OLR Bill Analysis
sSB 1017

AN ACT CONCERNING THE OPEN CHOICE PROGRAM.

SUMMARY

This bill changes the purposes for which two types of grants related to the Open Choice program must be spent. These grants are awarded by the State Department of Education (SDE) to regional education service centers (RESCs) and public school districts from the state-appropriated funds for Open Choice. Open Choice is an interdistrict attendance program that, under existing law, allows students from large urban districts to attend suburban schools, and vice versa, on a space-available basis in order to reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation; improve academic achievement; and provide public school choice.

First, the bill requires a RESC to use Open Choice program operating grants awarded by SDE, in part, for education advocate staff in certain school districts, rather than for providing staff assistance to all of their participating schools. Second, it requires unspent funds from the Open Choice per-pupil state grant awarded to school districts by SDE to be used on education advocate positions rather than other specified uses in current law.

The bill also earmarks up to 3.5% of the state appropriation for the Open Choice program to fund the education advocate staff positions in the specified districts.

It also removes obsolete language from the Open Choice law.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2019

RESC OPERATING GRANTS FOR OPEN CHOICE

By law, RESCs must help school districts in their respective regions administer the Open Choice program in exchange for an annual
operating grant from SDE. This assistance includes providing staff to (1) help participating students transition to new schools and (2) act as a liaison between the students’ parents and the new school districts. The bill names this staff position an “education advocate” and requires that one be placed in any district that receives more than 75 incoming students under the Open Choice program. Additionally, it adds a third duty to this position: providing academic and other social support to these incoming students.

**DISTRICT PER-PUPIL GRANTS FOR OPEN CHOICE**

By law, SDE must generally provide, within available appropriations, an annual grant of up to $2,500 per-pupil to local or regional boards of education that receive Open Choice students in their school districts. By March 1 each year, SDE must determine whether the number of Open Choice students for the fiscal year is less than the amount for which funds were appropriated for the program. If so, then the additional funds carry forward, rather than lapse, to the next fiscal year.

Current law requires the SDE commissioner to use these excess funds for the following purposes:

1. awarding up to $500,000 for supplemental per-pupil grants on a pro-rata basis to receiving districts who host at least 10 out-of-district students under the program, not to exceed $1,000 per student;

2. awarding the next $500,000 as supplemental pro rata grants, in an amount determined by the commissioner, to districts that report by March 1 that they have more out-of-district students under the program than they did the prior school year; and

3. using any remaining funds to increase enrollment in the Open Choice program.

The bill removes these specified uses in current law and instead requires SDE to use such unspent funds to provide an education advocate to districts that accept more than 75 students under the Open
Choice program.

**COMMITTEE ACTION**

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute
Yea 34 Nay 0 (03/15/2019)