



2016 End of Session Newsletter



Independent Accreditation Victory!

Ten years ago, IACS made getting “independent accreditation” its top priority. After seven years, the legislature passed independent accreditation into law as part of the 2013 education reform bill with a “sunset” provision ending the program in 2020 barring further action.

This year, on the last day of the session, the legislature passed a budget bill with language that included striking the sunset provision from Code. Independent accreditation, once signed by the Governor, will now be there for our schools for the foreseeable future.

For many decades, Iowa was the only State in the country that required accreditation by the state itself to participate in a broad array of programing, including sports, textbooks & transportation funding, STO tax credit scholarships, AEA support, etc.

The six independent accreditation agencies recognized by the Department of Education align with each other, provide a higher bar for our schools, and understand the unique nature of private schools.

After ten sessions of advocacy, we are pleased to report that this priority is achieved and we can build on this accomplishment moving forward! There is still much work to do!

A special thank you to Reps. Greg Heartsill, Joel Fry, and Majority Leader Chris Hagenow for making this happen. We also appreciate Rep. Cecil Dolecheck for initially helping us get this program created in 2013.

Status Quo Appropriations

In contrast to the victory on independent accreditation, we were disappointed that there was no action on additional funding for nonpublic students and parents. Current levels were maintained.

Thousands sent messages to their legislator on these issues through the combined efforts of IACS, the Iowa Catholic Conference, and Iowa Alliance for Choice in Education (Iowa ACE). Legislators were able to find at least \$150 million in new funding for public schools and the Governor’s budget included \$90,000 in additional funds for nonpublic textbook & technology funding but this was stripped out by the House and Senate early in the education appropriations process.

We will continue to request the legislature fund its commitments it has already made to Iowa’s nonpublic school students. The state has committed to funding the transportation of students to and from our schools but has consistently underfunded it. It has committed to providing reasonable funding for textbook and classroom technology but has lost ground as inflation has outpaced increases.

We believe Iowa’s nonpublic school students are a valuable asset to the state, save the state countless dollars in state aid and other services, and deserve a portion of our tax dollars to help offset the huge investments you make in their education.

Smarter Balanced Delay

Nothing has changed as of the publishing of this newsletter on standardized testing rules or funding. It's status quo for now.

The Iowa legislature delayed implementation of Smarter Balanced after public and private school advocates, including IACS, raised questions about cost, bandwidth and computer infrastructure, test quality, and the state of the consortium itself.

We believe Iowa's nonpublic schools are not and should not be under obligation to offer any specific test that may or may not align with our curriculum and high standards.

We will continue working with the legislature and the Department of Education on this issue. Please work through IACS if you have questions or concerns.

Other Updates

There are a number of other issues we worked on or watched this session. Here are just a few:

ESA Update - The Iowa House proposed a compromise ESA Pilot program this year for low-income children in the Waterloo and Sioux Center school districts. This proposal passed subcommittee but was not considered by the full appropriations committee. The pilot would have cost less than \$1 million. We supported the bill, had some concerns about details in the proposal, but hoped it would get more consideration than it did this year. Special thank you to Rep. Walt Rogers, Rep. Jake Highfill, and Senator Behn for their work on this issue over the last few years.

We believe this is the future of school choice in Iowa. It will work hand-in-hand with the STO tax credit.

Tax Credits - The STO tax credit was not increased this year and remains at the current level.

Transportation & Textbook Funding - The Governor's budget this year included a modest increase in textbook funding but it was not included in the final budget.

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IACS Consultant/Lobbyist

Eric Goranson
[Goranson Consulting, Inc.](http://GoransonConsulting,Inc)

Contact Us

We have a new address!

Iowa Association of Christian Schools
PO Box 12028
Des Moines, Iowa 50312

info@iowachristianschools.org
www.iowachristianschools.org

