



Saint Stephen's Position on Accepting State Scholarship Funds

What is HB-1? What are its key provisions?

House Bill 1 (aka "HB-1") was signed by Governor DeSantis in March 2023. This legislation provides funding through the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Educational Opportunities (FES EO) and the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES UA) to Florida residents with a child(-ren) eligible to enroll in a K-12 public school. This funding may be used for tuition and fees at a participating private school; the costs of standardized testing; curriculum materials; and transportation to and from a non-public school, among others.

Does Saint Stephen's accept funds from the revamped FES EO and FES UA programs? Are other forms of financial assistance available?

No. The Saint Stephen's Board of Trustees voted in May 2023 not to accept state monies under HB-1 or any other state scholarship programs. However, families whose household income makes them eligible for assistance may apply for need-based tuition support directly from Saint Stephen's.

Why did Saint Stephen's decide not to take state funding?

As an independent school, Saint Stephen's values its ability to operate independent of state requirements. This includes not having to participate in state-mandated testing. There are provisions in the law that could require Saint Stephen's to administer such tests, including to students who do not participate in the funding program. For example, the legislation requires participating private schools to file quarterly reports with the state; such reports are subject to change but must include a variety of demographic and curricular information. HB-1 and other legislation also have regulations regarding teacher certification and licensure that could potentially affect some of our educators and what they teach in their classrooms. Finally, taking HB-1 funds could make Saint Stephen's reliant on funding that could dissolve based on conditions outside of our control. These provisions, all of which could impact Saint Stephen's independence, led us to not accept such funds at this time.

Have other independent schools also decided not to accept funds under HB-1?

Yes. A number of our regional peer schools have also decided not to take state funds.

Might Saint Stephen's take FES EO or FES UA funds in the future?

While the Board and Administration believe that the decision not to accept state funds is appropriate, as with all mission-related issues, we will continue to monitor the situation moving forward and will update our families should anything change.

I still have questions: to whom can I speak?

If you have additional thoughts or questions, please contact Head of School Peter Kraft (pkraft@saintstephens.org).