



AEA Bill - Amendment Summary

Despite an announcement by Governor Reynolds on January 18 that she had listened to Iowans voicing concerns about her original piece of legislation to radically alter the state's Area Education Agencies and impose new financial burdens on public and nonpublic schools, a newly released amendment makes few significant changes in response.

In summary, the amendments to the original bill:

Diminish Local Control

- Local decision-making authority is transferred from the local level to the Director of the Iowa Department of Education (DE), another agency, or is simply eliminated 133 times in this bill.
 - This includes instances when the bill allows the district to direct the use of its funds to partner with the AEA for services.
 - Additionally, there are eight transfers of decision-making power away from the State Board of Education to the Iowa Department of Education Director.
 - Provides the Iowa Department of Education Director complete authority over AEA staffing, contracts, salaries and reorganizations, reduces the Chief Administrator positions and replaces them with an Executive Director with a special education background.
 - All requests by a school district to enter into a fee for service agreement with an AEA must be approved by the Iowa Department of Education Director.
- Bypasses the open meetings structure for public input into AEA budget setting and puts the Iowa Department of Education Director in charge of budget approval.
- Gives the Department of Management power over total tax levy remains. (*Note: If a school district does not reduce the tax rate to account for the removal of media services, the Department of Management will do so.*) This provision will allow the Department of Management to arbitrarily reduce a district's levy after an elected board approved the levy rate which will establish precedent for overturning locally controlled decisions by locally elected board members.
- Requires the use of the Science of Reading programming. (Currently, curriculum decision-making is made at the district level.)

- While the bill allows districts to decide how to use special education and education services funding, the Iowa Department of Education ultimately makes the decision on whether districts can contract with the AEA for those services.

Reduce Economies of Scale

- Prohibits the economical sharing of positions between AEAs and school districts, and would terminate current agreements in place to share positions such as social workers, school business officials, and technology staff, effectively erasing operational sharing currently flowing to districts.
- Eliminates \$32 million of funding from local school districts and accredited non-public school budgets for Iowa AEA Media Services, and thereby removes access to cooperative purchasing currently in place across the state. While these services would be available on a “fee for service” basis only, the bill does not provide the districts or nonpublic schools with funds to purchase those services.

Create Unrealistic Timelines for Decision-Making

- Sets the date for a decision for Special Education agreement with AEA to Feb. 1 of the prior school year (for future years), and by June 1, 2024.

Lack Clarity in Several Areas

- Creates “fee for service” structure for AEA Special Education, Educational Services (including professional development services) and Media Services, with all services approved by the Iowa Department of Education Director. As referenced above, local school districts would receive no funding for Media Services.
- Allows districts to seek “fee for service” requests from different AEAs although the amendment does not make clear the logistical feasibility of honoring those requests.

Continue to Create Challenges for Special Education Support

- The mechanism for non-public students to receive special education services remains unclear. Non-public schools will have to rely on their local public school districts for access to the educational services they are receiving today.

Additional Items of Note:

- Retains a provision for AEAs to provide online learning for students to meet “offer and teach” requirements and allows AEA professional learning to count for licensure credit.
- Leaves the original teacher compensation language the same despite concerns about the financial unsustainability for local school district budgets.