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House of Representatives
State of Iowa
Eighty-Fourth General Assembly
STATEHOUSE
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

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Big Week for School Choice and Agriculture

This week the House approved a number of substantive education bills, several of which help increase opportunities for homeschooling families, as well as provide choice and local control in the public school system. The first bill acknowledges that we have many good nonpublic schools in Iowa. We are the only state where accreditation for these schools can only be approved by the state department of education. House File 583 allows these schools to seek accreditation from nationally recognized nonpublic accrediting bodies. The state department of education would have to acknowledge that accreditation. I heard from many patrons of nonpublic schools in northwest Iowa who were in favor of this bill, and I was happy to vote for it.

Another bill attempts to deal with the fact that Iowa has among the poorest and most restrictive charter school laws in the country. House File 585 amends the charter school and innovation zone school chapter of Iowa code. It separates the approval process for the two types of schools by allowing charter schools to be approved by the local school board, as opposed to the state board of education. Innovation zone school applications are still to be approved by the state board. It allows more entities to apply to create a charter school, including community colleges, regents universities, nonpublic schools, private colleges, and nonprofits. Current code only allows for a principal, teachers, or parents to apply for converting an existing school into a charter. The bill also allows for the charter to be established in a new building and not just an existing attendance center, as allowed in current code. The bill eliminates the requirement that charter and innovation zone schools comply with Iowa Code chapters 20, collective bargaining, and chapter 279, which deals with the powers and duties of a school district, instead allowing them the option to comply, should they choose. My view is the more freedom infused into the educational system the more creative professionals will be in creating educational opportunities for students.

House File 588 allows parents providing home school education to their children to also teach students that are not related. The bill limits enrollment to no more than four unrelated students. Independent private instruction is exempt from all school-related statutes and rules

except compulsory attendance. Additionally, independent private instruction must provide private or religious based instruction as its primary purpose and must provide enrolled students with instruction in math, reading, language, science, and social studies. This allows a way for more than one family to share resources in educating their children.

Finally, House File 584 allows a parent that is home schooling their children to teach driver's education to their children, as well. The course of instruction must be approved by the department of transportation and meet at least the standards taught in public and private school driver education courses. But some requirements established in the bill are actually at a higher level. For example, the amount of student driving time doubles from 20 hours to 40 hours when the parent is teaching driver's education.

One more major bill to mention this week is important to our agriculture industry. House File 589, which passed with bipartisan support in the Iowa House, is an effort to modernize offenses related to Agriculture Production Code chapter that was enacted a decade ago. The primary concerns this bill seeks to address are the biosecurity of our animal and crop industry, and the well-being of animals. The bill protects livestock and crop operations against unauthorized destruction, killing or injuring of stock, or disruption of agricultural or biotechnical operations on an owner's premise. Additionally, it makes it unlawful to produce, possess, or distribute an unauthorized recording at an animal or crop operation created under fraudulent pretenses. Finally, this measure creates a fraud provision to address situations where access to an animal or crop facility are granted by the owner or keeper of the facility on the basis of deceptions that hide the true intent of the person seeking access. This bill does not seek to protect operators who mistreat or neglect their animals, but rather promotes reporting these instances through the proper channels as defined in Iowa law. These channels involve reporting concerns to local, state, or federal authorities which then allows trained investigators to enter the facility unannounced during normal business hours and conduct an investigation that is biologically safe. This is a good bill that protects our vitally important agriculture industry from those who seeks to do it harm.

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