



## UEN Call to Action Feb. 9, 2018

### Private School Vouchers/Charter Schools Bill Introduced

**Background:** [HSB 651 Education Savings Accounts \(vouchers\) and Charter Schools in the Iowa House](#): this bill creates education savings accounts for private school students, specifying that eligible students include those attending kindergarten for the first time, those who have attended public school in the previous two semesters, and those who have previously received a ESA grant. (Note, this bill does not specify that home school students are eligible for any ESA.) The amount of the grant includes 90% of the regular program district cost minus the average property tax share, including weighting for special education, ELL, etc., and the per pupil share of the categorical supplements (TSS, PD, EICS, TLC and AEA supplements TSS and PD).

The bill specifies allowable expenses and allows any balance remaining in the account to be used by the student for in-state college expenses until age 23. The bill prohibits the state or any agent of the state from exercising authority over any nonpublic school who receives tuition from an ESA and specifically prohibits the state from requiring private schools to modify admissions criteria or curriculum in order to serve students receiving ESAs.

The bill also creates a charter school process with at least three models; a school board authorizing model, a school board/state board model and a founding group-state board model that does not include support of the local school board. The bill requires the regular program district cost plus many other funds follow the student to the charter school.

A subcommittee of Representatives Rogers, Wheeler, Jones, Mascher and Nielsen has been assigned, with its first meeting scheduled for Tuesday, Feb. 13. UEN is opposed.

#### Reasons for UEN opposition:

**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. If competition is thought to make schools better, we already have it. Iowa public schools graduate over 91% of Iowa students within four years, which is first in the nation.

**Iowa Already Supports Private Schools:** 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. Worthy of note: according to State Tax Subsidies for Private K-12 Education by 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 have both (AL, IA, IN, LA, SC).

**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

[Iowa's Urban 8: Cedar Rapids, Council Bluffs, Davenport, Des Moines, Dubuque, Iowa City, Sioux City, and Waterloo](#)  
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higher expectations. If there is not enough money to fund public schools, how can the legislature divert millions to private schools?

**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 and saves 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. We will see our public schools slowly impacted by fewer students every year as they age through the private school until there is a full-fledged voucher program for all private school students.

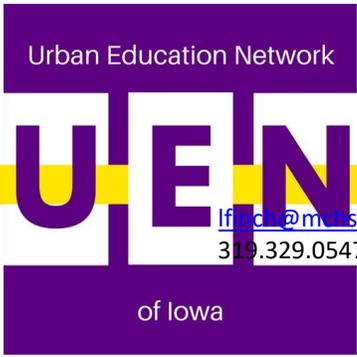
**Public School Flexibility and Charter Schools:** Charter schools exchange regulations for accountability (although evidence is mixed at best on outcomes for students in charter schools.) Freeing up public schools to operate more flexibility to meet the needs of students is a better place to start if the public believes Iowa schools need to improve.

**No Accountability:** Public schools are accountable to taxpayers, parents, communities (the public) and serve all students. Public schools cannot jettison students that are not meeting expectations or refuse enrollment based on specific student needs, such as disabilities, or students who 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.

#### **Advocacy Actions:**

- Contact your state Representatives this weekend and into next week, asking for the priority of public schools, and a no vote on vouchers or education savings accounts in Iowa. Find your representative here <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find>
- You can also call the House Switchboard during the week, # 515.281.3221, and ask to speak to your representative or leave a message for them to contact you.
- Thank legislators for holding schools harmless in current year cuts and encourage continued work on formula equality, school funding, flexibility and extension of the state penny.
- Recruit a few parents to also call or email their representatives.
- Keep us posted on what you hear.



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To Become Successful World Citizens

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