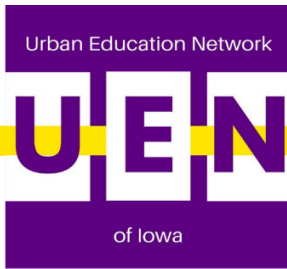


Urban Education Network Legislative Priorities for 2022 Session

(Approved by Steering Committee Nov. 17, 2021.)

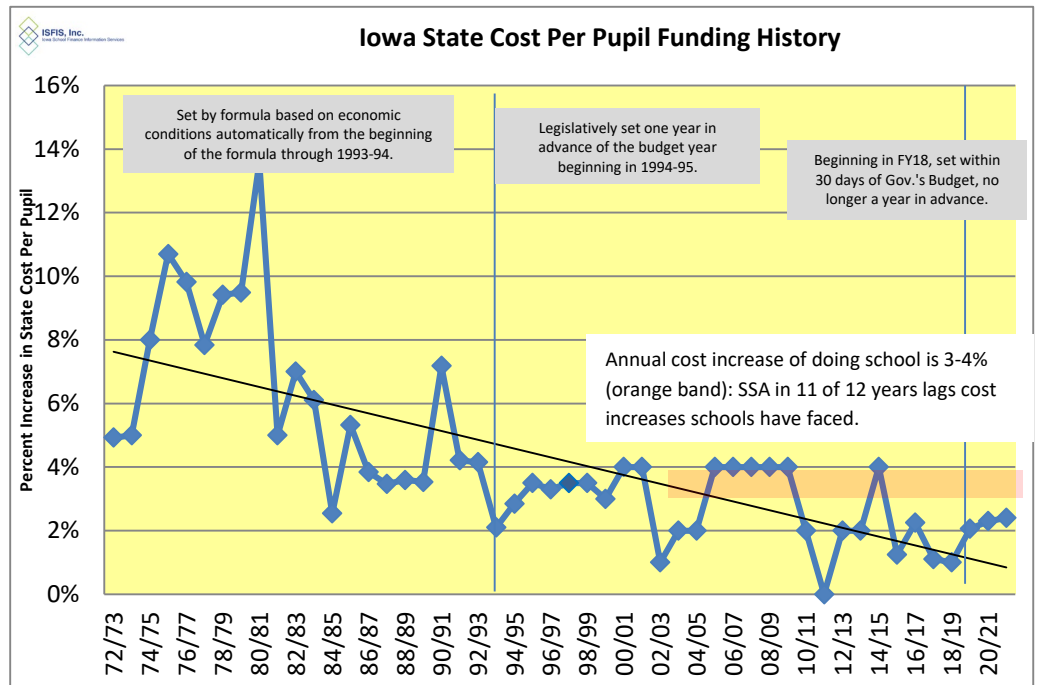
- **Invest in Iowa's Future:** provide adequate school funding with SSA set at 5.0% including a minimum of 3.75% SSA for inflationary costs and competitive wage and benefits for staff and additional 1.25% SSA for childcare and workforce pipeline challenges for 2022-23 school year. Funding should be set predictably, timely, sustainably and equitably. Continued progress on the inequity within the formula is important. Districts need adequate funding to address growing inflation and teacher and staff shortages in Iowa's competitive employment economy.
- **Student Opportunity Equity:** close achievement gaps by increasing resources in the short term for English-language learners, minority students and early childhood/preschool with a long-term focus on low-income and at-risk students. Preschool budget protections from enrollment swings; including state funding for 2021-22 PK enrollment growth if federal funding is not forthcoming.
- **Teacher, Administrator, Staff Shortage:** promote staff diversity and talent, waiver of one-year experience for licensure reciprocity in recruiting diverse staff to better reflect diversity in student populations, flexibility in hiring, loan forgiveness programs and hiring retirees without negative IPERS implications. Iowa's Future Ready Workforce should include an educator focus to replenish the talent pool and attract high school and college students to a career in education.
- **Mental Health Services:** structure and funding to eliminate the shortage of professionals. Funds to provide case management and service coordination is required when Medicaid, special education or other categorical funds do not cover it. School districts require capacity and/or funding to provide 1) transition support and services for students returning to school after a mental health placement, 2) ongoing teacher, administrator, and support staff training to improve awareness and understanding of child social emotional, behavioral and mental health needs, 3) actionable classroom strategies to address student needs, and 4) integration of mental health promotion into instruction when appropriate.
- **District Authority:** Home Rule in Iowa Code 274.3 requires liberally construing the laws affecting schools to effectuate the purposes of local control. UEN makes a strong statement that the legislature and governor should focus their efforts on flexibility rather than state-mandated one-size-fits-all action. A specific ask: request flexibility to use school general fund to pay for expanded preschool slots.



UEN 2022 Priority Issue Brief Adequate Education Resources

History: This chart shows the historical percentage increase in Iowa's state cost per pupil, called State Supplemental Assistance or SSA, since the funding formula began in 1972-73:

Current reality: Annual cost increases have not been enough to pay for staff salaries sufficient to compete with the private sector, employee benefits, and all of the other costs of operating schools and meeting student needs. Few or no applicants for all, especially urban districts, demonstrates the inability to compete for human capital in Iowa's growing economy. SSA impacts the



weightings, or multipliers, assigned to students with special education needs, English-language learner supports, college credit courses and preschool, providing resources for student programs.

The SSA funding percentage is also applied to Teacher Salary, Professional Development, Teacher Leadership and Compensation (TLC) and the new Transportation Supplements. Although the transportation funds are for any general fund purpose (considered as reimbursement), other categorical funds are regulated for specific purposes. AEA special education and school improvement are also dependent on adequate increases in the per pupil amount and state and federal unfunded mandates are paid from this funding. When school costs increase more than funding, program and staff reductions follow. Declining enrollment requires even further reduction. Although growing enrollment demands additional staff and supports, those are compromised with low SSA.

COVID-19: Schools are still striving to replace retirees or hire long-term substitutes to fill in when staff are ill or have not returned to teaching. Schools not benefitting much from federal pandemic funds based on the Title I formula still have additional costs and labor shortages due to the pandemic. Districts with high poverty have additional pandemic educational needs. Without adequate funds, urban districts cannot pay a competitive wage and attract quality staff to our schools; this dynamic has intensified due to the pandemic. See the UEN Staff Shortage position paper for additional data regarding staff shortages.

