

# **Iowa House of Representatives**

## **State Representative Cecil Dolecheck**

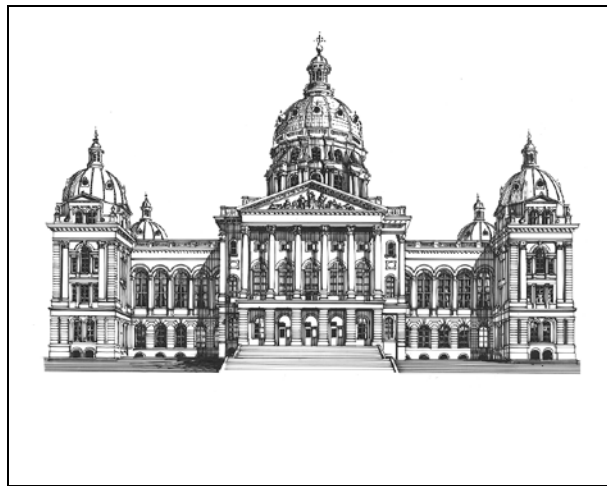
### **Dolecheck's Details**

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**For the week of February 14th, 2011**



## **The Governor's New Preschool Plan**

Much emphasis has been placed on Governor Branstad releasing his preschool plan after he campaigned on the issue and asked that we eliminate the current state funded preschool program. On Monday he released the plan to the legislature and to the public.

The governor and House Republicans have argued that the current statewide voluntary preschool program (SWVPP) costs too much and is unsustainable in the current budget climate. It provided free preschool to any family who applied, including those who could readily afford preschool. When the state has been unable to meet its current funding obligations to even K-12 education, how could we continue funding an additional grade with a price tag that keeps rising every year?

The current program has cost the state \$156 million so far in just 4 years and that number will keep increasing until it reaches a yearly cost of over \$100 million (it is estimated to cost the state \$70 million in FY12). Governor Branstad's new plan contrasts most sharply with the old plan on that number. His plan spends \$43 million in state money FY12 for preschool tuition scholarships and requires parents to kick in an additional \$7.5 million. Here's how his plan breaks down.

The Iowa Preschool Program (IPP) provides scholarships of \$3,000 per eligible four-year old which follows the child to an eligible preschool provider of the parent's choice. This is equal to roughly a .5 weighting in the school funding formula. The SWVPP used a .6 weighting and was about \$3,600 per student (current K-12 state cost per pupil is \$5883). The \$3,000 funds 10 hours of instructional time per week for 34 weeks in the year, which is \$333 per month.

Under the IPP all families contribute something to their child's preschool, but that amount will change with the level of the family's poverty level. The state will pick up the remaining amount up to \$3000.

The total appropriation the governor is recommending is \$43,600,000. The remaining \$1,202,322 (after subtracting the \$42,397,678 state cost) will be used by the DE for oversight, assessment, and advertising. Distribution of the funds will flow through the school district and be sent to the preschool of the parent's choice. For the parent contribution, the parent will pay that directly to the preschool their child is attending.

One of Gov. Branstad's goals is to roll various state preschool funds into one program. The \$43,600,000 is made up from several of those programs. It includes \$35,000,000 appropriated for the IPP, \$4,600,000 from the Shared Visions preschool program, and \$4,000,000 from ECI (Empowerment) preschool tuition assistance. As for quality and assessment, those are addressed with several components. Preschools who wish to participate in the program, whether they be private or public, must meet one of several standards measurements. This includes the National Association of Education of Young Children (NAEYC), federal Head Start program standards, or the state's Quality Preschool Program Standards (QPPS). The DE will determine whether a preschool program meets one of those standards.

Certified teachers will no longer be required, meaning private preschools will not need a district teacher in order to qualify for funds. To assure teacher quality, two options are available. Individuals with a bachelor's degree can teach but have two years to earn a newly created early childhood certificate. The certificate will be issued by the Board of Educational Examiners (BOEE).

There will be provisions to ensure that private preschools have an equal footing in the program. Most importantly, parents can choose to spend their dollars at an approved private program of their choice. Secondly, the DE will maintain a website with all eligible preschools in a district which can be narrowed by zip code. Third, school districts must confirm that they have contacted all private preschools in their district. The money in this program will follow the child and provide the family a choice. The new program is a step in the right direction, making sure that families who need assistance will have the opportunity while not shutting out 4-year-olds in districts who did not participate in the SWVPP. It will ensure that private preschools are not put at a competitive disadvantage against a growing state program.

## **House Provides Home Rule for School Districts**

This week the House passed a bill establishing home rule for school districts in Iowa. It's a step that many Representatives feel is necessary to give school districts some autonomy and control over their own operations to meet a challenging budget situation. It certainly isn't a new concept in Iowa. Iowa adopted home rule for cities in 1968 and again for counties in 1978. Those have been in place in Iowa now for decades, giving not only local authorities an understanding of the implications, but also Iowa's courts, should issues of legality arise.

The home rule bill that the House passed this week extends that local control to school districts. House Republicans feel that heavy-handed state regulations can be burdensome for creativity and innovation and that local boards and superintendents know best what would serve their district and their students well. The bill gives them a chance to try new things and work effectively with the tools they have at their disposal.

This increase in authority is not, however, without check. Consider it a "limited" home rule. Taxing authority still falls on the legislature. Local boards cannot create new levies without the state allowing them to do so. Additionally, anything created at the local level under home rule is not permanent law. Should problems arise, either the local community can make a decision to stop the practice, or the legislature can mandate a solution. Finally, home rule does not come at the expense of existing state law or the constitution. If state law says that a school district must act in a certain way or expend certain funds on specific purposes, they still have to abide by those statutes.

The House passed the bill because they feel that local boards were elected by the community to provide a service to them and their children. They should be given the opportunity to be creative and innovative. A waiver process does exist for some things with the Department of Education, but it still gives ultimate control to the state, leaving local boards with no option other than to ask for permission. They deserve the opportunity to have some control over their affairs and don't need permission for everything not already dictated in Iowa law.

What do you think? Email me your thoughts. My e-mail address is :

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Visitors to the House include : Robert & Ruth Cochran of Lenox, Caroll Baker and Phil Kinser of Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative, and Clara McKenney of Bedford.

Information about my legislative forum schedule, past newsletters and biography can be found at [www.iowahouserepublicans.com/members/cecil-dolecheck](http://www.iowahouserepublicans.com/members/cecil-dolecheck)