

SF 159 voucher plan would divert funds and diminish equal opportunity

Strengthening public schools for everyone is Iowa's responsibility

High-quality public education gives every student an equal chance in life, regardless of their race, income or where they live. By taking money from public schools to pay tuition at private schools and loosening open enrollment rules, Governor Reynolds' proposal, SF 159, would deprive neighborhood public schools, and the communities that depend on them, of resources students need to learn and succeed.

Lawmakers should reject this massive and flawed education policy and funding package.

- ▶ **It fundamentally changes — and jeopardizes — Iowa's long-standing commitment** to free universal public education and equal opportunity for every Iowa child, supported by both state and local taxes.
- ▶ **It diverts taxpayer dollars to private schools** that Iowa taxpayers have no responsibility to support, while shortchanging public responsibilities shared by every taxpayer. Vouchers — like any bad public subsidy — are giveaways of tax dollars without public accountability or public purpose.
- ▶ **It diminishes equity** when we should be enhancing it. While small steps toward equity in school transportation funding have begun, this bill blows other equity concerns out of the water:
 - **Vouchers offer no benefit** to students in areas without private schools, and diverting funding will make it more difficult for public schools to serve students in every neighborhood in the state — although they are most likely to hurt schools in Black and brown communities where lost dollars will force administrators to cut corners.
 - **Loosening open enrollment would hasten further racial segregation** and undermine the sense of community that starts in our schools even more than open enrollment does now. Diversity plans are a tool to keep all families in a community together, behind shared goals and responsibilities to provide the strongest schools for every Iowa child.
- ▶ **Iowa already is generous to private schools** through a variety of policies costing over \$65 million annually, mostly from the state budget (see the LSA's October 2019 Issue Review for more on this topic). The creation of a voucher system, however, is a radical departure from just offsetting selected costs. Vouchers take funds designated for public education and pass them on to private schools.
- ▶ **It's expensive in its first year — estimated at over \$50 million — and almost certain to expand.** Already we have seen this with the "voucher-light" program already in place: School Tuition Organization tax credits in Iowa have tripled in cost despite early assurances of their limited use. One senator announced during the subcommittee meeting on this bill that it didn't go far enough. Those who would divert money intended for public education want vouchers for private schools expanded once they are established. This legislation is the foot in the door.