Other State Comparisons: First, from 2019 US Census data, May 2021

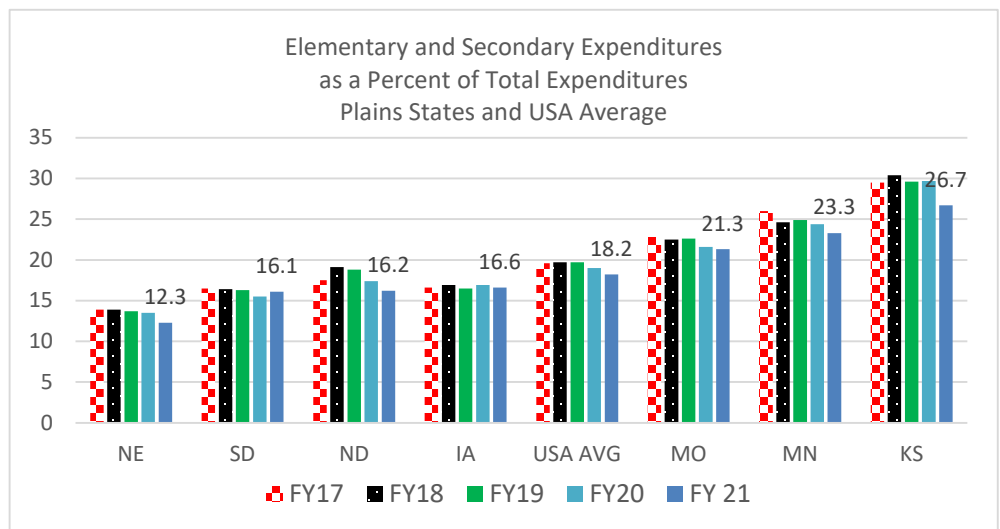
<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2019/econ/school-finances/secondary-education-finance.html>

- Iowa slipped to 30th in per pupil public elementary and secondary school system expenditures, which is \$1,280 below the national average.
- Since 2014, Iowa elementary and secondary education spending has increased 11.6%, while the national average increase has been 19.9%. In the Midwest region, Nebraska is the only state outpaced by Iowa. Iowa ranks 40th nationally in the per pupil expenditure *increase* since 2014.

A true apples-to-apples comparison shows what percent of total state resources are spent on education. The NASBO (National Association of State Budget Officers) annual [State Expenditure Report](#) analyzes all state expenditures:

- In FY 2021, Iowa's education expenditures were 16.5% of total state expenditures. Plains states averaged 18.2%. All states averaged 18.9%.

- Iowa's 2021 drop of 0.3% was not as steep as the national average decline as a percentage of total expenditures, which was a reduction of 0.8%.



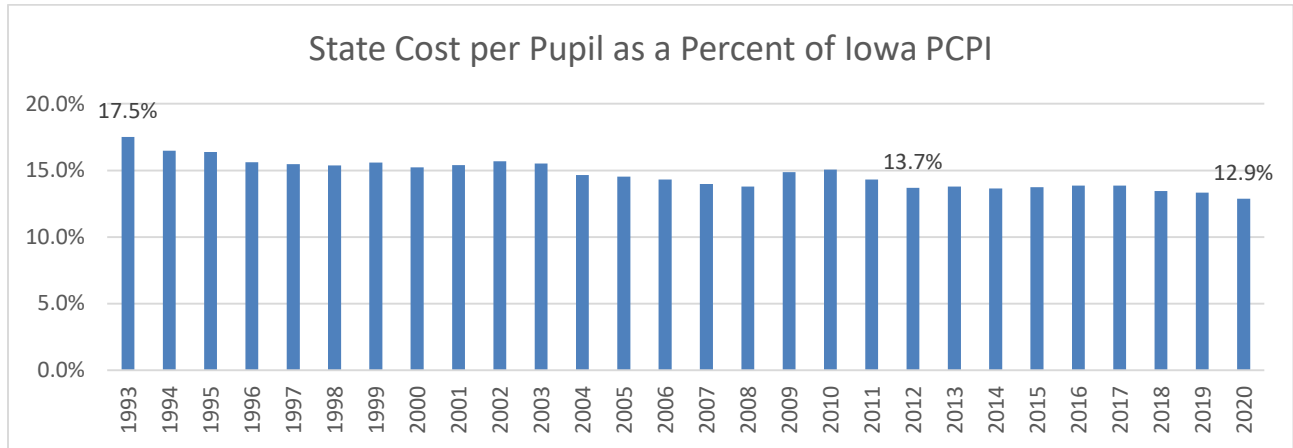
- Iowa's formula has become increasingly state-funded.

- Iowa's ability to maintain 16.6% in FY 2020 may be due in most part to the property tax relief portion of the formula (property tax relief payment.)

Benchmarks/Economic Measures for Comparison: When comparing the state cost per pupil to economic benchmarks and other states, Iowa school funding falls short. Economic benchmarks:

- ❖ The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for Iowa grew 30.5%, controlling for inflation, 2011 to 2020, compared to the state cost per pupil, which grew 16.9% over the same period. <https://www.bea.gov/sites/default/files/2021-09/qgdpstate1021.pdf>
- ❖ Expressing the state cost per pupil as a percentage of one billion GDP shows a disturbing trend. In the 1990s, the SCPP ranged between 52-44% of one billion GDP. In the 2000s, the SCPP ranged from 45-37% of one billion GDP. Since 2010, the SCPP has ranged from 37-34% of one billion GDP; the last six years show the lowest comparison in the formula's history.
- ❖ Iowa Per Capita Personal Income increased 40%, 2010-2020, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/> while the state cost per pupil increased 19% over the same decade.

This chart shows the ratio of the State Cost per Pupil as a percentage of Iowa's per capita personal income (PCPI) from 1993 to 2020. The 12.9% found in 2020 is the lowest comparison in the history of the funding formula. Source for PCPP <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/IAPCPI>



Impact: Efforts to educate students, prepare a qualified workforce, and deliver the excellent educational outcomes to which Iowans are accustomed will be compromised if the basic foundation of school funding is not sustained. There are not enough qualified applicants to fill school jobs, generally indicating that the profession of teaching is being outpaced in the marketplace. Class sizes are going up. Programs are being eliminated. Districts are offering fewer extracurricular and fine arts opportunities for students, especially in middle school. Investments in Iowa schools will return economic benefits to taxpayers and Iowa's business community. Many of this year's kindergarten students will be entering the workforce in 2035. They will be Iowa's caregivers, entrepreneurs, welders, lawyers, doctors and computer scientists. They will teach the next generation of students. Our investment today will improve the quality of life for all Iowans in the future.

Invest in Iowa's Future: provide adequate school funding with SSA set at 5.0%, including a minimum of 3.75% SSA for inflationary costs and competitive wage and benefits for staff, and an additional 1.25% SSA for childcare and workforce pipeline challenges for 2022-23 school year. Funding should be set predictably, timely, sustainably and equitably. Continued progress on the inequity within the formula is important. Districts need adequate funding to address growing inflation and teacher and staff shortages in Iowa's competitive employment economy.

