**CALL TO ACTION UDATE**

**Education Savings Accounts (Vouchers), Charter Schools and   
Diversity Plans/Open Enrollment Bills Are Not for Iowa**

**February 5, 2021**

**School Choice Discussions Move in the Senate – Over to the House. Some items of concern were amended out of the bill in the Senate, but our major objections to vouchers, charters and elimination of diversity plans remain. Here’s what you need to know:**

**Update Feb. 5:** Diversity plans HF 228 was approved by the House and sent over to the Senate. This indicates the House’s intent to work on provisions of the bill separately. It will take longer but allow advocates to continue connecting with their legislators about concerns. Keep discussing vouchers with House members in particular this week. Use the new information below to continue conversations.

**See the Jan. 29 Call to Action Update for details about SF 159 all provisions after consideration in the Senate. When considering any shift to privatization, Other Initiatives Deliver Better Results:** Stanford Economist Professor Martin Carnoy studies the effectiveness of educational interventions. "There are many policy changes that are likely to have much higher payoffs than privatization including teacher training, early childhood education, after-school and summer programs, student health programs, and heightened standards in math, reading, and science."

**New This Week: Cost of Vouchers to the Public School Talking Points on Charter Schools**

**Cost of the Voucher:** SF 159 includes a scholarship, the amount of which is determined by a formula based on funding that goes to public schools. Some school choice advocates claim that local money stays with the school district as only $5,025 goes with the voucher. Although the voucher is based on some of the revenue associated with schools, each student leaving the public school will take all of the funds generated by counting them in the public school enrollment. There is no funding that remains with the district if the student is enrolled in the private school. Any individual weightings such as special education, ELL, concurrent enrollment, etc., are also lost. This total comes from the sum of the following based on state averages, so a local district’s impact could vary. The district will also lose the SAVE per pupil allocation, currently at just over $1,000 per pupil, and any federal funds, such as Title funds and REAP that are distributed on a per student basis. If there are fewer students counted statewide due to some choosing the voucher and leaving the system, the per pupil allotment may change. SAVE and Title I funds would be redistributed to all eligible schools; those funds do not stay with the district from which the voucher student originated.

School district funds lost per voucher

$7,048 regular program

$1,100 per pupil supplements

$ 350 dropout prevention authority

$ 538 Instructional Support Authority

**$9,036 per pupil lost revenue**

Additionally, weightings, SAVE and federal funds are also tied to enrollment.

**Charter Schools:** SF 159 includes two kinds of charter schools. We support the first and opposed the second:

1. **Chartered by school board** – still lots of provision to meet, but theory is exchange of flexibility through State Board of Education waiver of regulations for focused accountability for student
2. achievement. This allows a flexible approach to a targeted learning program such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) or STEAM (STEM + Arts), or a College Prep Program for first generation college goers, like Storm Lake’s existing public charter school. This approach is OK and should proceed first. The locally elected school board is in charge of the charter, the contracts, transparent fiscal responsibility and accountability for student outcomes. The school board could convert an existing attendance center to a chart school or create a new charter school.
3. **Chartered by an outside entity** – this method allows outside entities to establish charter schools within the boundaries of a school district without the permission or consent of the school board. This could be disgruntled community members if an attendance center needs to close for budgetary purposes, or due to pushback on attendance center boundaries changed for equity purposes. Universities, businesses, chartering companies, nonprofits and community groups could form charters and could work with businesses that establish charter schools to meet all of the start-up provisions.

Concerns with Charter Schools charters by an outside entity:

* **Rural School Flexibility:** Rural school boards should be in charge of any charter schools in their communities. Provisions of SF 159 expanding flexibility for Public Charter schools are only good if those flexibilities, oversight and authority to charter the school remain with the locally elected school board. We should expand Iowa’s existing charter school law to give that flexibility to school boards. The second chartering method, to allow outside entities to create charter schools without the school board’s authority or consent is not good for Iowa.
* **Four Reasons Charter School Don’t Fit Rural Communities and One Reason They Do** Forbes, Dec. 2017:<https://www.forbes.com/sites/petergreene/2018/12/17/four-reasons-charter-schools-dont-fit-rural-communities-and-one-reason-they-do/?sh=166bf495386e>
  + **Rural Schools Run On Tight Budgets:** “One does not remove a few hundred thousand dollars from a rural school budget without really feeling it. Most rural districts are lean operations already, without fifteen jobs like Assistant Vice-Superintendent in charge of Paper that can be easily absorbed. Transportation may be a huge chunk of the budget, and there really isn't any way to tighten that particular belt. The minute a charter starts "redirecting" tax dollars away from a rural district, that district will feel the hurt.”
  + **Rural Communities Are Limited Markets:** “Charters are launched with primary attention to business concerns, not educational ones. . . If you are hoping, directly or indirectly, to make some money running your charter, there are riper markets to approach than rural ones. Even if you hope to do good, but want to be sure you have a solid financial basis, there are better places to launch than in a rural area.”
  + **When Do Rural Charters Make Good Sense:** “The small community of Tidioute, Pennsylvania, lost its public school due to budget cuts in the larger district of which they were a part. So to keep the heart of their community intact and their children's education local, they re-[opened their local school as a charter school,](http://tidioutecharter.com/index.html) operated and controlled by local folks.
  + It is the one approach to rural chartering that makes sense--***a local school under local control created to meet a local need. That's a good charter fit.” (See Option 1 in the Governor’s Proposal)***
* **Charter Schools from Outsiders is not a good fit for Iowa:** Iowa schools and communities are good at collaborating. We will collectively find the answers to meet the needs of students if state regulations can get out of our way. Charter schools created by outside entities, often for-profit businesses, can create rifts in local communities and draw capacity (staff and students) away from schools facing budget pressures.
* **Charter Schools Increase Property Taxes:** Charter schools have a mixed bag of results and many close. SF 159 allows school boards to request spending authority from the SBRC for the opening/closing of a charter school. Spending authority is funded by Property Taxes. Also, the potential to double count students would increase property taxes. The fiscal note states:

**“**There is a potential for double counting of students for State funding. For the initial year of funding for a charter school, State funding is based on an estimate of enrolled students. The potential students included in the charter school estimate may not actually attend the charter school and would in turn be funded at the school where the student is actually enrolled.”

Charters close or never open due to low enrollment: As reported in [Forbes Sept. 2018](https://www.forbes.com/sites/petergreene/2018/09/28/the-promises-charter-schools-dont-make/?sh=697bbc1a67ad): The Center for Media and Democracy found that (nationally)[about 2,500 charter schools closed between 2000 and 2013](https://www.prwatch.org/node/12936). Some of them closed at the end of the school year, some never opened in the first place, and some closed abruptly in the middle of the year. Charters can close for a variety reasons; this week's closings appear to be due to financial problems because of low enrollment.

**House Members**

To call and leave a message at the statehouse during Session, the House switchboard operator number is 515.281.3221. You can ask if they are available, leave a message for them to call you back, or leave a short message to “oppose any school voucher proposal.” Legislators are typically back home over the weekend.

The following links will take you to each Representative’s legislative page, with email address and often home or cell phone number so you can easily connect with them. Continue to contact House members, especially House Republicans, asking for a NO vote on Vouchers if there was a bill just addressing that provision. Let us know what responses you get back. Remember to be respectful and explain the impact these provisions would have on your school and education for your students.

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