

K-12 School Funding Passed

The Senate passed an increase of \$124 million in Supplemental State Aid for a total for FY 24 of \$3.7 billion of state aid to K-12 schools. This is a 3% growth in SSA. It increases the statewide state aid per pupil by \$222, so now the total amount is \$7635 state aid per pupil. Adding in categorical funding, pre-school funding, transportation funding, and other state funding streams the total amount provided for K-12 schools is \$5.4 billion.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

I chaired a bill that would eliminate the use of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework for Social Emotional Learning (SEL) adopted by the Dept. of Education in 2019.

The CASEL framework for SEL uses what is called “transformative” SEL, as opposed to the traditional or classic SEL we have known. This includes concepts from critical race theory specifically prohibited by law from being taught, trained in, advocated for, or promoted. Six of these concepts are:

1. That one race or sex is inherently superior to another.
2. That the USA or Iowa are fundamentally or systemically racist or sexist.
3. That an individual, by virtue of their race or sex is inherently racist, sexist or oppressive whether consciously or unconsciously.
4. That an individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment because of their race or sex.
5. That fault, blame or bias should be assigned to a race or sex or to a member of that race or sex or claiming that consciously or unconsciously members of one sex or race are inherently racist or inclined to oppress others.
6. Characteristics, traits, values, morals, and ethical codes, privileges, status or beliefs should be ascribed to a race or sex or to an individual because of their race or sex.

These conflict with many families’ religious and political beliefs.

“Transformative” SEL also includes LGBT ideology, which is the belief system held by some schools that homosexuality is an innate and immutable characteristic and that homosexual practice and lifestyle is an acceptable alternative way of life that should be affirmed. “Transformative” SEL also includes the belief that a person’s gender identity is changeable and that their current gender identity should be accepted and affirmed over the person’s actual biological sex, even if it is in conflict with that. These sets of beliefs are contrary to and opposed to many families’ religious beliefs regarding sexuality, sexual ethics, and sexual practice.

The kind of SEL that is needed is what schools had when the program started out. Children were taught on an as-needed, sometimes individual, basis how to manage their emotions, get along with others, set and achieve goals, make sound decisions, and take responsibility for their actions. These are universal and common goals shared by all families for their children. And these should be taught in school as they come alongside parents and reinforce what is being taught at home. This is the kind of SEL families are looking for from their schools.

But with “transformative” SEL that has changed. The bill is designed to return to the traditional or classic SEL we have known.

Another part of the bill requires written parental consent for a student to take part in a survey, activity, or test that asks about political affiliations or beliefs of the student or the student’s parents; mental or psychological problems of the student or the student’s family; sexual behavior, orientation, or attitudes; illegal, antisocial, self-incriminating or demeaning behavior; critical appraisals of other individuals with whom the student has close family relationships; religious practices, affiliations or beliefs of the student or the student’s parents.

These are delicate and sensitive student and family information and are private and tender parts of a student’s life, the family’s beliefs, and student/family relationships and are very personal. Schools have no business getting this kind of information without the consent of the parents.

Protecting the Property Taxpayer

The Senate passed out a bill that would prevent a property tax increase due to a calculation error at the Department of Revenue. It could have amounted to a property tax increase of \$120 million. The bill fixes the error and extends the deadline for local governments to certify their budgets so that they have time to make the necessary budget adjustments.

Iowa Veterans Trust Fund

Governor Reynolds is appropriating federal funding to supplement the amount the state appropriated last year from the Veterans Trust Fund to help with the large increase in requests by veterans in need. The Senate Veteran Affairs Committee will be looking at ways to ensure the disbursement of funds from the amount allocated each year is sustainable and that the criteria used to determine if a veteran is eligible for funding will not result in exceeding the annual limits of the funds available.

Bills that Passed in Committees

The Iowa Senate is now in the 4th week of the legislative session and members have been busy with committee and subcommittee work. Here are the bills moving in committee and will soon be ready for debate on the Senate floor:

Rural Emergency Hospitals: This bill establishes a license for a “rural emergency hospital” (REH). An REH means a facility that provides rural emergency health services 24/7 and does not provide any inpatient acute care. This is a federally authorized license and rules are set at the federal level. Critical access hospitals such as Waverly Health Center, Floyd County Medical Center, Community Memorial Hospital in Sumner, and MercyOne New Hampton are qualified for this designation REH. A certificate of need is not required. The advantage of this designation is that it authorizes a higher reimbursement rate under Medicare.

Sexual Exploitation of a Minor: Penalties are increased for these crimes.

Bicyclist Penalties: This bill increases the penalties for driving too close to a person on a bicycle. The penalties would match those for driving too close to a pedestrian.

Hands Free: This would prohibit the use of a cell phone while driving unless the driver is using a “hands-free” mode. This would now be a moving violation. Certain exceptions, such as for law enforcement, apply.

Adoptive Parent Employees: Employers would be required to treat adoptive parents of a 0-6 year old child and biological parents of a newborn the same in terms of policies, benefits, and protections for the first year of the adoption.

Optometrist Bill: Optometrists will be allowed under this bill to administer a local injectable anesthetic prior to administering one of 4 other injections they are allowed to do by law. The problem is the optometrist can't do the 4 injections on a patient they are allowed to do without giving the anesthetic first.

Physical Therapist Bill: Physical therapists would be allowed to refer a patient for X-rays and MRI's, but the results would have to be interpreted by a qualified health care professional.

Barbershop on Wheels: This would authorize barbers and cosmetologists to practice in a mobile location, outside of a fixed geographical place.

Feel free to contact me with ideas, thoughts, and concerns. My phone is 319-987-3021 or you can email me at sandy.salmon@legis.iowa.gov . I want to hear what you are thinking and will listen to your input. Together we will work to make a difference for the future of Iowa. Thank you very much for the honor of representing you!

Sincerely,

Sandy