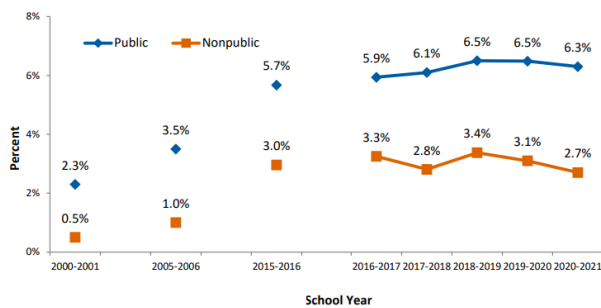
UEN 2022 Priority Issue Brief: English Language Learner Supports

Services for ELL Students: The Urban Education Network (UEN) supports additional funding no lower than the national average (0.39) for ELL programming and state/regional capacity to assist districts with ELL students to improve instruction and evaluate programs for best practice. Students should be eligible for service for up to seven years based on their mastery of academic language at grade level. UEN supports flexibility for districts to best use funds to meet the needs of students and recognition of factors such as low income in meeting the learning needs of non-English speaking students.

Enrollment of English Learners

Figure 1-4

Percent of Public and NonPublic School K-12 Students who are English Learners 2000-2001, 2005-2006, 2015-2016, 2016-2017 to 2020-2021



Source: Iowa Department of Education, Bureau of Information and Analysis Services, and SRI.

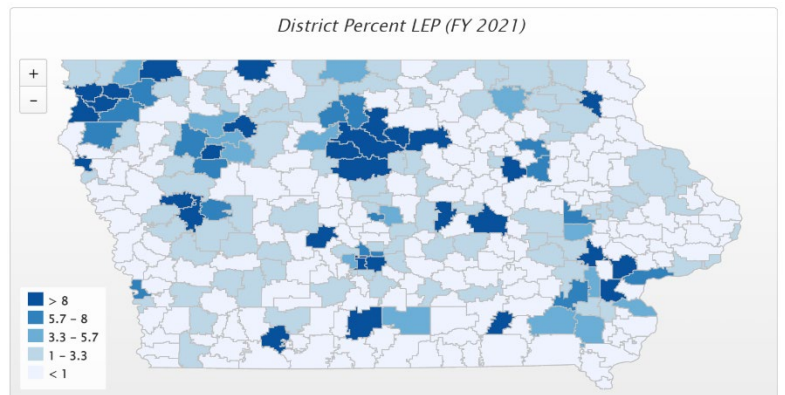
ELL Enrollment Growth

The number of students who are English language learners (ELL) continues to increase. In the 2020-21 school year, 6.3% of students were reported as ELL, up from 2.3% in 2000-01 as reported in the 2021 DE's Annual Condition of Education Report (Dec. 2021). Of the 46 Iowa school districts in FY 2021 with 6% or more of their enrollment eligible for ELL programming, 14 are urban districts and 32 are more rural in nature.

The map shown below from the ISFIS Mapping Tool shows the distribution is geographically

diverse, with the darker blue districts having ELL concentrations above 8% in FY 2021.

Funding History: The [ELL Task Force Report](#), Nov. 2013, tells the history of the formula support for ELL services: "Prior to the 2013 legislative session, students served in an ELL program counted for an additional 0.22 weighting, including state contribution in the formula, for programming for up to four years. During the 2013 legislative session, state contribution was extended to a fifth year, first available to schools in the 2014-15 school year budget.



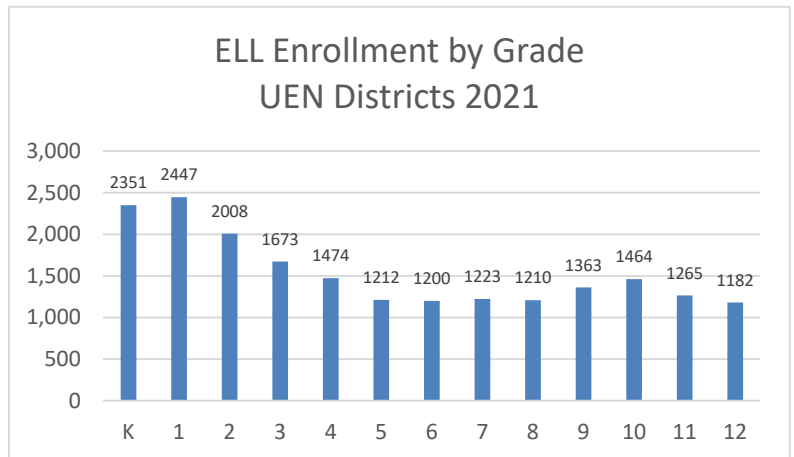
Legislation enacted in 2021 [HF 605](#) set two weightings to generate funding for students served in limited-English proficient programs based on need, which is a beginning to the tiered weighting recommended by the Task Force 8 years prior:

- An intermediate level with a weighting of .21 based on student ELPA test scores
- An intensive level of .25 based on student ELPA test scores.

Educational Requirements: The Task Force Report also describes the responsibility of schools to provide services: Iowa has educational requirements for ELL students as defined in Iowa Code, Chapter 280.4, Uniform School Requirement: When a student is limited English proficient, both public and nonpublic schools shall provide special instruction, which shall include, but need not be limited to, either instruction in English as a second language or transitional bilingual instruction. Such instruction will continue until the student is fully English proficient or demonstrates a functional ability to speak, read, write, and understand the English language.

Funding Recommendations: The Task Force recommended and the UEN supports LEP weighted funding closer to the national average by increasing to an average of .39 through a phase-in formula over a three-year period. The .39 national average weighting was shown in the Nevada study, Study of a New Method of Funding for Public Schools in Nevada, American Institutes for Research, 2012. The Task Force also recommended extending eligibility for ELL state weighting from five to seven years, reflecting the research-based timeline sufficient to move LEP students to proficiency: They state, “The extension of years is critical to provide enough time for all students to reach academic language proficiency through ELL educational programming to ensure they don’t fall into a subsequent designation of special education requiring an Individualized Education Program.”

Success: this chart shows that ELL students served early in elementary years tend to exit the program, as the numbers by grade level decrease dramatically through 6th grade.



How long does it take for ELLs to reach proficiency? The National Literacy Panel, as reported in [A review conducted for the Center for Public Education](#) by researchers at Edvantia, concluded that “considerable future research is needed to develop valid and reliable measures” of academic language proficiency (August & Shanahan, 2006). However, studies conducted to date indicate that it takes 4 to 7 years for ELLs to become proficient in academic English.” They cite several empirical studies that confirm the statement.

Preschool Policy Suggestion: Iowa’s preschool students are not assigned an ELL status or program supports until they attend kindergarten. An ELL weighting applied to PK would provide additional resources, especially for translation and services to communicate with parents who play a vital role in supporting the success of school for students. In combination with this change, there should be an extension of at least one more year (to six) for state contribution to support the costs of education Iowa’s English learners.

