

Legislative Session Final Report

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The west side of the Iowa State Capitol the morning of the final day of the 2025 Legislative Session. (Photo by The Capitol Group.)

2025 Legislative Session Concludes

The 2025 Session of the Iowa Legislature came to an end the morning of May 15th, 13 days past the scheduled final day of adjournment.

Despite holding large majorities in the House of Representatives and the Senate, Republican lawmakers struggled, but eventually came up with agreements on each of the 11 needed budget bills.

There were little to no changes made to state or local tax policy. Also an agreement on property tax changes stalled when the House and Senate could not agree on a plan.

Looking ahead to next year, the first day of the 2026 Iowa Legislative Session is Monday, January 12th.

Bill To Allow School Chaplains Stalls

The controversial bill that would allow public schools to employ or engage (without pay) chaplains, was not approved by the Legislature during the 2025 Session, but is eligible for further consideration next year.

The bill, House File 884, was approved by the House and then the Senate Education Committee, but came to a halt once it was placed on the Senate debate calendar.

Of concern is the lack of detail in the legislation.
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Some of those missing elements include:

- Nothing in the bill prevents school “chaplains” from trying to convert students to another religion;
- The bill does not prevent school “chaplains” from belittling, denigrating and or denying the validity of faith traditions;
- The bill does not require a school to inform a parent prior to a “chaplain” interacting with a student.

It is important to note that claims by supporters of the bill that the Des Moines Public Schools currently “have chaplains” are false and have been debunked by the District.

Expect proponents of placing chaplains in public schools to be active in their efforts during the 2026 Session of the Iowa Legislature.

Hygiene Products Bill Slowly Advances In The House

Legislation to have schools make feminine hygiene products available, is continuing to make its way through the legislative process.

House File 833 has been approved by both the House Human Resources Committee and an Appropriations Committee subcommittee.

The bill requires school boards to ensure that feminine hygiene products can be accessed by students without cost in at least half of the restrooms in school buildings in the district where

students in grades 6 through 12 are educated. It also requires that the supply of feminine hygiene products is refilled regularly.

As written, the legislation appropriates an amount necessary to fund the full cost of compliance with the legislation by school districts for the next three years.

HF 833 remains eligible for continued consideration in the 2026 Legislative Session.

School Based Mental Health Funding Approved

The MHA-backed Children’s Mental Health-School Based Training and Support program has again received the support of lawmakers.

Included in the Education Appropriations bill is a continuation of \$3.183 million in funding for the program.

Bills Approved By The House and Senate

(HF - House File, HSB - House Study Bill, HR House Resolution, SF - Senate File, SSB - Senate Study Bill, SR - Senate Resolution)

(F - For, A - Against, M - Monitoring)

SF 647 (formerly SSB 1231) - Education Appropriations (F) - Included in this spending bill is \$3.183 million for the Children’s School-Based Mental Health Training program.

Approved by the Senate 34-14. Approved by the House 59-32.

SF 538 - Threat Assessment Teams (M) - The bill allows covered entities that provide services to students enrolled in kindergarten through grade 12 who are experiencing or at risk of an emotional disturbance or mental illness, or who pose an articulable and significant threat to the health and safety of any person, to share records or information that are reasonably necessary to ensure access to appropriate services for such students, or to ensure the safety of such students or others, with any other such covered entity. The bill authorizes all such covered entities to communicate, collaborate, and coordinate efforts to best serve students.

The bill defines “covered entity” to include nonpublic schools, charter schools, innovation zone schools, the judicial branch, a criminal or juvenile justice agency, political subdivisions, state agencies, and any service or support provider that contracts with such persons.

The bill authorizes school districts, accredited nonpublic schools, charter schools, and innovation zone schools to establish a multidisciplinary threat assessment team. The multidisciplinary threat assessment team is required to coordinate resources and assess and intervene when a student enrolled in the school exhibits behavior that may pose a threat to the safety of the school, school employees, or other students enrolled in the school.

Approved by the Senate 48-0. Approved by the House 91-0. Signed into law.

SF 277 (formerly SSB 1077) - Truancy Law Update (M) - This bill modifies provisions related to compulsory education, truancy, and chronic absenteeism. The bill requires the Department of Education to develop, in consultation with the Iowa County Attorneys Association, a model policy that county attorneys may reference when determining whether and to what extent to enforce the provisions of Code chapter 299 on compulsory education. The bill also requires the Department to distribute the model policy to county attorneys, school districts, and accredited nonpublic schools.

The bill adds undergoing military entrance processing, engaging in military service, traveling to attend a funeral, and traveling to attend a wedding to the list of specified activities that are not included when determining whether a child of compulsory attendance age is deemed to be a truant.

Finally, current law provides that if a child is absent from school for greater than or equal to 15 percent of the days or hours in the grading period, a school official is required to attempt to find the cause for the child’s absences and initiate and participate in a school engagement meeting. The bill provides that a school official is only required to initiate and participate in a school engagement meeting if the school official determines that the child’s absences are negatively affecting the child’s academic progress.

