered end-of-course assessments required for graduation.

Need: Culturally-Sustaining Schools Where All Students Feel Safe and Welcome

Act 293 (SB 123) – Allows cities, parishes or local public school boards to employ or accept as volunteers chaplains who are not required to be certified by the state board of education. It also provides these chaplains with immunity for actions taken or statements made in accordance with their role unless the statement was malicious, willful and deliberately intended to cause harm or harassment.

Act 326 (SB 262) – Expands the “Parents’ Bill of Rights for Public Schools” to add that a school “shall not discriminate against their child by teaching the child that the child is currently or destined to be oppressed or to be an oppressor based on the child's race or national origin.”

Act 641 (HB 904) – Requires each public elementary, secondary and postsecondary school to report and disclose funding, personnel and programs related to diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. It also specifically exempts charter schools from these reporting requirements.

Act 676 (HB 71) – Requires each public school to display the Ten Commandments in each classroom.

Need: Safe Schools Free from Harmful, Punitive Discipline and Policing

Act 386 (HB 629) – Requires parents of students deemed truant to ensure students make up missed schoolwork and attend meetings at the school at least on a monthly basis until the student makes up missed work. If parents do not comply, they can be fined up to \$500, imprisoned for up to 90 days, or both. If these parents receive probation, a minimum condition of probation shall be that the offender participates in 40 hours of court-approved community service or a combination of 40 hours of court-approved community service and attendance at a court-approved family counseling program by both a parent or legal custodian and the minor.

Act 780 (HB 107) – Prohibits the taping of a student’s mouth shut or otherwise restricting their airway in any manner as a disciplinary tool regardless of parent consent.



Mississippi

Need: Fair School Funding for All Students

Chapter No. 484 (HB 4130) – Creates a new student-based funding formula called the Mississippi Student Funding Formula. This formula focuses on the increased resources needed by special populations of students. It replaces the Mississippi Adequate Education Program.

Need: Safe Schools Free from Harmful, Punitive Discipline and Policing

Chapter No. 405 (HB 1194) – Allows the Mississippi Department of Education to report aggregated data about expulsions.



North Carolina

North Carolina did not have a regular session in 2024, and in the second year of the biennial schedule it hosts several short sessions. Although not all sessions have been completed, several bills of interest to education equity advocates are working their way through the process.

HB 207 – Would create additional due process rights for students receiving short-term suspensions. Currently, due process rights only attach to long-term suspensions of 10 days or more. The bill has passed the House and Senate but is still in the House Committee on Rules, Calendar and Operations of the House, awaiting a final “agree” vote or to be sent to a conference committee.

HB 1027 – Would revise suspension policies by ensuring notices about potential discipline are provided in parents’ primary languages, encouraging intervention strategies for truancy and tardiness, requiring a policy for in-school suspensions, prohibiting the use of recess restriction as a punishment, prohibiting detaining students for discipline for more than an hour after school, prohibiting suspensions in first through third grade. This bill did not receive a vote in committee.



South Carolina

Need: Culturally-Sustaining Schools Where All Students Feel Safe and Welcome

Act 203 (HB 4624) – Prohibits not only gender reassignment surgery for young people under 18 but also prohibits public school staff and officials from withholding knowledge of a student’s gender identity from the student’s parents and places an affirmative duty on them to report to parents if students express a different gender identity or if they request to be called by pronouns that align with their gender identity.



Tennessee

Need: Fair School Funding for All Students

Public Chapter No. 328 (SB 0012) – Expands the eligibility criteria for an education savings account to include students zoned to attend a school district with at least three schools identified as priority schools in 2015 and at least three schools identified as being in the bottom 10% of schools in 2017. This bill expands Tennessee's existing voucher program from three districts (Memphis Shelby County Schools, Metro Nashville Public Schools, and the Achievement School District) to include Hamilton County Schools.