UEN 2022 Issue Brief Preschool

Background: Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SVPP), first implemented in 2007-08, has grown to serve 31,468 4-year-olds in 2019-20. PK enrollment was lower than kindergarten by 8,364, meaning as many as 27% of kindergarteners may not have been served in SVPP. The importance of reading proficiently by the end of third grade is critical, and quality preschool helps students reach that important benchmark. Many parents chose not to enroll students in PK in the Fall of 2020 due to the pandemic, in Iowa and across the nation. PK dropped from 31,468 to 27,392 (Down 4,076 Oct. 2020 compared to Oct. 2019). Early indications of Oct. 2021 PK enrollment indicate that preschool is still under-enrolled. Hold harmless budget provisions and programs to support early literacy will be more important than ever next school year.

Why does preschool matter? The Perry Preschool Project, 40 years later, documents \$17 savings for every dollar invested (earlier findings of \$8 saved for every dollar invested are also often cited). Once considered a strategy just to support working parents with child care needs, the majority of states now view access to high-quality PK programs as a critical long-term economic investment in the future workforce. Education Commission of the States, <http://www.ecs.org/docs/early-learning-primer.pdf> Oct. 2014: *Six rigorous long term evaluation studies have found that children who participated in high-quality preschool programs were:*

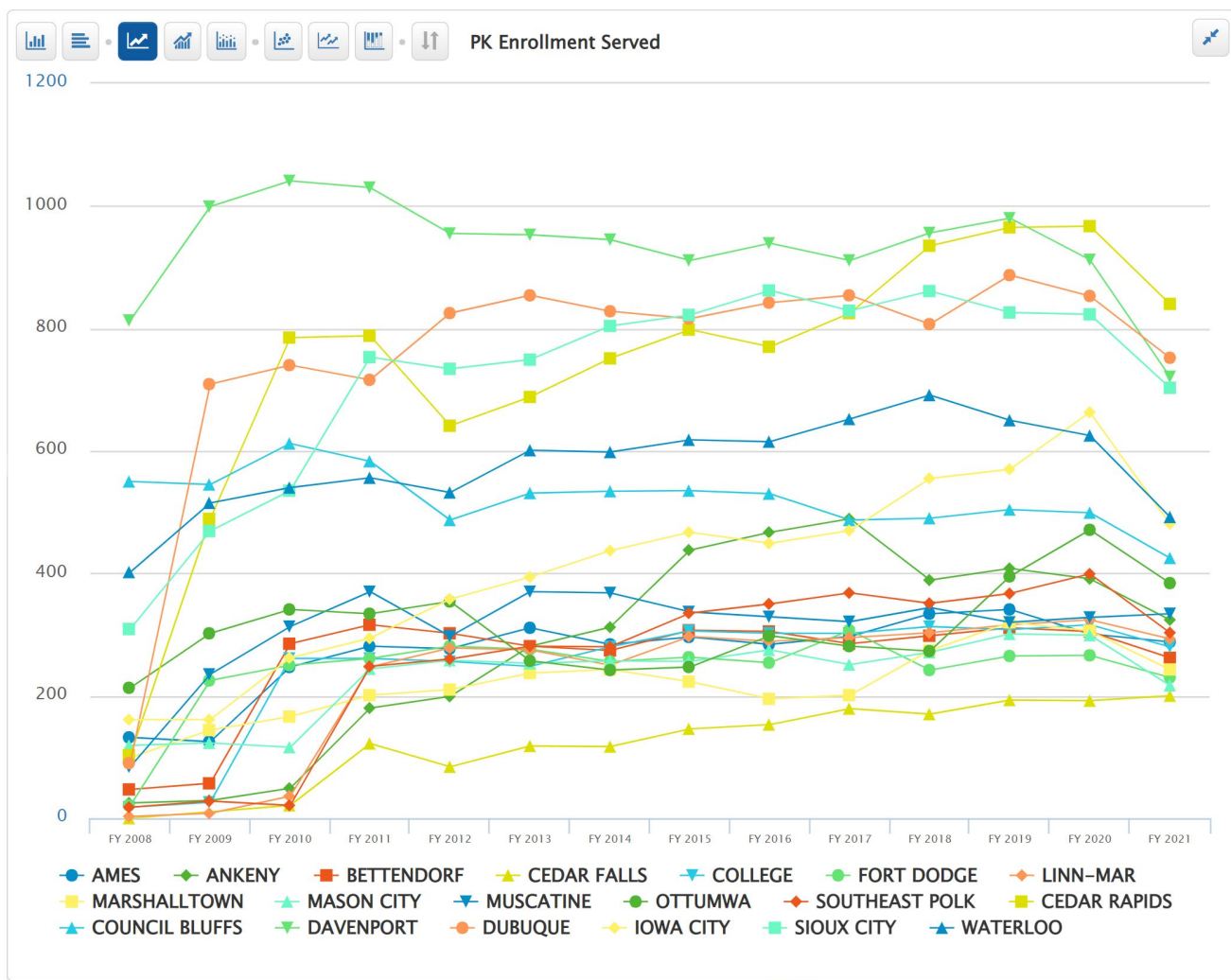
- 25% less likely to drop out of school.
- 40% less likely to become a teen parent.
- 50% less likely to be placed in special education.
- 60% less likely to never attend college.
- 70% less likely to be arrested for a violent crime.

Sarah Daily, *Initiatives from Preschool to Third Grade: A Policymaker's Guide*, shows reductions in costly outcomes that quality preschool prevents. (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, October 2014) <http://www.ecs.org/docs/early-learning-primer.pdf>. The National Conference of State Legislatures quotes studies on long-term return on investment. <http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/new-research-early-education-as-economic-investme.aspx>

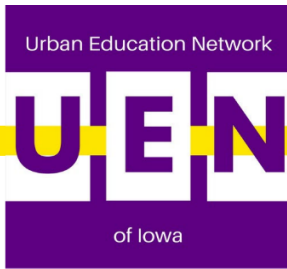
Another study shows improved behavior and social skills: the Journal of Research in Childhood Education, The Long Term Benefits, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2016.1273285> demonstrates for low-income students in quality preschool compared to low-income students without the PK experience, the PK group had fewer behavior issues, referrals, better attendance, initially more special education in kindergarten (identified earlier) but less special education services by fourth grade than the control group.

Barriers to Expansion. Preschool funding in the formula is paid entirely with state funds, based on the prior year's enrollment of four-year-olds in the program on Oct. 1. Although three-year-olds and 5-year-olds may be served, they are not counted for weighting/funding purposes. Unlike the regular program enrollment for K-12 budget purposes, there is no adjustment for enrollment changes; 1) no

101% budget guarantee if fewer students are served and 2) no on-time funding modified supplemental amount if more PK students are served than in the prior year. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the Fall 2020 PK enrollment dropped significantly, which means that the 2021-22 PK budget will also drop significantly. Districts are prohibited from using general fund dollars to pay for PK expenses, so staff reductions are likely in the Fall of 2021. Additionally, four-year-olds from low-income families may need additional supports, such as full-day programs or wrap-around care to allow families full employment. For non-English-speaking families, preschool is critical, yet the 0.5 weighting is not enough to cover the costs of translators, staff and additional materials to support immigrant families to fully engage with their students. Des Moines Public Schools lost over 500 PK students. This chart shows the rest of UEN districts, with all but one showing the COVID PK enrollment drop.



