



Equity Committee

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Subsidizing Standards for Public School Students' Activities

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Position

It is the position of the Iowa Youth Congress, the voice of Iowa's youth, to support the expansion of the Student Activity Fund by providing money to school districts in order to subsidize approved extracurricular activities.

Current Situation

Iowa's efforts to help low-income students participate in extracurricular activities are uncoordinated and incomplete. Although many Districts across the state have provided various forms of aid to low-income students, failure to create a standard state-wide program allows for students in rural communities around the state to fall behind and provides inadequate opportunities to students of differing socio-economic statuses in those areas. The National Center for Education Statistics data reports that students in the lowest socio-economic status are 20 percent less likely to participate in an extracurricular [5]. This gap reflects the true impact of inaction. Standardizing an economic subsidization for participation in approved extracurriculars would not only increase student involvement in school activities, but would also decrease the opportunity gap among those of disparate socio-economic backgrounds.

Currently, Iowa Code § 298A.8 requires a Student Activity Fund in every district. This "Student Activity Fund" simply keeps all money used for extracurricular activities in a separate fund or account from other district costs such as a "Nutrition Fund" or "Day Care Fund" [4]. The Iowa school funding formula supports the school district's expenses for teaching and learning but does not provide for any direct funding for the Student Activity Fund of the district. Essentially, school districts are not technically required to have any money in their Student Activity Fund, and there is no money from the state government that goes directly to support that fund.

In districts such as Iowa City, disparities in accessibility are being met with innovative funding allocations producing immense results. At Iowa City's City High School, in order to subsidize the 475 dollar cost to participate in the school's show choir, the City High Music department provides financial aid to students who qualify for free or reduced lunch [5]. Although this financial aid program gives 10 students the opportunity to participate in an activity they otherwise could not afford, the money does not come from a district program [5]. Instead, the money stems from donations and fundraisers held by the Music Department of City High School. This is just one example of school initiatives that have opened the door for extracurricular involvement of numerous students, causing life-long impacts on personal and community development.

Rationale

Participating in extracurricular activities benefits students not only in high school, but also in their future careers. Students who take part in activity programs tend to have higher Grade Point Averages (GPA), improved attendance, lower dropout rates, and higher post-secondary education achievements than their peers. Statistics also summarize that involvement in extracurriculars is correlated with lower dropout rates as non-participants' dropout rates were at 21.2 percent compared to those of participants at 7.1 percent from an analysis done in 2017 [2]. As for post-high school, in a report by the National Center for Education Statistics, they found that only 48 percent of seniors who were not involved in an extracurricular activity were expected to earn a college level degree, compared to 68 percent of seniors who were in an extracurricular activity [5]. The National Federation of State High School Associations also goes on to report that involvement in activities leads students to also learn valuable life skills as well as self-esteem and resilience, which makes them less likely to engage in risky behaviors [1]. These extracurricular activities can give children exposure to adult mentors who they might otherwise not have in their lives [6].

For lower-income youth, extracurriculars often act as a vehicle for upward mobility. They provide access to valuable mentorship and increase a student's chance of receiving post-secondary education, which are both important opportunities to narrow the achievement gap. Growing financial barriers to activities put low-income students at a greater disadvantage and perpetuate a cycle of poverty [3].

Recommended Action

As officially supported by the Iowa legislature, actions to develop a bill and subsequently promote our cause will be done by implementing standards for public school action on subsidization. The bill would sustain that the annual Iowa spending bills must delegate necessary funds into the previously established Student Activity Funds to support this initiative. The primary allocation would be done by collecting spending information from each public school district from the primary year to create an approximated level of funding for each school district. To do so, at the end of the school year that this bill is enacted, school districts will complete the following standardization level process and report these costs to the state to in place a monetary value for their district's fund. This process will state that the administrative representatives of any district-approved extracurricular activity must clarify any costs associated with their program and have them reported to the financial administration of the school before the start of said program every school year. This includes the recommendation of exact necessities, including transportation and equipment, so that these items can be purchased on a subsidized dollar and on a consistent basis. At the end of each school year, the final program costs based on their usage by students would be sent to the state to be totaled and the financial budget for the subsidization program to be adjusted for the upcoming financial year. The adjusted funds placed into each Student Activity Fund will be financed by a combination of state funds and district funds with state funds coming from the State of Iowa General Fund's education appropriations. Districts shall have the ability to add on to their Student Activity Fund with local school district funding if it is deemed necessary.

For the usage of this fund by students, students who qualify for the state's free or reduced lunch program (regardless of whether they utilize the program for lunch) would be able to complete a state-issued form that requests subsidized funds for exact costs or equipment to support their participation in an activity. The school district must then review and approve or deny the request to use funding from the Student Activity Fund. These funds will be controlled by the school's financial structure in order to track and pay for approved costs. We recommend that you take action to aid students by supporting subsidizing standards for student activities.

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Sources

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