



UEN Call to Action Mar. 23, 2018

Private School Vouchers Bill Clears Subcommittee in the Senate

Background: [SSB3206 Education Savings Accounts \(vouchers\) in the Iowa Senate](#): this bill by Sen. Schneider creates education savings accounts for private school students, but does not include charter schools or home school students in ESA eligibility. The amount of the grant is set at 60% of the regular program district cost or just over \$4,000 per pupil. The funds for the grant become a standing unlimited appropriation, in other words, like school aid, the amount necessary to fund the program is automatically appropriated. This bill was considered in a subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee on Thursday, March 22, with Sens. Chelgren and Rozenboom recommending it move forward and Sen. Danielson opposing the recommendation. Next step, full Appropriations Committee. UEN is opposed to this bill, which does the following:

- Requires DOM to write rules to administer the program
- Creates an education savings account for each eligible student that applies by Jan. 15 in the prior year, equal to 60% of the regular program state cost per pupil, which is \$4,039 in FY 2019 dollars. The first ESA grants would be awarded in the 2019-20 school year.
- Limits eligibility to incoming kindergarteners or students who have attended a public school for the previous two semesters, and specifies that prior ESA recipients are eligible. Funds remaining in the account may be used for higher education expenses in an Iowa college or university, until the student reaches 25.
- Requires that if a student is expelled from the nonpublic school, both the nonpublic school and the parent must report the expulsion and the parent is required to repay the voucher amount to the DOM, unless the student relocates residence to another community and enrolls in another nonpublic school.
- Does not require the nonpublic school to change admission processes, to admit all students, and specifically states that the bill is not intended to put demands on nonpublic schools to comply with any state requirements.

Reasons for UEN opposition, but first, a clarification: UEN school leaders support parents in making the best decisions for their children and recognize Iowa private schools as good partners in our communities. Our advocacy is not an indictment of private schools, but rather a primary concern for public school resources and needs of public school students.

School Choice already exists in Iowa, through transfer within a district, open enrollment to a neighboring district, three types of home school options, quality private schools with low income tuition support and two online public academies. Over 65,000 Iowa students already attend school in another school district, a private school or an online academy. This doesn't include home school students, since we don't know how many students are home schooled in Iowa. If competition is thought to make schools better, we already have it. If school choice is required to provide parents with options for their students, we already have it.

Public School Funding is a Priority: Iowa's public schools, which educate 94% of Iowa students, have experienced many consecutive years of low funding increases combined with higher expectations. The Governor is leading our state in preparing for a Future Ready Iowa

Iowa's Urban 8: Cedar Rapids, Council Bluffs, Davenport, Des Moines, Dubuque, Iowa City, Sioux City, and Waterloo

UEN Associates: Cedar Falls, College, Ft. Dodge, Linn-Mar, Marshalltown, Mason City, Muscatine, Ottumwa and Southeast Polk

Workforce, including expansion of computer programming and CTE investments. The Legislature and Governor just began to address the public school inequities of transportation and formula differences. The costs of educating students of poverty have not yet been addressed by the Iowa funding system. Meanwhile, teacher shortages are looming as Iowa has eliminated the Teacher Forgivable Loan Repayment Program. If there is not enough money to fund public schools, how can the legislature divert millions to private schools?

Iowa Public Schools provide successful options for students: Iowa public schools graduate over 91% of Iowa students within four years, which is first in the nation. The other 6 states that have ESAs rank much lower than Iowa school performance, based on the [USNews Ranking of Best States](#) that Governor Reynolds touted in March of 2017. Iowa is #8, while AZ is #43, FL is #29, MS is #45, NC is #21, NV is #49 and TN is #32.

Iowa's Tax Dollars already fund school choice: Iowa already invests over \$53 million in tuition and textbook tax credits, tax credits for school tuition organizations for low and middle income families, transportation and textbook funds, and program and course supports for home school and private school students. According to the Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy, Oct. 2016, of the 17 states that have either private school scholarships or private school tuition/expenses tax credit, Iowa is one of only five that has both (AL, IA, IN, LA, SC).

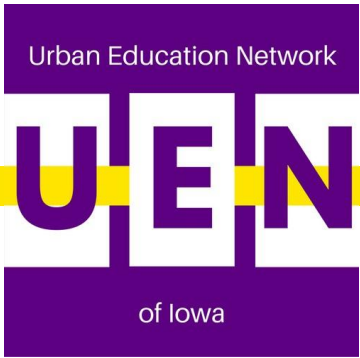
Statewide Complications Occur: the survival of rural schools depends on adequate state funding, yet there are few private schools available for their parents to choose as an alternative. According to the National Rural Education Association, investing in vouchers reduces resources to rural schools while saving money for parents in urban centers. Meanwhile, student poverty and minority concentration in the inner cities is exacerbated when families with means are encouraged to leave the public school for a private program, increasing the challenge of urban districts while decreasing resources.

It's not revenue neutral to School Districts: Since ESA's as proposed can go to kindergarteners, every student who would have attended private school anyway will now qualify for an ESA. Even if no additional student opts into the voucher than would have gone to private school, hundreds of millions of dollars will be taken off the table, unable to fund the needs of public school students. For every student that leaves the public school to take advantage of the voucher, the school district will no longer count them in enrollment, so will lose the funding associated with that student.

No Accountability: Public schools are accountable to taxpayers, parents, communities (the public) and serve all students. Public schools do not jettison students that are not meeting expectations or refuse enrollment based on specific student needs, such as disabilities, or students who have behavior issues, are non-English-speaking, minority or low income. If additional state dollars are used to fund vouchers, it is only fair that the private schools receiving those tax dollars also comply with testing, reporting, and service requirements.

See the UEN Issue Brief on [School Choice](#) for more background, research and talking points.

Specific Advocacy Actions follow:



Advocacy Actions

Contact your state Senators this weekend and into next week, asking for the priority of public schools, and a no vote on vouchers/education savings accounts in Iowa. Please remember that public school leaders support parents in making the best decisions for their children and recognize Iowa private schools as good partners in our communities. Our advocacy isn't an indictment of private schools, but rather a primary concern for public school resources and needs of public school students. Find your Senator here <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find>

- Senators on the Appropriations Committee will be next in line to vote to move SSB 3206 forward. Contact them and ask for a no vote. Appropriations Committee members are listed below for your reference.
- You can also call the Senate Switchboard during the week, # 515.281.3371, and ask to speak to your Senator or leave a message for them to contact you.
- Thank legislators for holding schools harmless in current year cuts and encourage continued work on extension of the state penny this year, and more attention next year on formula equality, school funding, and flexibility needs.
- Recruit a business leader to also call or email their senator.
- Keep us posted on what you hear.

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Senate Appropriations Committee Members

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- [Tim Kraayenbrink](#) (R, District [5](#)), Vice Chair
- [Joe Bolkcom](#) (D, District [43](#)), Ranking Member
- [Nate Boulton](#) (D, District [16](#))
- [Michael Breitbart](#) (R, District [28](#))
- [Mark Chelgren](#) (R, District [41](#))
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- [William A. Dotzler Jr.](#) (D, District [31](#))
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