



## Students First Act

Homeschool Iowa wants to help families understand the Students First Act currently being debated in the Iowa Legislature. We hope this brief answers many of your questions.

Please contact us at [advocacy@homeschooliowa.org](mailto:advocacy@homeschooliowa.org) if you need more information.

- The Students First Act is in bill form as House File 68 (HF68). Parents who choose to enroll their child in an **accredited private school** will receive the amount of per pupil funds allocated annually by the state into a special Educational Savings Account (ESA) managed by a third-party provider to be used for tuition, fees, and other qualified education expenses. Parents **do not receive a voucher** or have direct access to educational monies. In the 2023-2024 school year, the amount will be about \$7600.
- The ESA may only be used only for students enrolled in accredited schools; **homeschool students do not qualify** for this program.
- The ESA program will be administered by the Department of Education. The bill gives the Department the option of using a third-party vendor to administer the program funding.
- The Students First Act also includes protections against the Department of Education or other State government entities using the ESA program to force non-public schools to modify their curriculum or beliefs to participate.
- The goal is not to “defund” public schools. HF68 makes changes to the way Iowa counts students. Currently, when a student leaves a public school to enroll in a private school, the State no longer counts that student, and the public school receives no funds. Under HF68, students who attend an accredited private school will still be counted in the resident public school’s total, and \$1,205 per student attending accredited private schools in the district would be allocated to the public school.
- The bill has a **three-year implementation plan**. ESA accounts will be available in the '23-'24 school year for all kindergarten students, all students previously in public schools this year, and all private accredited school students of families at or below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level, which is roughly \$83,250 for a family of four. In the '24-'25 school year, the program will expand to 400% of the FPL, and in '25-'26 the income limit is removed so that all students are eligible.
- New in this proposal is increased flexibility for how school districts can spend their money. Currently, the State earmarks school districts’ budgets for specific programs and some of those dollars go unspent. This has been a problem for public school administrations for years. They have needs that go unmet due to State regulations. The Students First Act will allow school districts the flexibility to use unspent funding from Teacher Leadership and Compensation, Professional Development, and Talented and Gifted categorical funds for teacher salaries. The bill releases funding to each school district previously not available.
- The students of parents using an Education Savings Account (ESA) to pay for accredited private schools **will not be unsupervised**. Parents must apply for ESA on an annual basis. Students who are eligible for ESAs) will be required to take the State achievement tests. The test results will be sent to the Department of Education, which will be responsible for tracking student outcomes. The Department will continue to supervise all students using ESA monies, whether their enrollment is in public or private accredited schools.