

Bill of the Week

Separate Special Education Schools (SF 2404)

This bill allows one urban and one rural school district to test out separate schools for children with challenging behaviors or students receiving special education services.

☑ Key Points & Impacts

- Parents of children with disabilities worry that separate classrooms will lead to more isolation and a missed opportunity for all students to become more understanding and accepting of differences.
- Others worry that separate centers create stigmas, lower expectation, and remove students from their peers and community supports.
- The bill does not state that attendance in these separate schools would be voluntary, which is necessary for this bill to meet the requirements of federal education law.
- Separate schools often fail to provide the necessary, diverse peer models for communication and behavior that help students learn to navigate real-world solutions.
- Studies indicate that students moved to separate settings often have more academic struggles and may not be able to return to integrated classrooms and schools.
- Schools across Iowa practice inclusive education to ensure students with and without disabilities receive the maximum benefit of their education. All students deserve to live, learn, and play in a diverse and welcoming environment.
- Children learn to be inclusive at a young age. We want them to carry this forward into their careers. It all starts in school.
- As one parent summed it up during a public hearing, “Students with disabilities are not problems to be hidden away from the public.”

📣 Facts at a Glance

- If this bill passes, the Iowa Department of Education would require two school districts (one urban, one rural) to set up separate, segregated schools for students receiving special education or students with challenging behaviors.
- The rural school district would be Spirit Lake. There are 13 school districts that would qualify for the urban location.
- The bill does not include the estimated \$4.5 million needed to fund this pilot program. Only \$165,000 of that amount would be used for the rural location.
- About 15% of students in the US receive special education services. Of those students, 2% are educated in separate, segregated schools. (1)
- Two-thirds of students receiving special education services spend more than 2/3 of their day in general education, integrated classrooms. (2)
- Iowa continues to have an achievement gap for students with disabilities. While Iowa ranked 10th in 8th grade reading, our state ranked 41st in achievement of students with disabilities. (3)
- Studies show that segregation does not close the achievement gap – but inclusion does. (4)