Quality Preschool: Early investment increases access to quality preschool programs which prevents higher costs later. Barriers to preschool access must be eliminated, and schools must have the funding and flexibility to provide preschool and wrap-around services for a full day, prioritizing high-need students first. UEN supports poverty and English-language learner weightings for preschool students and formula protections against the negative budget and program impacts of preschool enrollment swings.

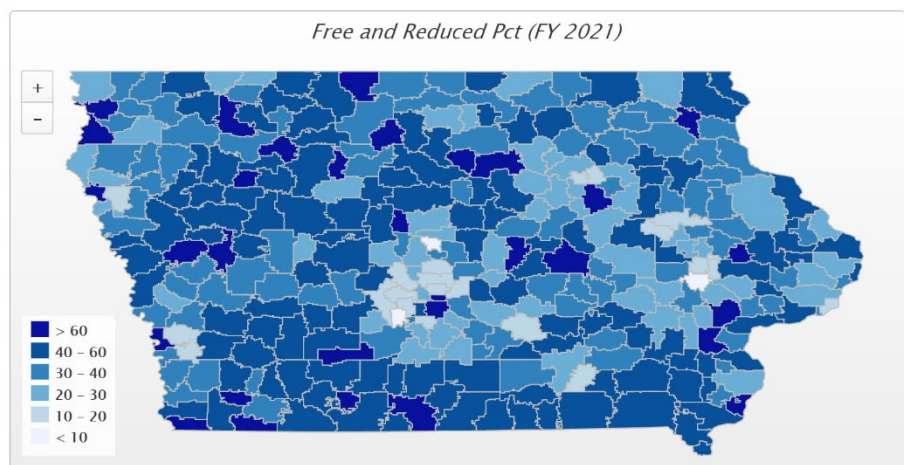


2022 Priority Issue Brief: Opportunity Equity for High-Poverty Students

Background: Iowa's funding formula does not sufficiently recognize poverty as a driver of at-risk student programming. In 2001, about 27% of students were eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL). Dropout Prevention funding is based on total enrollment, not the percentage of students at-risk. Although flexibility for the use of DoP funds has been expanded, DoP capacity is still limited to 2.5% of the total regular program district cost or up to 5% of regular program district cost based on historical practice.

The December 2019 School Finance Interim Committee passed a unanimous and bipartisan recommendation to study the impact of poverty on educational outcomes. The committee saw this presentation by ISFIS reporting on other states, the national average of 29%, and the shortfall in Iowa compared to best practice. Here's a [link](#) from the Committee Legislative Website showing the presentation. The study was directed to review other states' formulas that provide resources for students from low-income families which are showing successful student achievement outcomes for at-risk students. [HF 2490](#) Poverty Weighting Study was approved with strong bipartisan support in the House Education Committee in the 2020 Session, but the issues have received no action since. This bill serves as a good starting point for continued conversation.

Current Reality: In FY 2021, 41.8% of students, or 202,007 children, were FRPL eligible, according to the Iowa Department of Education's [reporting](#).



- Poverty is now found throughout the state. It is no longer just an urban challenge. The map's darkest color shows 78 districts with more than half of their student eligible for FRPL, and 31 districts have more than 60% of students eligible for FRPL. Those above 70% include Council Bluffs, Sioux City, South Page, Hamburg, Storm Lake, Clay Central-Everly, Denison, Marshalltown, Waterloo, Des Moines, LuVerne, Rock Valley, Postville and Stratford (6 of which are UEN member districts.)
- Iowa's funding for at-risk (.48%) and dropout prevention (2.5-5%) combined are well short of the national average 29% weighting for low-income students. (AIR, [Study of a new Method of Funding for Public Schools in Nevada](#), Sept. 2012). Since Iowa spends \$1,280 less per student than the national average ([Census data](#) FY 2019 reported May 2021), the weighting per low income Iowa student, applied to a lower base, is inadequate to provide needed supports.

- Students from low-income families are more likely to begin school academically behind, exhibit nonproficient literacy skills, especially in early elementary, and fall further behind over summer breaks, unless schools have the resources, staff and programs to meet their needs.
- Low-income students are an important piece of Iowa's workforce puzzle, will stay in Iowa, and either be the backbone of our communities' potential or a drain on future resources.
- Districts must waive fees for FRPL-eligible families, meaning districts with concentrated poverty have fewer resources for textbooks and drivers' education, further stressing the general fund.
- High-poverty School Investments boost achievement. Education Week, [Student Outcomes: Does More Money Really Matter?](#) Fresh research bolsters the case for K-12 cash—and a rough road without it, Daarel Burnette II, June 4, 2019 reports: "More money does, in fact, make a difference, they (researchers) say—provided that you spend enough, and in the right manner. They point to research in the past five years that provides examples of instances where politicians and taxpayers invested more money in teacher salaries, school construction, and schools with high populations of low-income students and saw students' test scores jump."
- The McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown, FutureEd, [State Education Funding: The Poverty Equation](#), March 2020, states, "What's more, when poverty is concentrated in a school—that is, when a significant portion of students in a school come from low-income households—the impact on performance is compounded. [A body of research](#) suggests that there is a 'tipping point,' somewhere between 50 to 60 percent of a school's students living in poverty, where performance for all students there drastically declines."
- UEN's priority on student opportunity equity includes a long-term goal for Iowa's formula to include a poverty factor weighting so districts with concentrated poverty have resources aligned to the needs for staffing, programs and supports for all students to reach success in postsecondary education or the Iowa workforce.

Student Opportunity Equity: close achievement gaps by increasing resources in the short term for English-language learners, minority students and early childhood/preschool with a long-term focus on low-income and at-risk students. Preschool budget protections from enrollment swings; including state funding for 2021-22 PK enrollment growth if federal funding is not forthcoming.

UEN 2022 Priority Issue Brief

Teacher, Administrator, Staff Shortage

Background: Iowa's largest schools have traditionally been full of excellent teachers dedicated to student success. Competitive economic conditions, however, are making it difficult to attract and retain great teachers, indeed school employees in many different job roles, and it's getting worse.

