

RESOLUTION OPPOSING LEGISLATION TO CREATE AN EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNT PROGRAM IN TENNESSEE

WHEREAS, the Maryville City Board of Education is responsible for providing a local system of public education; and

WHEREAS, the Tennessee General Assembly in the 2019 legislative session may entertain legislation that would create an Education Savings Account (ESA) program allowing qualifying parents to use public funds for private education options, (e.g. private school tuition, online coursework, homeschool expenses, etc.); and

WHEREAS, although an ESA may be structured somewhat differently than traditional vouchers, it is still a redirection of public education dollars to private institutions; and

WHEREAS, more than 50 years have passed since private school vouchers were first proposed, and during that time proponents have spent millions of dollars attempting to convince the public and lawmakers of the concept's efficacy, and yet, five decades later, vouchers still remain controversial, unproven, and unpopular; ESAs are an attempt to rebrand the voucher argument; and

WHEREAS, the Constitution of the State of Tennessee requires that the Tennessee General Assembly "provide for the maintenance, support and eligibility standards of a system of free public schools", with no mention of the maintenance or support of private institutions; and

WHEREAS, the State of Tennessee, through work of the Tennessee General Assembly, the Tennessee Department of Education, the State Board of Education and local school boards, has established nationally recognized standards and measures for accountability in public education; and

WHEREAS, ESAs eliminate public accountability by channeling tax dollars into private institutions that may not face state-approved academic standards, do not make budgets public, do not adhere to open meetings and records laws, may not publicly report on student achievement, and do not face the public accountability requirements contained in major federal laws, including special education; and

WHEREAS, ESAs create a risk of fraud, especially when public funds are distributed directly to a bank account rather than on a reimbursement basis; ESA programs require extensive auditing programs to ensure funds are used appropriately; and

WHEREAS, ESAs leave many students behind, including those with the greatest needs, because public education dollars are channeled into private institutions that may not be required to accept all students, nor offer the special services they may need; and

WHEREAS, ESAs programs divert critical dollars and commitment from public schools to pay private education options for a few students, including many who already attend private schools or homeschool; and