

FACT

OR

Fiction

DEBUNKING THE MYTHS SURROUNDING SCHOOL CHOICE

1. Iowa has already fully implemented school choice.

Public schools in Iowa do have open enrollment which allows parents to enroll their child in another school district. However, open enrollment does have limits. For example, five school districts in Iowa, including the Des Moines schools, have diversity plans which may limit a child's opportunity to leave that district for a better school. Iowa also has limited charter school opportunities. For private school options, Iowa not only allows homeschooling, but also offers the School Tuition Tax Credit and the Tuition and Textbook Tax Credit, but both offer minimal assistance. Parents, especially those with lower and middle incomes, and who cannot home-school their children, do not have many opportunities for choice in education.

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2. School choice does not really matter.

School choice is about educational opportunity for families and their children. Too often the discussion centers on education funding rather than providing the best educational opportunities and outcomes for families. When it come to education there is not a one size fits all approach. School choice refers to public education dollars following the student to the school or educational service which best fit their needs. Funding students rather than educational bureaucracies removes these barriers. Students should not be denied a better education due to their zip code or socio-economic status. School choice empowers parents to choose the best educational option for their child be it in a public, private, or home-school environment. Whether it is values, safety, educational quality, or other reasons, many parents across Iowa are looking for alternatives to public education. School choice is about empowering parents to find what works best for their child.

Fiction

3. Iowans support school choice.

Yes, a recent poll showed that [62 percent](#) of Iowans surveyed believe that education dollars should follow the student to a school of their choice.

FACT

4. With the COVID-19 pandemic, parents are looking to alternative education methods such as pods.

FACT

Education pods are starting to spring up across the nation as one innovative solution. Education pods or “learning hubs” are organized by parents with small groups of students (dozen or less) that are led by a teacher. Pods can be an effective solution, but often alternatives to public school education are often out of reach for lower and middle-income parents.

5. Education Savings Accounts (ESA) allow all parents the ability to provide the best educational opportunity for their children.

FACT

An ESA allows public funding to follow the student rather than a specific designated school. There are many different types of ESAs. Some only apply to lower income families or to those children with disabilities. The best ESA policy is universal. An ESA provides parents with the flexibility to customize the best education for their children. This includes not only choosing which school their child attends, but also purchasing other educational services, thus affecting the overall quality of education which they receive. The flexibility of an ESA is what makes it such a popular policy among families.

6. ESAs can be used for multiple types of educational services.

FACT

ESAs can be used to purchase a variety of educational services. Some of these include:

- School tuition and related fees
- Online education and tutoring services
- Specialized education services and therapies for children with disabilities
- Curriculum and other supporting educational tools
- Education pods
- Unused ESA funds can be used to help pay for higher education

7. ESAs are funded by private grants.

Fiction

ESAs provide parents with a deposit of public funds into government-authorized savings accounts with restricted, but multiple, uses. The dollar amount of an ESA varies depending on how the program is designed, but the amount is usually based upon the state cost per pupil. As an example, recent ESA proposals in the Iowa legislature, if passed, would have provided on average between \$4,042-\$5,613 per student. For Fiscal Year 2021, the state cost per pupil in Iowa is \$7,048.

8. Allowing education dollars to fund students rather than schools a controversial idea.

Fiction

Many government programs are based on funding individuals who make choices with those resources. Public funds are often used for private purposes such as food stamps, Pell Grants, the G.I. Bill, and Medicaid. Individuals and families who are recipients of these public funds can choose from a variety of both public and private sector providers.

9. School choice policies harm public education.

Fiction

School choice is not an attack on public education. Nor is about dismantling public schools, rather, it is about the belief that there are many ways to deliver education. Opponents of ESAs often argue that they deprive public schools of both students and resources. This [argument](#) is false. ESAs affect public schools funding and resources in the same way they are affected when a student leaves because their family moved to a new district. In addition, public schools get to [keep](#) almost all of the federal and local tax dollars and usually a portion of the state funds allocated for each child. It is also assumed an ESA or other school choice policies will create a mass exodus of students leaving public schools. This argument does not hold water as an [estimated](#) two-thirds of ESA, voucher, and tax-credit scholarship programs have participation rates of 3 percent or less.

10. School choice benefits rural Iowa.

FACT

Public schools across Iowa are a source of community pride. Schools can also make up the heart of a community. School choice can benefit families in rural Iowa by providing additional educational opportunities. Even if a private school alternative does not exist, an ESA program can help families access educational services and courses that may not be provided by their local public school. Policymakers in Iowa could also allow for more charter schools in Iowa. Whether a child is in an urban or rural setting, the objective of school choice is to eliminate as many roadblocks as possible that prevent the best quality of education. An ESA program is about offering parents the best educational choice for their children, if the rural community school is that best choice, then rural schools need not fear an ESA program.



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