Many content areas are experiencing a shortage, but especially at the secondary level. The Iowa DE compiles a list, which for 2021-22 included deaf or hard of hearing impaired, visually impaired, industrial technology, special education (both II BD/LD and ID and I mild/moderate K-8 and 5-12), family consumer sciences 5-12, all world language, agriculture (5-12), all science (5-12), business (5-12), school counselor (K-8 and 5-12), mathematics (5-12), teacher librarian (K-8, 5-12 and K-12), early childhood education, east science, physics (5-12) and all social studies. <https://educateiowa.gov/pk-12/educator-quality/practitioner-preparation/teacher-shortage-areas>

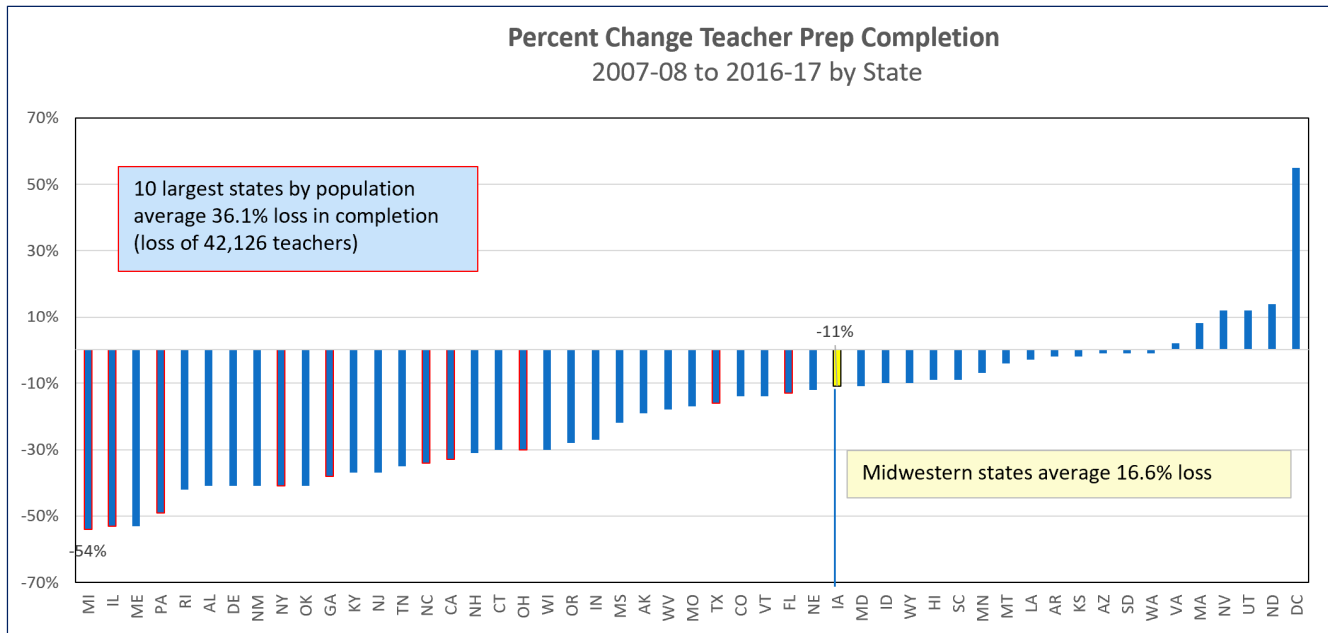
Urban school leaders are experiencing fewer applicants for positions in music, art, physical education and even elementary positions. Almost all districts in Iowa are struggling to find bus drivers, paraprofessionals, office staff, and food service workers.

When there are shortages, the market tends to draw teachers from rural areas lacking social amenities to higher-paying urban districts. Rural districts have experienced fewer qualified candidates, and sometimes no candidates at all, applying to fill vacant and mandated positions. Iowa's urban districts are now also experiencing a labor shortage; teachers are being recruited to suburban districts, other states, or private-sector jobs which are also compelling. Iowa's employers are looking for a strong work ethic, communication skills, and the ability to get to work on time. The Future Ready Workforce list of High-Demand Jobs includes educators. All of this information predates the COVID-19 global pandemic, which has encouraged earlier than planned retirement, reluctance for retired teachers to return as substitutes, needs for qualified staff to cover when teachers are out sick or in quarantine, and greater educational and mental health needs of students, all of which increase stress and responsibilities for classroom teachers.

Teacher Shortage and Comparative Pay Data:

- The gap between Iowa Average Teacher Salary and the National Average, as reported in the 2021 Iowa Condition of Education Report, continues to grow. Iowa's average in 2020 was \$5,949 less than the national average (in 1988, the gap was \$3,182 and in 2019, the gap was \$4,815). Higher pay for teacher leaders, paid as much as \$10,000 more for additional work through TLC plans, has helped to improve our average total pay ranking since 2015. Iowa ranked 22 in 2018, however, slipped to 23 in 2019 and now 24 in 2020.
- With significant teacher shortages across the nation, beginning teacher pay is critical in keeping Iowa graduates in Iowa and attracting graduates from other states. Iowa is in the second to lowest quintile, ranking 30th in starting teacher pay. Source: *A State-by-State Analysis of the Factors Influencing Teacher Supply, Demand, and Equity*, <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/understanding-teacher-shortages-interactive>

- Fewer teacher preparation candidates are graduating from colleges and universities of education, as reported in **Teacher Retention and Recruitment: Shortages in Iowa/Nation, 50-state Comparison of Strategies**, [Education Commission of the States](#). In the Midwest states alone, between 2008-2017, there were 8,183 fewer graduates, for a loss of 17%. The following chart, compiled by Iowa School Finance Information Services, ISIFS, Inc., shows the nationwide data, which is even more drastic and predates COVID pandemic stressors on teacher supply.



- The implementation of the teacher leadership and compensation system increased demand for teachers to fill vacant positions to replace teacher leaders. TLC may also have slowed the pipeline of individuals willing to take on the work of school administration.
- Teachers in urban areas have larger class sizes and often a diverse student enrollment with specialized teaching approaches required. Despite very diverse student enrollment, however, urban districts struggle to hire teachers from varied race and cultural backgrounds. Urban school leaders are using ESSER federal pandemic funding to establish grow your own programs to recruit from within.
- Some community members, dedicated to the urban area, may be willing to teach in areas of their expertise but can't afford to quit working for two years to become certified. Some programs in CTE areas have provided avenues to on-the-job training, a good model which could be expanded.
- Beginning January 1, 2021, educators new to the state receive licensure reciprocity for their teaching, administrator or coaching license with 1 year of experience. Although welcome relief, this does not allow new college graduates from other states to begin their teaching careers in Iowa without having to take courses not required in their university's school of education program. The one year of experience requirement is especially challenging when recruiting from historically black colleges and universities.

Teacher, Administrator, Staff Shortage: promote staff diversity and talent, waiver of one-year experience for licensure reciprocity in recruiting diverse staff to better reflect diversity in student populations, flexibility in hiring, loan forgiveness programs and hiring retirees without negative IPERS implications. Iowa's Future Ready Workforce should include an educator focus to replenish the talent pool and attract high school and college students to a career in education.

