



## February 2015 Newsletter



### The Legislative Session Has Begun!

#### We Hope You'll Join Us For The "Education Celebration" On March 3!

IACS is a proud part of the school choice coalition under the umbrella of [Iowa Alliance for Choice in Education \(Iowa ACE\)](#) and its sister organization, [Iowa Advocates For Choice in Education](#). Together, they host an "Education Celebration" at the Capitol each year. This year, with all the momentum on school choice, **we need all hands on deck for this event!**

We need you to make it a priority to be at the "Education Celebration" at the State Capitol on Tuesday, March 3! The purpose of the day is to visit with our legislators and show them how parental choice in education benefits children, families and the state of Iowa! **Arrive around 10:00 AM** for fellowship and lobbying time and **stick around for the noon rally** featuring Keynote Speaker Virginia Walden Ford, the powerful force behind the creation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarships Program.

This is also an amazing opportunity to plan a tour of the Capitol and the Capitol grounds. Bring yourself or bring an entire class (or your entire school!). We can't overstate what a big deal this event is.

Our attendance goal is 1,000 supporters - be a part of this important day! If you're bringing a group, please notify Trish Wilger at [twilger@iowaace.org](mailto:twilger@iowaace.org). She may have support for transportation expenses. Please visit [www.iowaace.org](http://www.iowaace.org) for more information.

See you under the golden dome!

#### IACS Priorities This Legislative Session

Since our [last newsletter](#), the legislative session has taken off. This session has started much quicker for IACS than most sessions and movement on education bills is happening daily. We are tracking fewer overall bills this year but the issues we are facing are larger. Between working on sunset removal for independent accreditation, Education Savings Accounts, STO support, textbook and transportation funding, school start date (see the section on this later in the newsletter), and a handful of other technical issues; we are still very busy advocating for your school this year.

Our priorities remain the same this year: support your accreditation choices, advance school choice, and avoid unfunded mandates or regulatory changes that negatively affect your mission as a Christ-centered school.

We will be posting guidance, topics for discussion, and updates on frequently asked questions on the [members section](#) of the IACS website. Got questions about start date, early literacy, or other issues? Check there first!

If you are a parent or community member with questions, you can always contact us at the email address at the end of this newsletter. We are here for you! Keep an eye out for action alerts (be sure to [sign up](#) on our website for these!) on key issues this legislative session. There will be times we need your help! Thank you in advance!

## 2015 ABCs of School Choice

The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice publishes “The ABCs of School Choice” each year outlining every school choice program in the country, grouped by State. We are proud of the entry for Iowa, which now reflects our independent accreditation, growth of the STO tax credit, and our universally available tuition and textbook tax credit that has been on the books for many years.

The Friedman Foundation has been one of our strongest supporters in Iowa as we pursue school choice for all Iowa parents. Their research and technical assistance to state organizations like Iowa ACE and its coalition members is invaluable.

Please check out the the [2015 “The ABCs of School Choice.”](#) on their website! It will help you appreciate Iowa’s progress on the issue and give you a feel for what other States are doing.

## IACS Member Website Launched!

We have had a new website now for a while and it has been met with great reviews. We aren’t resting on our laurels, however.

[Our Member’s-Only section of the website is active!](#) Please let us know if you are having any issues logging in or have any questions or suggestions.

Make sure you are not logging in at our main website but that you are visiting [members.iowachristianschools.org](http://members.iowachristianschools.org) to use the username and password you should have received in late December. Both have log-ins but only the members section will work with your username and password.

You can already find some helpful files in the resources and forum sections!

## Education Savings Accounts Explained

The Catholic Messenger in Davenport published [a great article](#) on an ESA informational meeting held at Assumption High School recently. IACS lobbyist Eric Goranson, Iowa Catholic Conference Director Tom Chapman, and Iowa ACE’s Trish Wilger addressed ESAs and other issues to over 100 parents from local Catholic, Lutheran, and other Christian Schools in the area. [You can read the article here.](#)

## School Start Date

The school start date debate has been heating up since the Governor instructed the Department of Education to change school start date policy in December.

Proponents of a later start date, now set in stone to be after Sept. 1, claim that students are served best by being able to participate in educational events (i.e. State Fair). The tourism industry makes the case that it needs inexpensive student labor.

Our position is that parents and educators are best able to make decisions that directly impact their students’ education. We believe that our schools must be responsive to the desires of our parents. We also believe that locally elected school boards are the best place to determine start dates for public schools based on their local realities. It’s about local control. It’s about setting a precedent for who makes educational decisions for children (special interests or parents and educators?).

We have been supporting companion bills in the House and Senate that repeal the start date provisions in the Code and return the decision making to local parents and school boards.

Unfortunately, the State Fair and tourism industry have been working

equally hard to keep the start date set no sooner than September.

It is becoming apparent that neither chamber of the legislature has it in them to ultimately support full repeal. Currently, there is a proposal in the House that would set the school start date at August 23. We believe this is too late and are pushing for a more reasonable compromise. We do not support a compromise that sets the date too late nor will we support tying start date to any special interest’s whims.

Many of our parents support a later start date. Some prefer it earlier. Different parts of the State have different local realities. We hope that everyone can agree that a few men in a board room in Des Moines or a few legislators in the Capitol building should not be able to determine a one-size-fits-all policy for our schools. These decisions should be made at the local level, where parents and educators have a greater voice and are more easily heard. Iowa business interests will and should adjust. Parental rights and our children’s academic success are far more important than anyone’s pocketbook.

IACS member schools can find more information and commentary on the [member’s section](#) of the IACS website.

## Congratulations to The STOs!

The School Tuition Organizations (STOs) had \$12 million in available tax credits to distribute in tax year 2014 and that goal was met! Thanks to generous donors, thousands of Iowa children will be able to attend the nonpublic school of their parents’ choice. If you’d like more information on this incredible program that benefits students and taxpayers alike, check out the [latest newsletter](#) on Iowa ACE’s website.

## IACS Online

Check out our website! You can keep track of IACS' efforts at [www.iowachristianschools.org](http://www.iowachristianschools.org). Learn more about IACS and sign up to receive email updates and alerts. If your school is not listed or needs updating, please let us know.

“Follow” IACS on [Twitter](#).

“Like” us on [Facebook](#).

“Follow” us on [Google+](#).

## IACS Membership

Your school should have received this year's request for dues. We appreciate those that have already responded, **thank you!** We can't effectively represent the interests of your school at the capitol without your school's participation! **We need your help to protect the rights of Christian schools in Iowa.**

As an example of the value of IACS membership: every year IACS defeats numerous unfunded mandates at the Iowa Capitol. Just *one* of these mandates would cost your school significantly more than its IACS dues for the year! Add to this significant victories on accreditation and school choice issues and IACS membership is a great value. Join us as we work for you. Contact us for more information.



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