Approved by the Senate 47-0. Approved by the House 93-0. Signed into law.

SF 22 - Hands Free Phones While Driving (F) - This bill prohibits any use of an electronic device while driving. The bill defines the terms “electronic device”, “use”, and “voice-activated or hands-free mode”. The bill allows the use of an electronic device if the vehicle is at a complete stop off the traveled portion of the roadway, or as far away from the center of the roadway as is practicable if the vehicle cannot be entirely removed.

Approved by the Senate 47-1. Approved by the House 84-11. Signed into law.

HF 1049 (formerly HSB 342) - Health and Human Services Appropriations (M) - Included in this bill is a provision which prohibits fiscal year 2026 moneys appropriated for the medical assistance program to be used for reimbursement for sex reassignment surgery or associated procedures, including hormone therapy or other medical interventions intended to alter primary or secondary sex characteristics related to an individual’s gender dysphoria diagnosis.

Approved by the House 63-28. Approved by the Senate 31-15.

HF 865 - Student Bullying (M) - This bill modifies provisions related to the harassment or bullying of students enrolled in school districts or accredited nonpublic schools.

Approved by the House 64-33. Approved by the Senate 32-16

HF 835 (formerly HF 102) - School Seizure Training (M) - The bill requires by the start of the school year beginning 25 July 1, 2025, for the board of directors of each school district and the authorities in charge of each accredited nonpublic school to have at least one school employee at each school who has met the training requirements necessary to administer or assist with the self-administration of a seizure rescue medication or medication prescribed to treat seizure disorder symptoms and approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration and a manual dose of prescribed electrical stimulation using a vagus nerve stimulator magnet approved by the United States food and drug administration.

The bill also requires the Department of Education to convene and provide administrative support to a health care-related training for school personnel group. The bill requires the group to review and develop a plan to ensure that Iowa educators have the health care training necessary to perform their duties and to submit recommendations for delivery and implementation of training required under state law or rule. The bill requires the group to submit its findings and recommendations in a report to the General Assembly, the Governor, and the State Board of Education by December 1, 2025.

Amended and approved by the House 94-2. Approved by the Senate 49-0

HF 782 (formerly HSB 106) - Cell Phones in Schools (M) - Commencing with the school year beginning July 1, 2025, the bill requires school districts, charter schools, and innovation zone schools to adopt policies regarding student use of personal electronic devices during school hours. The bill establishes what the policies are to include. The bill requires the director of the Department of Education to develop and distribute to schools model policies that, if adopted, would satisfy the school's responsibilities under these provisions. However, schools may adopt policies that are more stringent than these model policies. The bill defines "personal electronic device" to include electronic communication equipment, mobile phones, smart phones, video game devices, and portable media players. These provisions take effect upon enactment.

Approved by the House 88-9. Amended and approved by the Senate 49-0. Approved by the House 92-4.

Signed into law.

HF 330 (formerly HF 5) - Autism Spectrum Coverage (F) - This bill relates to insurance coverage for covered individuals for the treatment of autism spectrum disorder. The bill also changes the definition of autism under current law to align with the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders.

Approved by the House 92-0. Approved by the Senate 45-0

Other Bills of Interest

(HF - House File, HSB - House Study Bill, HR House Resolution, SF - Senate File, SSB - Senate Study Bill, SR - Senate Resolution)

(F - For, A - Against, M - Monitoring)

(NOTE: Any legislation, not approved by the House and Senate, introduced in 2025 remains eligible for consideration in 2026)

SF 172 - Child Sexual Abuse and Assault Prevention (F) - The bill requires the director of the Department of Education to develop and distribute to school districts and accredited nonpublic schools model guidelines related to how to best provide instruction to students enrolled in kindergarten through grade six in child sexual abuse and child sexual abuse awareness and prevention. The bill establishes requirements related to the model guidelines. The bill requires school districts and accredited nonpublic schools to provide instruction related to child sexual abuse and child sexual assault awareness and prevention that is consistent with the model guidelines to students enrolled in kindergarten through grade six. The bill also requires the Board of Educational Examiners to adopt rules that establish continuing education requirements for renewal of a license, certificate, authorization, or statement of recognition. The bill establishes that continuing education activities may include participating in or presenting at in-service training programs related to child sexual abuse and child sexual assault awareness and prevention.

On Senate debate calendar

SF 168 (formerly SSB 1022) - Supplemental Weighting Modification (M) - The bill provides that the supplementary weighting associated with a shared operational function in the area of a master social worker, an independent social worker, a mental health professional, or a school resource officer shall not count toward the maximum amount of additional weighting for budget years beginning on or after July 1, 2025.

On Senate debate calendar.

SF 102 - School Mental Health Training (F) - The bill requires each board of directors of a school district by July 1, 2026, to require annual, evidence-based training on educator mental wellness and self-identification and mitigation of negative mental health symptoms for all school personnel who hold a license, certificate, authorization, or statement of recognition issued by the Board of Educational Examiners and who have regular contact with students in kindergarten through grade 12. The bill makes a similar requirement for training on student social and emotional wellness and the identification and mitigation of negative mental health symptoms in students.

