

# Iowa Association of Christian Schools

## February 2014 Edition



[www.iowachristianschools.org](http://www.iowachristianschools.org)

## Education Savings Account Legislation Introduced!

### ESA Legislation Introduced!

We have known that a sea-change in education policy as big as Education Savings Accounts was going to take time, education, and huge grassroots support.

This year, for the first time, Iowa's school choice coalition introduced [ESA legislation](#) in the Iowa House with the help of Representatives Chris Hagenow (R-Windsor Heights), Peter Cownie (R-West Des Moines), and Jake Highfill (R-Johnston). It passed out of subcommittee and is currently in the House Education Committee.

Although the bill's future is uncertain, our primary goal this session was to introduce the legislation, demonstrate that Iowans are behind ESAs, and answer questions. The response to our [action alerts](#) was **HUGE!** We are fairly certain no other constituency group in Iowa can generate the kind of response they got from you and for that we are extremely grateful.

Thousands of emails were sent to Representatives in the first 72 hours after the alert went out! Between your emails and recent polls showing Iowans overwhelmingly support universal school choice, the remaining hurdles left to clear are the simple fact that ESAs are a new idea and intense opposition from special interest groups vested in making sure only public schools receive support.

The biggest argument against ESAs is that it will take funds away from public schools, which is false. Over the last number of years, education spending in Iowa has increased dramatically, totaling over half of Iowa's

budget, which is rapidly closing in on \$7 billion. We believe the cost of ESA legislation would be less than the ongoing annual cost of last year's ed reform and smaller than the increases in education spending many are advocating for this year. We have the luxury of seeing what impact school choice programs have had in other states. Research clearly shows school choice improves outcomes in public and in private schools. We believe that improving student outcomes is critical and that universal school choice is the single best way to accomplish that goal.

We are very well positioned to advance this issue moving forward! Your support of school choice organizations like [Iowa Advocates](#) (and their PAC) and your willingness to contact your legislators will ensure we continue to make progress. This may not be quick and easy to accomplish - but this is worthwhile.

### Education Celebration Coming March 6

Iowa ACE's annual **Education Celebration** is coming to the Iowa State Capitol on **Thursday, March 6!** Please come at 10:00AM and plan on staying through the rally, which should end around 1:00PM.

This is a great opportunity to bring a group of students, get a tour of the Capitol, visit with your legislators, and show your support for school choice in Iowa! Will you plan on joining us?!

You can read more about it on the [Iowa Advocates for Choice in Education website](#). We hope to see you there!

February 14, 2014

## ESA Bill Introduced In The Senate!

Last year, Senator Jerry Behn (R-Boone) agreed to introduce and champion Education Savings Account legislation. Senator Behn also introduced the ESA legislation as an amendment late in the session and it failed on a bipartisan, tie vote. Although disappointed it didn't pass, we were very encouraged by the progress in our first year working on the issue.

This year, Senator Behn [introduced](#) a new version of the ESA bill, co-sponsored by every Republican in the Senate. We appreciate his support and the willingness of each of the 24 co-sponsors to sign on. We will continue working with Iowa Advocates for Choice in Education and the Iowa Catholic Conference on this legislation. Leadership in the Senate does not appear willing to move the legislation currently.

We thank Senator Behn and the other co-sponsors for their support of the bill. You can read the bill [[SF 2154](#)] and the list of co-sponsors on the legislative website.

## Where Are Iowans On School Choice?

[The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice](#) recently worked with a reputable national polling firm to conduct a [survey](#) of a broad cross-section of Iowans on school choice. The survey showed that Iowans generally like their local public schools *and* want to see school choice expanded in Iowa. This was very good news! Here is a breakdown of some of the results:

- When asked which issues were most important to the State, education was second only to economy/jobs.

- Iowans, unlike most every other state surveyed, show solid support for both public *and* private schools.

- Iowans clearly favor universal school choice.

## IACS Website Redesign!

We have a [new website!](#) Please take a minute to familiarize yourself with our new website. We made it simple and added features; including a blog, an action alert center/email sign up, and a much easier navigation.

We'd love your feedback on the new website and any ideas to improve it.

## Iowa ACE Needs Your Help

[Iowa ACE](#)/Advocates is gearing up for a busy year. They are looking for opportunities to get in front of community groups, business leaders, parent groups, and anyone else that may be a school choice supporter to tell our story, educate Iowans about the ESA proposal, and ask for support.

Some of our IACS schools and STO leaders have been asked to help in very specific ways and we are grateful many are doing so. Would you be willing to host someone from [Iowa Advocates for Choice in Education](#) for an informational meeting and invite community leaders, school families, board members, or others? No group is too small or too large.

They will be asking those in attendance to sign up for email alerts, to volunteer, and to financially support Iowa ACE and its political action committee. Please contact us if you are interested in helping.

## ESA Numbers: The Real Story

Many have received emails from legislators after responding to our action alert earlier this month. In those emails, legislators have mentioned a number of figures. We want to clarify the context of those numbers so, if you choose, you are able to reply with accurate information:

Some estimate ESAs could cost \$207 million. Although theoretically possible, similar programs implemented in other states demonstrate not every private school family and a small percentage of public school families will utilize the program, putting the realistic annual cost of the program at a level that is less than last year's ed reform bill and less than many of the numbers being discussed for allowable growth this year.

Some claim ESAs would divert money from public schools. There is no mechanism in the bill to divert money from public schools. Public schools will still receive local property taxes, their local option sales tax, and other State revenues regardless of where children attend school. We have not seen any choice program with negative consequences for public school budgets or, more importantly, student achievement.

Some mentioned State support of non-publics is already at \$37 million. Although we are unsure of their breakdown, please keep in mind that \$12 million is our STO tax credit (no direct expense to the State), over \$9 million is a reimbursement to public school districts for transportation, and the textbook appropriation is limited to \$20 per student.

The ESA concept is cost effective, true ed reform that respects the role of parents. It is also a fraction of the cost public K-12 schools receive (currently over 50% of a \$6.5 billion budget).

## IACS Online

Check out our **NEW** 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](#).

## 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 Brad Vis at (712) 476-2615 for information.



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