

Q. and A. on the Parent - Aid School Bill

Q. What is the tuition assistance program called "Parent Aid"?

A. It's a plan to help parents meet a portion of the cost of sending their children to nonpublic schools.

Q. Is there anything like it now?

A. Yes, there is. The plan is modeled after the highly successful Scholar Incentive Program that now aids all students attending all colleges in the State.

Q. How does it work?

A. It makes a grant to the student (actually to his parent) to aid him in obtaining an education in New York State.

Q. A religious education?

A. No. A secular education. In fact the tuition aid bill has been carefully drawn to insure that there is absolutely no "aid-to-religion".

Q. How much does it actually pay?

A. That depends on 1) the cost of the education in the school; 2) the income of the parent; and 3) a formula established by the bill that pays a "portion" of the parent's cost in tuition.

Q. What is the maximum grant available?

A. The upper limits are:

1) For a family with a net income of under \$4,000 the maximum grant for elementary school students would be \$150; for high school \$250.

2) For a family with a net taxable income of between \$4,000 and \$9,000 the maximum elementary grant would be \$100; high school grant \$200.

3) For a family with a net taxable income of over \$9,000 but less than \$15,000 the maximum elementary tuition grant would be \$50; high school \$150.

4) For a family with a net taxable income of over \$15,000 there are no grants. Only families earning under \$15,000 net taxable income are eligible.

Q. What about the family with two or three children in school?

A. Each additional child in school reduces the net taxable income by \$2,000 for figuring purposes. For example, a family with net taxable income of \$8,000 with three children in grammar school would be considered to have an income level of \$3,000 less, \$4,000 or \$4,000. When one child graduated from high school the income would rise to \$6,000.

Q. What's the reasoning behind the bill; the philosophy?

A. The reasoning simply, is to meet a need. There are some 800,000 students in nonpublic schools in New York State. They're citizens just like their friends in the public schools. Since the state aids the children in the public schools through state aid to school districts, it's reasonable then for the state to aid the children in the nonpublic schools through aid to their parents.

Q. What does the state save by helping Catholic parents?

A. Well the full cost of educating the 800,000 nonpublic

How Plan Would Work

Example — An average pupil in a Catholic grammar or high school.

Tuition — \$200 per pupil.

School Eligible? — Curriculum shows 90 per cent of time is spent on subjects similar to those taught in public schools of district (is thus over the 80 per cent minimum required).

Maximum Grant? — Law permits a top grant at this school of 65 percent of tuition cost. So \$130 is the top grant any student can have at this school.

BUT: Parent income determines how much of that \$130 maximum grant at this school a student is eligible to receive. Here's how:

For Parent with Taxable Income of:
Under \$4,000: grant would be \$130 (i.e. the top grant at the school would go to all students whose parents earned under \$4,000).
\$4,000 to \$9,000: grant would be \$100.
\$7,000 to \$15,000: grant would be \$50.
Over \$15,000: No grant available.

Note: For purposes of figuring each additional child in school reduces net taxable income by \$2,000. So a parent with four children in school and a net income of \$10,000 could deduct \$6,000 to figure his eligibility under the law and his bracket.

school students in the public schools would be an additional billion dollars each year. Add to that an initial cost of 2½ billion dollars to build or acquire classrooms for them... and that's what the state saves by aiding the parent to keep his child in the nonpublic school.

Q. How does this grant stack up against the costs?

A. The Education Department figures that New York State spends about \$1,140 per pupil in the public school. The grants under the parent aid bill would only be a beginning in meeting the need.

Q. But don't nonpublic schools, well at least Catholic schools cost less?

A. Yes they do. That's because of the low overhead and instruction cost achieved by the dedicated religious men and women (brothers, sisters and priests) who take very low salaries and who make up the bulk of the educational staff. Costs in Catholic schools are much lower than the public schools.

Q. But what about those high tuition private schools?

A. There are very few schools making a profit. But if they were, the children attending these schools would not be eligible for a tuition grant.

Q. What about a school that spends all its time teaching religion and offers little secular education?

A. The plan requires that the nonpublic school fulfill all educational requirements as set forth by the State Education Department. A school must include at each grade level courses of instruction equivalent to the content in public schools.

Q. How do we taxpayers know the kids will be getting a good education in these nonpublic schools?

A. Again the bill provides that the schools must be subject to inspection and visitation by the Education Department.

Q. What's the chance of people starting new schools to take advantage of the grants?

A. Pretty small. In the first place the school must be in operation for three years before tuition grants become available. Secondly, the grants represent only a small portion of the cost. The maximum \$150 primary school pupil grant isn't much of an inducement for somebody to set up a school where costs are going to run from \$1,000 to \$1,500 per pupil not counting classroom space. And any school set up would have to be fully equipped to give the education required by the State Education Department regulations and the New York State laws.

Q. What about discrimination.

Won't there be a rush to set up lily-white schools with these grants?

A. Again the grants are too small to consider setting up anything. They only make sense for schools already in business, and as for discrimination the bill specifically provides that all the provisions of the anti-discrimination section of the education law must be enforced in any school whose students receive grants.

In that respect, the act is a major breakthrough. For the first time, New York would use the financial power of the State, in combination with the State's anti-discrimination laws; to promote desegregation in all nonpublic education.

Q. You mean if a racist tries to start a school he won't get a cent under this plan?

A. Right. Whether black or white or yellow . . . a school with a racist policy is ineligible.

Q. No aid to racists, no aid to religion, just aid to parents, right?

A. Right. And it helps preserve the voluntary effort of parents by keeping them involved (they must pay at least 35% or more of the tuition since the grant provides a maximum of 65 % of tuition costs?)

Q. And it's all right for government to do this kind of thing?

A. Certainly. Government's job is to see to the accomplishing of public purposes. Education is a public purpose. Government can achieve this purpose in two ways: 1) do it itself (public schools and universities); 2) do it through others (nonpublic schools and universities).

One obvious case is medicare. Aiding the aged, sick is a public purpose. But government doesn't build hospitals and nursing homes, it pays (as it does through medicare) for the health care of the aged, sick in

nonpublic hospitals and nursing homes. It achieves a public purpose using public funds to obtain the service from nonpublic sources.

Q. What about Blaine and First Amendment and all that?

A. Constitutionally there's no problem. The bill specifically prohibits aid to religion. It provides for grants only to help meet a percentage of tuition costs . . . 65%. The payment to the parent is for his use only for the secular education of his child. It cannot be paid unless the education his child receives is in full conformity with the education laws and requirements of the State of New York.

Q. It's quite legal then?

A. Indeed. Its effect will be to aid secular education which is a legal public purpose.

Q. It makes sense, then, for the legislature to pass the bill?

A. Yes. There is obviously great need. The legislature has the responsibility to respond, promptly and adequately, to public needs.

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