

Indiana School Boards Association

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PRESS RELEASE

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ISBA launches "ESA Is Not OK" Advocacy Campaign Toolkit

Calls on school board members to encourage legislators to vote "NO" on HB 1005 and SB 412

(Indianapolis) – The Indiana School Boards Association today released an advocacy campaign toolkit with key resources for school board members to use in calling on their legislators to vote “NO” on creating education savings accounts and expanding the Choice Scholarship voucher program, measures that could cost taxpayers more than \$200 million over the next two years.

The toolkit empowers school board members to speak up in defense of public education and help discourage the Indiana General Assembly from expanding private school choice at the expense of K-12 public education, which serves one million Hoosier students, or 90% of all students in the state.

The “ESA Is Not OK” Advocacy Campaign Toolkit is available online at www.isba-ind.org/esa-is-not-ok.html.

The toolkit features talking points to prepare school board members to communicate with their lawmakers and local community, facts and figures to help school board members frame what’s at stake, a sample resolution for school board members to introduce back home, materials to share on social media, and legislator contact information. Recent research from the University of Notre Dame and the University of Kentucky showing vouchers have not improved student achievement is also included.

The school choice proposals under consideration this session will have an immediate and profound financial impact on public schools. House Bill 1005 will cost more than \$200M over the next two years, consuming most of the \$227M increase in education funding proposed by the Governor. Similar legislation pending in the Senate has an estimated price tag of \$150M over the biennium. Indiana spent \$170 million on vouchers last year and more than \$1 billion on vouchers over the past decade.

Given the fiscal constraints caused by the pandemic, now is not the time to create a new entitlement program that will divert needed resources away from public school students for private school tuition, unregulated home schools, and DIY (Do It Yourself) educational options like parent pods and micro-schools. Public funds should fund public schools, which are open to all children and are a state constitutional duty.

“Lawmakers should reject education savings accounts and voucher expansion and instead build on the good budget supporting public education passed in 2019 by continuing to address the teacher pay gap and funding a tuition support increase that keeps pace with, or exceeds, inflation,” said Terry Spradlin, executive director of the Indiana School Boards Association.

The ESA bills, House Bill 1005 and Senate Bill 412, are scheduled to be heard in committees Wednesday. Senate Bill 413, which contains voucher expansion language, is also on the calendar.

Education savings accounts (ESAs) provide state funding to selected parents who withdraw their children from public school. HB 1005 proposes an ESA program that would give parents a taxpayer-funded debit card loaded with \$5,000 to \$7,000 per child to spend at their discretion on private school tuition, home school, tutoring, therapy, and other services. HB 1005 would also allow more families, including some upper-class families, to receive a voucher to send their children to private school at taxpayer expense. Eligibility would expand to include a family of four earning \$145,000 annually, about double that of the state’s median family income, and a family of five with annual income of \$170,000.

Indiana ranked 22nd in per-pupil K-12 spending in 2004 but has since fallen to 39th, contributing to the lowest teacher salary growth in the nation over the past two decades.

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