



# MYTHS VERSUS FACTS SCHOOL CHOICE IN IOWA

## **IOWANS SUPPORT SCHOOL CHOICE.**

### ***Fact***

[Polling](#) shows that 62 percent of Iowans surveyed believe that education dollars should follow students to a school of their choice. A majority of Iowa citizens believe no child should be forced to go to a school based on their zip code. Parents should be free to choose the school that best fits the educational needs of that specific child.

## **ESAS ALLOW ALL PARENTS TO PROVIDE THE BEST EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY FOR THEIR CHILDREN.**

### ***Fact***

A universal ESA allows public funding to follow the student rather than a specifically designated school with no restrictions. There are many other types of ESAs. Some only apply to lower-income families or those children with disabilities. ESAs allow parents to customize the best education for their children. Parents can choose which school is best for their child to attend and other education service needs like tutoring and additional assistance. The flexibility of an ESA makes it a popular policy among families.

An ESA program is necessary to complement Iowa's Student Tuition Organization Program (STO). If Iowa implements an ESA program, this would open the door to many more eligible families and, in turn, allow the STO program to serve more low-income families than ever before.

## **ESAS CAN BE USED FOR MANY DIFFERENT TYPES OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES.**

### ***Fact***

ESAs can be used to purchase a variety of educational services:

- School tuition and fees
- Online education
- Tutoring services
- Specialized education services
- Therapy for children with disabilities
- Curriculum support and education tools

## **SCHOOL CHOICE BENEFITS RURAL IOWA.**

### ***Fact***

It is often believed that rural Iowa may not have access to additional school choice options. However, if a private school option does not exist, an ESA program can help families access education services and other supports that may not be provided in the local public school. Charter schools are another good option for consideration of expansion. The overarching

idea is to remove barriers to quality education and offer parents the best education options—including services—for children.

## **SCHOOL CHOICE POLICIES HARM PUBLIC EDUCATION.**

### ***False***

School choice is not intended to push schools against one another or to abandon traditional public schools in favor of other options—quite the contrary.

A 2021 [study](#) found that offering parents more school options enhanced academic outcomes for students whether they enrolled in public or private schools. Two additional studies conducted in 2014 and 2020 found that traditional public-school students benefited from Florida's Tax Credit Scholarship program expansions. In the [2020 study](#), public school students who lived in areas close to private school options experienced a rise in test scores and a decline in absences and suspensions, as the presence of nearby alternative school options increased the accountability faced by the traditional public school system. These positive effects were considerable for students from low-income families.

In 1990, Wisconsin established the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program as the first significant school choice program in the United States; the private school voucher program still operates today. There are 76 educational choice programs in 32 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Twenty-four out of 26 empirical studies on school choice show a statistically significant improvement in academic outcomes of public schools where private school choice programs were also provided. In addition, there are no studies that provide any evidence of a mass exodus of students leaving the public schools upon enactment of school choice laws.

The intent of school choice policies is to help improve student outcomes in Iowa. In 2019, [Iowa students' fourth grade reading](#) scores were about the same as the national average of 219. Black student test scores had an average score that was **34 points lower than white students**. Hispanic students had an average score that was **19 points lower than white students**. The average reading score for eligible students for the free National School Lunch Program was **25 points lower for students who were not eligible**.

Expanding Education Savings Account (ESA) funding allows parents to receive their tax dollars and apply them to a school of their choice. This would, in turn, assist the most vulnerable students by providing the highest quality education possible. This is analogous to parents moving from one public school district to another. In Iowa, for example, the Iowa Budget Guarantee Law allows public schools to retain federal and local tax dollars. Further, public schools are held harmless from cost changes for one full year. School choice can be the tide that lifts all boats by creating greater accountability and responsiveness among school administrators to the needs of students. Education choice unleashes opportunities and the future potential of all American children, especially those in underserved communities. Educational choice should not just be for wealthy families.

## **ESAS ARE FUNDED BY PRIVATE GRANTS.**

### ***False***

[ESAs](#) are funded using public dollars and go into government-authorized savings accounts parents can access for multiple but restricted uses. The dollar amount varies depending on

how the program is designed. However, the amount is usually based upon the state cost per pupil. For the Fiscal Year 2021, the state cost per pupil in Iowa was \$7,048.

## **PUBLIC FUNDS CANNOT BE USED FOR PRIVATE ENTITIES.**

### ***False***

Public funds already go toward helping private individuals in many ways, from food stamps and Pell Grants to the GI Bill, higher education assistance, and Medicaid. There is no reason why K-12 should be different. For example, through the Iowa Tuition Grants, Iowa taxpayers already spend close to \$50 million for tuition to private Iowa colleges.

## **SCHOOL CHOICE SUBSIDIZES WEALTHY FAMILIES.**

### ***False***

Wealthy families have long had school choice because they can afford to move to districts with high-performing schools. School choice is about the educational opportunity for all families, especially lower-income families. There is no one-size-fits-all in educating children. Funding students rather than systems removes barriers. School choice empowers parents to find what works best for their children.

## **SCHOOL CHOICE DOESN'T WORK BECAUSE IT DISCOURAGES DIVERSITY.**

### ***False***

Numerous studies have been conducted to address the impact of school choice on racial and ethnic integration. By separating the decision of where to attend school from where one lives, findings suggest that school choice has the potential to reduce the role of income and race disparities in providing educational opportunity. Epple, Romano, and Zimmer (2016) found that charter schools and public schools exhibit similar degrees of racial and ethnic segregation, with charter schools more likely to have a disproportionately nonwhite student population and public schools more likely to have a disproportionately White student population. In terms of voucher programs, a recent study by Egalite, Mills, and Wolf (2017) assessed the Louisiana Scholarship Program and found that most students using vouchers reduced racial stratification in the public schools that they left and had only small effects on racial stratification in the schools to which they transfer.

Students and families rely on schools to give children the necessary tools to shape a better future for themselves. However, our schools were not designed in a way to unleash the potential of all children or to meet the diverse needs of millions of students who rely on them today. They were not intended to help children facing challenges of poverty, to overcome those obstacles and access opportunities. As a result, the public school system is too slow to innovate, adapt, and change. Education cannot be a one-sized approach. Just as higher education institutions compete for students, public schools should be allowed to do the same. Iowa has numerous private colleges recruiting students from the taxpayer-supported Regent Universities.