UEN 2022 Priority Issue Brief: Mental Health Services

Background: Mental health challenges for students have increased in all school districts in Iowa, including urban schools. The following statistics from *A Strategic Plan for a Children's Mental Health Redesign in Iowa* [DRAFT](#), are compelling:

- Over 20% of children have a seriously debilitating mental illness during their lifetime.
- Over 45% of children have had any mental illness.
- Half of all lifelong cases of mental illness begin by age 14 (75% by age 24).
- 80% of children who need mental health treatment never receive treatment.
- 50% of youth in the child welfare system have a mental illness.
- Treatment works. Treatment of mental illness reduces disability, leads to recovery and is most effective during the brain's development from birth to age 26.

Pandemic Impacts: [Pew Stateline](#), Nov. 8, 2021, explains how child mental health needs have increased over that last 18 months:

"The grief, anxiety and depression children have experienced during the pandemic is welling over into classrooms and hallways, resulting in crying and disruptive behavior in many younger kids and increased violence and bullying among adolescents. For many other children, who keep their sadness and fear inside, the pressures of school have become too great.

According to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, emergency department visits for suspected suicide attempts among adolescents jumped [31% in 2020](#), compared with 2019. In February and March of this year, emergency department visits for suspected suicide attempts were 51% higher among girls aged 12–17 than during the same period in 2019.

Last month, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children's Hospital Association [declared](#) that the pandemic-related decline in child and adolescent mental health has become a national emergency.

On top of social isolation and family instability, the medical groups said, "more than 140,000 children in the United States lost a primary and/or secondary caregiver, with youth of color disproportionately impacted."

Recent Strides: Unless a student is receiving special education services, and the IEP so authorizes, mental health treatment at school is not funded. Even though services are more readily available in urban communities than in rural Iowa, there are long wait times, and many urban school families have transportation or job conflicts in getting children to needed care when it does become available.

The 2019 Legislature created a structure for children’s mental health services. In 2020, the Legislature and Governor approved [SF 2360](#) Classroom Management/ Therapeutic Classrooms. This legislation sets up a grant process for additional therapeutic classrooms. Both of these efforts require funding to be successful, which the legislature appropriated in the 2021 Session. An appropriation of \$3.2 million to the Iowa AEAs in [HF 868](#) to provide mental health awareness training for educators and mental health services must also continue.

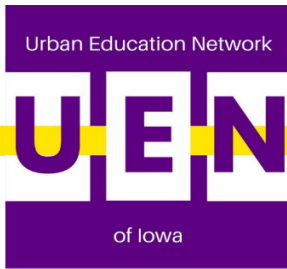
Thankfully, the 2020 Iowa Legislature approved schools as originating sites for virtual mental health counseling. The hope is to minimize absenteeism and get students the help they need while at school when virtual telehealth counseling is appropriate for their challenges.

Service Gaps: UEN mental health services directors met in September 2021 and agreed that a collaborative community approach is necessary to connect students to needed services. However, there is no funding source to provide for case management and collaborative time to identify appropriate services currently not billable to private insurance, Medicaid, or special education. This group also was concerned about the elimination of audio connection as a viable alternative when students are without enough bandwidth to connect to telehealth services without video.

Appropriate Roles: Child mental health policies overlap decision-makers and areas of authority, intersecting human services, health care, county and state government, and law enforcement. Education has a role in identifying students with needs (mental health first aid) and connecting students to services, but schools are not mental health providers, nor should they be. Schools should be on the team, however, as student success depends on transitions returning from mental health placements or needing scheduling and educational supports when treatment is ongoing. Schools should have the resources to educate students and staff about mental wellness, embedded throughout the curriculum where it is topical.

Over the last two years, changes to educational delivery to keep staff and students safe, family job loss, quarantine requirements and illness have added stress to students, parents and staff members with mental illness. The need to continue this important work is more urgent than ever.

Mental Health Services: UEN supports structure and funding to eliminate the shortage of professionals. Funds to provide case management and service coordination is required when Medicaid, special education or other categorical funds do not cover it. School districts require capacity and/or funding to provide: 1) transition support and services for students returning to school after a mental health placement, 2) ongoing teacher, administrator, and support staff training to improve awareness and understanding of child social-emotional, behavioral and mental health needs, 3) actionable classroom strategies to address student needs, and 4) integration of mental health promotion into instruction when appropriate.



UEN 2022 Priority Issue Brief

Local School Board Authority, District Flexibility, and Home Rule

Background and History

American democracy is built on the assumption that local leaders, closest to students and communities, will make the best decisions for their communities. This is in contrast to Dillon's Rule, a court case from the 1800s, which stated that schools can only do what is expressly authorized in state law. Iowa cities and counties were granted home rule by constitutional amendments decades ago. Those amendments excluded taxing authority, which remains heavily regulated by the State. Background on change to home rule for Iowa is found in the Legislative Guide to Iowa Local Government Initiative and Referendum, LSA, December 2008, found [here](#).

[HF 573](#) granted statutory home rule to schools during the 2017 Session. There continues to be confusion about the role of pre-existing administrative rules and the Department of Education's role in pre-approving district actions. Home Rule does not eliminate any current laws, but grants clearer flexibility in the areas not written. School districts are still be required to follow laws that compel actions as well as avoid actions prohibited in law.

Flexibility Provides a Good Result without Irreparable Harm

- School districts are called upon to deliver results, but often cannot exercise local authority to implement new practices, update processes, or think creatively. Professor Richard Briffault, Columbia Law School, in a presentation to the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Oct. 2003, explains why local control is necessary for school governance: "To be sure, greater state standard-setting, oversight, and interventions in cases of poor local performance have been accompanied in some states with measures giving local school boards greater operational discretion in achieving state educational goals. States may conclude that their purposes may be better attained by a degree of school district home rule rather than by state-directed micro-management of school operations."
- If a school takes an unacceptable action under home rule, the legislature may later prohibit it.

Local Control Further Democracy

Alexander Hamilton explained the democratic value of local control: "It is a known fact in human nature that its affections are commonly weak in proportion to the distance or diffusiveness of the object. Upon the same principle that a man is more attached to his family than to his neighborhood, to his neighborhood than to the community at large, the people of each State would be apt to feel a stronger bias towards their local governments than towards the government of the Union; "[Federalist, no. 17 Federal v. Consolidated](#)", Dec. 5, 1787. A more contemporary publication, Principles of Home Rule for the 21st Century, the National League of Cities in 2020 explains Hamilton's point; "At the heart of the concept of local democratic self-government is the accountability of local officials to the local community that results from local popular election of local lawmakers. Local election distinguishes local self-government from rule by state appointees, or from control by an electorate outside the locality." <https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Home-Rule-Principles-ReportWEB-2-1.pdf> In 2020 and 2021, public community reactions to pandemic policies have demonstrated that it is easier for citizens to access their school board members and attend board meetings than to engage in state-level policymaking.