Need: Protected and Expanded Opportunities for Emergent Bilingual Students

Public Chapter No. 327 (SB 0004) – Establishes a deaf mentor and parent advisor program to assist families in implementing bilingual and bicultural home-based programming for young children who are deaf, hard of hearing or deaf-blind at the Tennessee Schools for the Deaf and the West Tennessee School for the Deaf. This bill was led by EdTrust Tennessee and partner Stand for Children Tennessee.


Need: Schools that Prepare All Students to Access and Succeed in College

Public Chapter No. 322 (HB 12950) – Requires the state department of education to conduct a study of best practices in other states for the use of ninth grade “on-track” indicators in state accountability systems to prevent students from dropping out of high school. It also requires the department to submit a report of the outcomes of the study to legislative committees and to publish the report on the department’s website.

Need: Culturally-Sustaining Schools Where All Students Feel Safe and Welcome

Public Chapter No. 127 (HB 736/SB 872) – Changes from urges to requires the standards recommendation committee to include certain academic standards regarding the civil rights movement in the committee’s final recommendation of academic standards in the subject of social studies for students in grades nine through 12.

Public Chapter No. 268 (SB 817/HB 1376) – Places additional onerous burdens on Tennessee public postsecondary institutions related to “divisive concepts.” Particularly, this chapter requires them to publish a current syllabus for each course offered in the semester no later than seven days after the first day of class. This act also requires additional data collection and reporting related to “divisive concepts.”



Public Chapter No. 438 (SB 0102) – Prohibits a local education agency, public charter school, public institution of higher education, the state board of education, and the Department of Education from requiring an educator, employee of a school district or charter school, faculty member or employee of a public institution of higher education to complete or participate in implicit bias training; defines implicit bias training; and prohibits adverse licensure and employment actions from being taken against such an individual for the individual's failure or refusal to participate in implicit bias training.

Public Chapter No. 780 (SB 2766) – Removes the specific language of “on the basis of race; color; creed; disability; sex; national origin; marital status; political or religious beliefs; family, social or cultural background; or sexual orientation” and substituting instead “on any basis” in the K-12 education nondiscrimination statute.

Public Chapter 815 (SB 2501) – Adds a process by which compliance with the law concerning “divisive concepts” in institutions of higher education can be reviewed by applicable legislative committees.

Public Chapter No. 832 (SB 1810) – Requires a request made by a student to an employee of the student’s school district or public charter school for an accommodation to affirm the student’s gender identity to be reported to a school administrator and the student’s parent. The measure prohibits an employee of a school district or public charter school from knowingly providing false or misleading information to a student’s parent regarding the student’s gender identity or intention to transition to a gender that differs from the student’s sex at the time of birth. It also authorizes civil actions to be filed by parents and by the attorney general and reporter against a noncompliant school district or public charter school.

Public Chapter No. 0970 (HB 0996) – Clarifies that instruction in topics related to sexual activity are generally not age-appropriate for students in grades K-5 and must generally not be taught to students in grades K-5 as part of a family life curriculum. It clarifies that such prohibition does not prohibit a school district or public charter school from providing instruction to students in K-5 on the detection, intervention, prevention and treatment of child sexual abuse and human trafficking in which the victim is a child.

Measure dies in committee: HB1948/SB2350 – Attempted to ban diversity, equity and inclusion at public colleges and universities and failed unanimously in the Higher Education Subcommittee.



Need: Safe Schools Free from Harmful, Punitive Discipline and Policing

Public Chapter No. 275 (SB 0972/HB 0995) – Requires, prior to the administration of corporal punishment against a student, the student’s teacher or school principal to make certain documentation in the student’s educational record. It also prohibits corporal punishment against a student found to have a disability unless authorized in accordance with law.

Public Chapter No. 279 (SB 1069) – Gives the director of a school discretion to not refer a student suspended for more than 10 days to an alternative school or program if it is located on the same grounds as the school that the student was suspended from or if the director determines that the assignment may endanger the safety of other students or staff.

