**CALL TO ACTION UDATE**

**Charter Schools Are Not for Iowa**

**March 5, 2021**

**The House’s Charter School Bill, HSB 242 awaiting a new bill number, was approved by the House Education Committee March 3 on party lines, placing it on the House Debate Calendar.**

The bill contains two kinds of charter schools; 1) chartered by the local school board and approved by the state board of education and 2) chartered by an outside entity known as a founding group model and approved by the state board. Details of the bill regarding the “founding group model.”

* Establishes a Founding Group-state board model (new attendance center, not authorized by the school district). This provision includes the same requirements for application but no vote of parents or teachers is required
* Provides for a Charter school contract; requires DE to enter into a contract with approved charter school within 30 days, allows the initial contract for ten school budget years, allows delay of start up by one year, with the ability to request an extension if need more time.
* The bill defines “founding group” as a person, group of persons, or education service provider that develops and submits an application for a charter school to the state board.
* Possible chartering founding groups:university or college, private corporation related to the community, disgruntled parent group over a boundary or school closure, nonprofit, education management organization (EMO), former teachers or administrator, former school board members, community college, city or county, maybe even the state.
* Governance:the bill defines the “Governing Board” to mean the independent board of a charter school whose members are elected or selected pursuant to the charter school contract.

RSAI opposes 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 HSB 242 expanding flexibility for Public Charter schools are only good if those flexibilities, oversight and authority to charter 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.
* **Public Oversight:** taxpayer dollars should be overseen by locally elected public officials like school boards. We don’t need an “education management organization” with no Iowa connections telling Iowans what’s best for our students.
* We already have a public school charter law in Iowa.
* Districts are already providing innovative, personalized instructional opportunities to help our students be successful in the 21st century and beyond.
* Share what your district does that helps your students prepare for the future such as:
  + Innovative program offerings
  + Personalized instruction opportunities
  + Concurrent enrollment opportunities
  + Career or technical academies
  + Collaborations with local businesses or apprenticeship programs
* **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 Increase Property Taxes:** Charter schools have a mixed bag of results and many close. HSB 242 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 the Founding Group Charter Model. 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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