



The Iowa Association of School Boards is registered opposed to SSB 1065 for a multitude of reasons. Below are our specific comments on the bill. Based on these comments, we respectfully ask that you oppose SSB 1065.

Division I: Student First Scholarships

Student First Scholarships are just vouchers by another name. Public dollars should be for public schools. The public's investment should be used to support public community schools which are open to all students regardless of race, religion, gender, socio-economic status and disability, not for a new entitlement program for parents who choose private education.

Public funds require public accountability and transparency. Public schools are overseen by a publicly elected citizen governing board, are required to report academic results to the general public, have an annual public financial audit, and be transparent with all expenditures and decision-making. Private and religious schools are not held to that same public standard. Taxpayers have a right to know how their funds are being used but are left in the dark about the use and impact of voucher funds.

This proposal is a slippery slope toward a costly and expansive voucher program. This voucher program may start small, but as we've seen in other states, once a program is established, it is easy to expand. This will pull more resources away from public schools.

Vouchers for private schools, as outlined in this bill, could cost the state as much as \$54 million if every eligible student takes advantage of this program. This funnels taxpayer monies to private schools who do not have to accept every student or provide public oversight of how they operate. Additionally, it allows taxpayer money to cover the cost of things like tutoring, curriculum materials and AP exams for students in private schools. Many public school parents have to cover these expenses out of their own pockets.

In addition, voucher money can be "banked" if the voucher exceeds the costs of attending a private school and used for community college or post-secondary education. Basically, the taxpayer is now subsidizing a child's further education if they attend a private school. Our public school students don't get the same advantage.

Even more concerning is that the bill explicitly says that the state or any political subdivision of the state cannot exercise its authority over any private school or require a private school to modify its academic standards to receive payment from parents/guardians under this fund.

Division II: Charter School Programs

SSB 1065 gives broad new authority for private entities to use public taxpayer dollars to create charter schools outside the auspices of local school board oversight. Research shows that charter schools don't outperform public schools. They are just another attempt to use public dollars for private education.

While a charter school is subject to the same financial audits, audit procedures and audit requirements as a public school district, it doesn't have to follow the same the rules. In fact, this bill specifically exempts a charter school from all state statutes and rules and any local rules, regulations or policies that a public school must comply with except federal, state and local health and safety requirements; laws prohibiting discrimination and laws related to civil and human rights.

Iowa already provides the opportunity for local school boards to establish a charter school within the district's boundaries. We don't need to allow out-of-state, for-profit companies to use Iowa taxpayer dollars.

Division III: Voluntary Diversity Plans

The five districts with voluntary diversity plans review open enrollment requests to determine the impact it will have on the diversity in a specific building. The key factor is socio-economic status and English language status. The research is clear that maintaining a balance in a classroom of students of all socio-economic statuses has a positive impact on student achievement. Elimination of the ability to review and accept or deny an open enrollment request will negatively impact the ability of these districts to minimize a concentration of low-income or English-language learner students.

Division IV: Education Information, Program Standards and Funding

SSB 1065 directs the DE to develop a single, statewide electronic data collection and information processing system to be used by all public school districts and accredited private schools. The system must be compatible with those used by post-secondary institutions and community colleges in Iowa. This would replace systems individually maintained by districts and provide an easier mechanism for the transfer of student records. While we can support such an initiative, we would need more information about the cost for each district to maintain their current systems, what the cost of the new, statewide system would be and how much of that cost will be charged back to districts who are mandated to use it. In addition, the authority for the DE to charge a per pupil fee for the use of this mandated system is only limited in the first year. Increasing that fee in subsequent years should be subject to rulemaking and based on the full disclosure of costs for the system.

The bill also proposes more flexibility for public school districts and accredited private schools to establish and fund innovative programs to implement evidence-based practices to enhance student learning, well-being and post-secondary success. Flexibility and the implementation of innovative practices, as determined by the district, have the potential to provide additional educational opportunities within the framework of the public school system. We also support allowing the transfer

of unobligated teacher salary supplement funds and teacher leadership compensation funds into a district's flexibility account.

Division VI: Student Enrollment

This bill would change how a district calculates their enrollment for purposes of determining state funding. We understand that this change is to provide on-time funding for those school districts with growing enrollments. Those schools already have that mechanism. They can request spending authority from the School Budget Review Committee.

This comprehensive change in how districts determine enrollment should be further examined before becoming law. IASB recommends that a work group of school finance experts, managed by the legislative fiscal bureau, study the benefits and the downsides to changing how enrollment is calculated. This should include a review of:

- On-time funding. As noted above, this is currently in place as the SBRC grants spending authority.
- Options to provide funding for increased enrollment that school year rather than just granting spending authority.
- Budget guarantee review including the impact it has on districts and how it is implemented.
- In some cases, money follows the student and in some cases, it doesn't. A review of why that is and if it needs to be changed.
- Look at average daily attendance as a factor for the enrollment count.

Division VII: Open Enrollment

SSB 1065 makes changes to the open enrollment process to provide more parental choice. Currently, the open enrollment request deadline is March 1 unless the student meets the good cause exception. The governor proposes an April 15 deadline for an open enrollment request out of a district if the student's assigned attendance center is:

- Identified as in significant need for improvement by the DE for at least two years immediately preceding the request; OR
- Identified for comprehensive support and improvement under ESSA for two or more of the immediately preceding years.

IASB does not think this is necessary. This list may be updated after the March 1 deadline but because the good cause exception requires an attendance center to be on the list for at least two years preceding the request, the additional deadline is not necessary. 282.18, subsection 4(a) already allows a parent to make an open enrollment request after the March 1 deadline under the good cause exception. This bill adds to the list of good cause exceptions schools on either the state or federal list identified as in need of improvement. Providing a second date for open enrollment requests complicates school budgeting decisions. School budgets must be certified by April 15.

Finally, IASB opposes eliminating the 90-day waiting period for athletic eligibility in open enrollment transfers. This bill would completely eliminate the ability of the IGHSAU or the Iowa High School

Athletic Association to regulate the eligibility of students who transfer from one school to another, even in the middle of a season. A student could literally switch schools at will and be immediately eligible for competition. Recruiting has become a major issue across the nation and even here in Iowa.

This would be nothing short of catastrophic for high school sports.

Division VIII - School Board Powers and Duties

SSB 1065 adds language to the powers and duties of school boards to explicitly state that the role of the school board is to improve student outcomes. We would submit to you that school boards already know that this is their primary responsibility. The addition of this language to the code doesn't change that.