Public Chapter No. 299 (HB 340) Adds threatening mass violence on school property or at a school-related activity to the list of zero tolerance offenses.

Public Chapter No. 676 (SB 1726) – Requires the Tennessee Department of Education, using existing resources, to develop a conflict resolution program that may be adopted and implemented by school districts and public charter schools to assist students in any of the grades K-12 in developing the skills necessary for nonviolent conflict resolution.

Public Chapter No. 882 (SB 2931) – Conditions the expulsion of a student for committing the zero tolerance offense of threatening mass violence on school property or at a school-related activity to threats of mass violence determined to be valid based on the results of a threat assessment. It requires directors of schools and heads of public charter schools to report threats of mass violence on school property or at a school-related activity made by a student that are determined, based on the results of a threat assessment, to be valid.

Public Chapter No. 915 (HB 2472) – Requires school districts and public charter schools to advise an employee who is assaulted by a student of the employee’s rights as a result of the assault. It requires, instead of authorizes, the suspension of a student who commits an assault against an employee of the school district, school or public charter school in which the student is enrolled from attendance at school and from attendance at all school-sponsored events for at least one calendar year.



Texas

Texas did not have a regular session in 2024.



Virginia

Need: Fair School Funding for All Students

Chapter 722 (SB 54/HB 419) – Requires, for the purpose of addressing family demand and preferences for affordable, high-quality early childhood care and education services, state general funds to be provided to support the provision of services to families for early childhood care and education, as specified in the general appropriation act.

Need: Schools that Prepare All Students to Access and Succeed in College

Chapter 2 (SB 46/HB 48) – Prohibits any public institution of higher education from providing any manner of preferential treatment in the admissions decision to any student applicant on the basis of the student’s legacy status, defined in the bill, or the student’s familial relationship to any donor to the institution.

Chapter 657 (SB 199/HB 1345) – Requires the Virginia Board of Education – in collaboration with the Virginia Community College System, career and technical education directors, and industry partners – to develop and maintain a current, comprehensive and uniform list of industry-recognized workforce credentials that students may take as a substitute for certain units of credit required for graduation, including credentials that are accepted as substitutes for electives credits and credentials completed outside of regular school hours.

Promoting Culturally-Sustaining Schools Where All Students Feel Safe and Welcome

Chapter 370 (HB 168) – Requires the Department of Education to develop and make available to each school board a resource document containing guidance and best practices for providing the necessary support and services to homeless students.

Chapter 534 (HB 919) – Directs the Virginia Department of Education, in consultation with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and the Department of Medical Assistance Services, to develop, adopt and distribute to each school board a model



memorandum of understanding between a school board and a nationally-recognized school-based telehealth provider that sets forth the parameters for the provision of mental health teletherapy by the provider to public school students enrolled in the local school division.

Chapter 586 (SB 283) – Requires the Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction, in coordination with the Secretary of Education, to convene a stakeholder workgroup to study the estimated impact of offering free school meals to students statewide, identify options for reducing or eliminating student and school meal debt, and make recommendations on options for leveraging other programs funded at the state and federal levels for the provision of student school meals.

Chapter 689 (HB 253) – Requires each school board to permit students to submit oral comments during any public comment portion of such meeting. The students must be enrolled in a public elementary or secondary school in the local school division, provide acceptable proof of identification, if requested, and sign up in accordance with the sign-up procedures for the respective school board meeting.

Chapter 797 (SB 608/HB 625) – Requires the Virginia Department of Education to establish the Office of Community Schools as an office within the department for the purpose of supporting the development and growth of community schools throughout the commonwealth in accordance with the Virginia Community School Framework (now named the Best Practices for Virginia Community School Implementation).

Chapter 805 (HB 215) – Requires the Virginia Department of Education to develop culturally appropriate, age-appropriate, and trauma-informed Title IX and sexual harassment prevention training modules concerning Title IX rights and protections, consent and sexual harassment prevention and reporting and to make the training modules available to each school board for the education of ninth and 10th grade students.