District Authority: Home Rule in Iowa Code [274.3](#) requires liberally construing the laws affecting schools to effectuate the purposes of local control. UEN makes a strong statement that the legislature and governor should focus their efforts on flexibility rather than state-mandated one-size-fits-all action. A specific ask: request flexibility to use school general fund to pay for expanded preschool slots.

UEN 2022 Issue Brief

School Choice and the Priority of Public Schools

Current Reality: Iowa has a wide range of school choice options for parents and students, including:

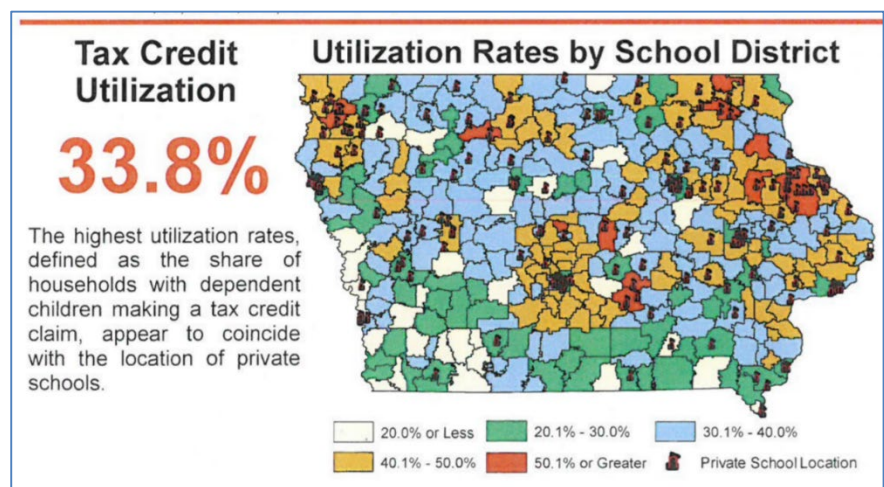
- **Within District Transfer:** A neighborhood public school or a public school in another neighborhood within the school district (transfers regulated by the local school board).
- **Open Enrollment to Public School in Another District:** 35,227 students exercised open enrollment to another school district in 2020-21. Options include: 1) Open enrollment to another district via timely application, 2) Open enrollment for a good cause after the March 1 deadline, 3) Open enrollment to an Iowa public virtual academy and other online program.
- **Charter Schools:** HF 813 and HF 847, effective July 1, 2021, create new charter school options for school boards or independent founding groups. See DE's guidance here: https://educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/2021-07-02_CharterSchoolGuidance.pdf
- **Accredited Nonpublic Schools:** 33,840 students enrolled in 2020-21. Private schools and parents are supported by millions of state tax dollars for school tuition organization scholarships, tuition and textbook tax credits, transportation/textbook funds to private schools, public school and AEA support for special education in private schools, and public/private partnerships for private preschool tuition in the statewide voluntary preschool program.
- **Home School Options:** competent private instruction or independent private instruction. HF 847 in 2021 applied the tuition and textbook tax credit to home school for the first time.
- **Public Funding for Private Education:** In 2018, over \$66 million in state tax dollars supported the education of Iowa students in private and home school settings, according to the Iowa Fiscal Policy Project [Analysis Nov. 2018](#). The additional fiscal impact of HF 847, if the fiscal note assumptions prove correct, would raise that total to \$91 million.

Vouchers or Education Savings Accounts Costs Outweigh Benefits: Increasing Iowa public investment in private schools will not add benefits and will negatively impact public school students:

- Iowa has competition to pressure schools to perform, if the assumption is that competition provides positive pressure. But according to the [Economic Policy Institute Report](#), Feb. 28, 2017, "Research does not show that vouchers significantly improve student achievement."
- That report concludes there are more effective ways to increase graduation and college attendance rates, that vouchers programs have hidden costs, including shrinking the pipeline into teaching, and that supports for privatization detract from more proven methods of improving student learning.
- Diverting funds to private education further stresses public school resources. From *State Tax Subsidies for Private K-12 Education*, Oct. 2016; "30 neovouchers across 20 states are draining over \$1 billion in public revenues from state coffers every year. Every dollar of revenue diverted toward private schools is revenue that cannot be invested in the public education system."

- **Recent Iowa Expansion of Private School Support:** In the 2021 session, School Flexibility and Choice, [HF 847](#), accelerated the prior year’s increase of the annual cap for School Tuition Organization (STO) Tax Credits to \$20.0 million from CY 2025 to CY 2022 and the credit was expanded from 65% to 75% of the contribution. The bill also doubled the Tuition and Textbook Tax Credit to 25% of \$2,000 spent and applied it to home school for the first time in CY 2021.
- **Fiscal Impact Specific to Iowa:** Gov. Reynolds signed the [Education Freedom Pledge](#) on Nov. 3, 2021, which states, “I pledge to support policies that promote parental rights in education and educational freedom. This includes the right of parents to voice their opinions at school board meetings and to take their children’s taxpayer-funded education dollars to the education providers of their choosing – whether it be a public, private, charter, or home school.” The cost of \$7,227 for each nonpublic student (33,840 in 2020-21 per DE statistics [webpage](#)) and each home school student (22,050 per [HF 847 fiscal note](#)) is \$403.9 million based on current school choice behavior.

- **Few Rural Private Schools:** few private schools are available for rural parents to exercise choice as this map from Iowa’s Department of Revenue [presentation](#) to the Tax Expenditure Committee measuring participation in tax credits, Jan. 2019, shows. According to the National Rural Education Association, private vouchers reduce resources to rural schools and save money for parents in urban centers.



- **Poverty/Minority Concentration in Urban Schools:** student poverty and minority concentrations grow when families with means are encouraged to leave the public school for a private program.
- **No Oversight:** The Economic Policy Institute also finds insufficient budgetary oversight of voucher programs. There is no publicly elected school board or DE regulation of allowable expenditures. The public does not have access to records or public meetings. Good stewardship of tax dollars requires transparency and clearly articulated expectations.
- **Level the Playing field:** Public schools are accountable to taxpayers, parents, communities, i.e., the public, and serve all students. Public schools cannot refuse to enroll or expel students that are not meeting expectations or refuse enrollment based on specific student needs, such as students with disabilities, who are non-English-speaking, minority or low income. If additional state dollars are used to fund vouchers, the private schools receiving those tax dollars must also comply with testing, reporting, enrollment and service requirements.

The Urban Education Network of Iowa (UEN) calls on legislators and our governor to invest in Iowa’s public schools, which educate 94% of Iowa students, before further expanding private school and home school options unnecessary in Iowa’s already competitive education environment.