**CALL TO ACTION**

**Education Savings Accounts Governor’s Proposal**

**Jan. 13, 2023**

**Big Picture**: RSAI encourages the legislature to oppose the Governor’s School Choice plan. With tax cuts and the low SSA rates lagging high inflation, we are more discouraged than ever that the State would consider funding a private school initiative that would send public dollars to private schools without accountability. Bills are being considered in both the House and Senate on Education Savings Accounts, [HSB 1](https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislation/BillBook?ga=90&ba=hsb1) and [SSB 1022](https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislation/BillBook?ba=SSB%201022&ga=90) respectively. RSAI is registered in opposition.

**Status:** Action is expected next week in both House and Senate Committees.

Having been considered by the Senate Subcommittee of Sens. Sinclair (C), Donahue, Quirmbach, Rozenboom, and Zaun on Jan. 12, SSB 1022 will move forward to the full Education Committee. The next Senate Education Committee is on the Schedule for Wed., Jan. 18 at 11:00.

For the House version, the Education Reform Committee is scheduled to meet at 2:00, also on Wed., Jan 18. They could meet as a “subcommittee of the whole” since the five committee members are also assigned as subcommittee members, which is a procedural way to combine the subcommittee and committee actions into the same meeting. Education Reform Committee members include Reps. Grassley, Wills, Windschitl, Konfrst, and Cahill.

Since these bills are moving quickly, advocacy actions must be taken this weekend and early into the week. See the [RSAI Position Paper on Opposing School Choice Expansion.](https://nebula.wsimg.com/4bbf3d634e86cf4b9a9e6e9404e463ec?AccessKeyId=D081CCCCA2DCE3941176&disposition=0&alloworigin=1)

**Public Hearing in the House on ESA Proposal**

The House has called for a public hearing on HSB 1 Students First Act, at 5:00 PM in RM 103, Supreme Court Chamber, first floor of the Capitol. Here are the details:

* Speaking time will be 2 minutes per individual and will alternate between pro/con for as long as possible (written testimony is encouraged but not required). If you sign up to speak, you must speak in person at the event.
* The meeting will be live-streamed via YouTube for those that might want to watch. The link will be provided 60 minutes prior to start of the meeting on the Iowa Legislative website, <http://www.legis.iowa.gov>.
* Persons wishing to speak at the public hearing must sign up electronically and indicate their position (con means opposed to the bill, which aligns with RSAI registration) and persons wishing to leave comments may both do so at this public hearing link: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/committees/publicHearings?action=viewOnlineSignup&meetingID=35789>

**Key Messages:**

* Education Savings Accounts shift funds from public schools to private schools, limiting or eliminating programs and opportunities for students in public schools.
* The Governor’s Proposal is costly and expansive, with a fiscal impact between $300-400 million annually, phased in at a time when historic tax cuts are estimated to lower state general fund revenues by $1.8 billion annually, or 20%. If the legislature overextends (not just this proposal but also significant property tax relief), public schools will not be adequately funded. Paying for this program with one-time money does not align with the conservative budgeting principles that positioned Iowa well coming out of the pandemic.
* ESA and voucher programs don’t offer parents real choice. Private schools pick and choose who they accept. Public schools accept ALL students.
* Almost 75% of public schools are in rural areas with little to no access to private schools. Most families will be excluded from participating in a voucher program, but the loss of just a few students in small schools reduces opportunities for the rest. Even without access to private schools, rural students are hurt by this proposal. The State will not be able to adequately fund both education systems as tax cuts are implemented. Rural schools are already cutting staff and programs due to both declining enrollment and funding increases that haven’t kept up with inflation. Rural schools face a teacher shortage. This proposal will only make that worse.
* Vouchers increase costs by creating two competing school systems. This is likely to reduce resources for public schools, which educate 90% of students. Public schools are accountable and transparent to the parents, the community they serve, and the taxpayers who fund them. Private schools do not have the same state requirements for accountability and transparency or oversight by taxpayers.
* Iowa already has many parent choice options.

See the [RSAI Weekly Report from Jan. 13, 2023](https://www.rsaia.org/2023-legislative-session.html) for a bill summary and additional RSAI concerns.

Find your Representatives here: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/house>

Find your Senator’s contact information here: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/senate>

Reach them at home over the weekend. To call and leave a message at the Statehouse, 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 just leave a short message such as “please oppose the Governor’s expansive and fiscally irresponsible school choice proposal that hurts rural schools.” (Legislators are typically at the Capitol from Monday midday through Thursday afternoon.)