Need: Protected and Expanded Opportunities for Emergent Bilingual Students

Chapter 743 (SB 272/HB 1247) – Requires state funding to be provided pursuant to the general appropriations act to support ratios of instructional positions to English learner students based on each student’s English proficiency level, as established in the general appropriations act.



Need: Safe Schools Free from Harmful, Punitive Discipline and Policing

Chapter 8 (SB 443) / Chapter 61 (HB 1317) – Requires superintendents to share the dispositions of delinquency cases of a student previously enrolled in their school division to the superintendent of the school division where that student is enrolled or intends to enroll.

Chapter 299 (HB 626) – Establishes the Community Builders Pilot Program to reduce youth involvement in behaviors that lead to gun violence and to increase community engagement among public school students by providing entering eighth grade students enrolled in Roanoke City Public Schools and Petersburg City Public Schools opportunities during the school year after regular school hours and during the summer months for community engagement, workforce development, postsecondary education exploration, and social-emotional education and development.



Southern Research Corner

Back to the Future –

How Modern Voucher Schemes

Maintain Inequality

by Fiorella Fachini

Commemorating the 70th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the *Southern Spaces* journal recently published an article exploring the enduring problem of education inequality in the United States, particularly focusing on school voucher programs affecting various southern states. The article, "[Separate and Unequal Schools: The Past is the Future](#)" by Steve Suits, expands on the history of segregated schools and their constant impact on present-day education inequity.

Through a critical lens, the author argues that school vouchers and education savings accounts (ESAs) are accelerating a return to a segregated and unequal education system. Although many voucher and ESA programs were initially created claiming to assist underserved students, they are now being extended to affluent families, effectively diverting public funds to private schools and homeschooling, which are less regulated and accountable.

Southern states are leading the adoption of universal private school vouchers. For example, in 2023, North Carolina became the 10th state to adopt a universal voucher program. Just this past March 2024, Georgia approved [Senate Bill 233](#), a harmful voucher bill that diverts resources from public schools to cover private school tuition.

The article also notes that states are pushing to implement these programs due to the temporary financial stability provided by federal COVID-19 relief funds. However, these funds are about to run out, and already underfunded public schools will face severe financial limitations. This will only worsen educational inequities and harm students, especially from low-income communities, as their school districts [struggle](#) to meet student needs when state funding falls.

Furthermore, there is a [discriminatory history](#) in the development of school vouchers. They are largely a product of [efforts to undermine](#) traditional inclusive public schools and maintain segregation. The design of universal voucher programs allows private schools to remain free of regulations, such as academic standards and accountability. Additionally, they are not required to provide transportation or free meals for low-income students, leaving this population at a disadvantage.

Suits concludes by emphasizing the urgent need to defend and invest in public education. The article urges collective action from communities, policymakers and advocates to oppose these privatization efforts and work toward a more inclusive and fair public education system.

IDRA has long asserted the clear evidence that school vouchers and other privatization programs like ESAs tend to [increase segregation](#) and deepen educational inequalities. We know that [vouchers hurt students](#). We remain committed to ensuring that all students, especially in the U.S. South, have access to high-quality public school education.



Resources



School Dollars Diverted in 2023 – A Scan of Private School Voucher Legislation in the U.S. South

eBook by Terrence Wilson, J.D., IDRA, 2023

<https://idra.news/DollarsDiverted>



Southern Education Equity Network

Get advocacy tips and connect with others

<https://www.idra.org/seen>




5 Reasons Private School Vouchers Would Hurt Students

Get IDRA's infographic in English and Spanish

<https://idra.news/5ReasonsVouchersHurt>





IDRA is an independent, nonpartisan non-profit organization. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

Children First

IDRA

Transforming Education

 www.idra.org

 idrasedn.org

     @IDRAedu

  @IDRAed

 [idra.news/LinkedInIDRA](https://www.linkedin.com/company/idra)