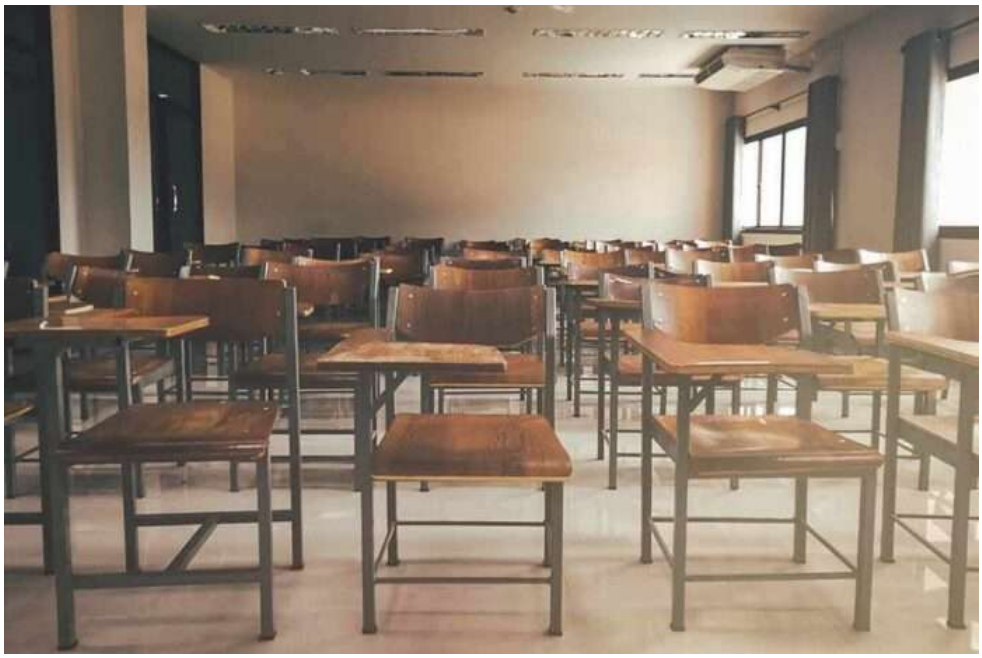
Scholarships Blocked – Bessent Calls Out Spanberger



Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent says Governor Abigail Spanberger is blocking scholarships that could fund tutoring and special-needs help for Virginia kids starting in 2027.

Story Highlights

- Bessent urged Virginia to certify scholarship organizations for a 2027 start.
- Virginia law already outlines how scholarship groups qualify and must spend funds.

- Spanberger’s office said the federal program would not help public-school students this year.
- Reports conflict on whether Virginia opted in or exited the program for 2027.

Bessent’s Direct Call for Action

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent posted on November 15, 2026, that Virginia “has already elected to participate in 2027,” and he pressed Governor Abigail Spanberger to certify scholarship organizations under federal law. His message said the program can help families pay for tutoring and special-needs services, including for students in public schools. His push sets a clear target date and a simple step: complete the certification process so eligible groups can receive donations and serve students in time for 2027.

Bessent’s position drew attention because it focuses on mechanics, not slogans. He asked the state to do an administrative task that unlocks private donations for student support. That framing appeals to families who want fast help for learning loss, reading gaps, and Individualized Education Program needs. It also aligns with the Trump administration’s view that states should not block educational opportunity when a lawful pathway already exists to move funds to students through certified organizations.

What Virginia Law Already Provides

Virginia law defines a scholarship foundation as a nonprofit approved by the Virginia Department of Education and set up to aid Virginia students. Applicants must submit information to the Department, which decides if they qualify. The same code imposes a strict spending rule: qualified scholarship foundations must distribute at least 90 percent of donations for educational expenses through scholarships to students, including students with disabilities. These guardrails aim to put dollars to work for kids, not overhead.

Because the framework exists, Bessent's ask is narrow: use the process the law already describes and certify eligible groups for the federal tax-credit program. That approach relies on Virginia's own accountability measures. It shows families and donors that most funds flow to services, not administration. It also means the state does not have to invent a new system. It needs to run the play it already has on the books and make timely decisions on applications so parents can plan for 2027.

Spanberger's Stated Rationale and Public-School Claims

Governor Spanberger's office said the administration does not believe the program would benefit public-school students and that Virginia would not participate this year. The office said it would watch results in other states before deciding next steps for Virginia families and schools. That stance conflicts with Bessent's claim that the program can support tutoring and services for public-school students, not only private-school transfers, if scholarship groups design awards for those needs.

Education analyst Chad Aldeman said a planned Virginia Tutoring Fund, which aimed to serve high-poverty public schools, was stopped by the governor's decision. His account suggests that at least some groups intended to target public-school students with federal tax-credit donations. If accurate, that undercuts the claim that the program offers no benefit to public-school families. However, the public record does not list which scholarship groups applied, what services they proposed, or whether the Department received complete files.

Confusion Over Participation and Next Steps

Reports split on a key fact: Bessent said Virginia elected to participate in 2027, while other outlets reported that Spanberger removed Virginia from the program. The available record does not show the specific filing that proves an election, a withdrawal, or how those steps affect certification timelines. That gap fuels confusion and lets politics crowd out procedure. Clear, posted documents from the state and federal agencies would resolve whether certification is optional or required once a state signals interest.

Parents deserve clarity now. If Virginia can legally proceed, the Department should process applications under existing state law that already demands a ninety-percent pass-through to student aid. If federal rules truly bar participation this year, the governor should release the letter or regulation that says so. Families trying to book spring tutoring or plan fall services cannot wait for partisan spin. Publish the

paperwork, certify qualified groups, and let donors help students who need support.