Referred to Education. Subcommittee: Evans, Donahue, and Taylor

SF 100 - School Mental Health Resources (F) - The bill requires schools to publish on the school's internet site the mental health resources created by Your Life Iowa, or a link to where such mental health resources may be accessed on Your Life Iowa's internet site, and to partner with students enrolled in the school in order to find additional ways to increase student awareness of mental health resources and information related to mental health.

Referred to Education. Subcommittee: Evans, Staed, and Taylor

SF 8 - Student Names (M) - This bill prohibits school districts and charter schools from taking disciplinary action against employees, contractors, or students for the use of legal names, the use of student names as listed in school registration forms or records, or for the failure to use personal pronouns in official communications.

On Senate debate calendar

HF 884 (formerly HF 334) - Allowing Schools To Hire Chaplains (A) - This bill authorizes school districts, charter schools, and innovation zone schools to employ chaplains, or engage volunteer chaplains, to provide support, services, and programs for students. The bill provides that such chaplains are not required to have a license, endorsement, certification, authorization, or statement of recognition issued by the Board of Educational Examiners.

On House debate calendar

HF 883 (formerly HF 543) - Hygiene Products in Schools (F) - This bill requires school boards to ensure that feminine hygiene products can be accessed by students without cost in at least half of the restrooms in school buildings in the district where students in grades 6 through 12 are educated and that the supply of feminine hygiene products is refilled regularly. The bill defines "feminine hygiene products" as sanitary napkins, tampons, or other similar items used for feminine hygiene.

The bill appropriates an amount necessary to fund the full cost of compliance with the bill by school districts from the general fund of the state to the department of education for the period beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2028.

Approved by Education. Referred to Appropriations

HF 859 (formerly HSB 217) - School Reductions In Force (M) - This bill requires school districts to adopt policies related to carrying out a reduction in force.

The bill defines "reduction in force" as the termination of a practitioner's employment due to economic reasons that include decreased funding, decreased enrollment, and the closure or reorganization of schools in the school system. The bill requires schools to adopt a policy related to carrying out a reduction in force and publish the policy on the school's internet site within 10 days after adoption.

The policy must require the school to consider whether to terminate the employment of administrative staff members prior to carrying out a reduction in force. The policy must also require the school to use practitioner performance as the sole factor or a primary factor when carrying out a reduction in force.

On House debate calendar

HF 737 - School Cardiac Emergencies (M) - This bill establishes the school health-related emergency response plan competitive grant program within the Department of Education. The bill defines “athletic emergency action plan” as written guidelines and templates for the documentation of emergency planning to help prepare individuals for a catastrophic injury situation that occurs during physical education or an extracurricular athletic activity or contest.

The bill provides that if the Legislature appropriates moneys to the school health-related emergency response plan competitive grant program fund, The Department of Education is required to develop and administer a school health-related emergency response plan competitive grant program to provide grants to schools to offset the costs associated with the school’s development and implementation of a cardiac emergency response plan that satisfies the requirements established in the bill.

Referred to Appropriations

HF 522 (formerly HF 114) - Special Foods For Therapeutic Classroom Students (M) - This bill relates to the therapeutic classroom incentive program by authorizing the expenditure of monies for certain nutritional items. The bill provides that the support provided by a therapeutic classroom may include supporting student access to micronutrients and vitamins, assessing the macro-nutritional needs of students, providing minimally processed whole foods, restricting the use and availability of certain artificial or synthetic food additives, remediating the negative impacts of excessive use of digital screens, increasing student exposure to natural light or the light emitted by full spectrum lighting fixtures, and carrying out any other scientifically supported initiative that a school district reasonably believes will improve student health.

Approved by the House 66-32. Referred to Senate Education. Approved by subcommittee.

HF 409 - Past MH History Questions (M) - The bill requires the Department of Inspections, Appeals, and Licensing to adopt rules prohibiting a hospital or rural emergency hospital from including on an application for clinical privileges a question regarding whether the applicant has a past history or diagnosis of mental illness, substance use disorders, or other physical or behavioral health conditions. The rules shall allow a hospital or rural emergency hospital to include a question regarding whether the applicant currently has any condition that is not being appropriately treated which impairs or adversely affects the applicant’s ability to practice with reasonable skill and safety in a competent, ethical, and professional manner.

The bill similarly prohibits licensing boards for health-related professions from asking about an applicant’s past history or diagnosis of mental illness, substance use disorders, or other physical or behavioral health conditions. The bill allows licensing boards for health-related professions to ask whether the applicant currently has any condition that is not being appropriately treated which impairs or adversely affects the applicant’s ability to practice.

Referred to Health and Human Services. Approved by subcommittee

HF 212 (formerly HSB 5) - School Food Prohibitions (M) - The bill provides that, when necessary, school districts, charter schools, and innovation zone schools are required to use natural fats and oils to prepare meals to be served to students as part of the school’s breakfast or lunch program. The bill prohibits schools from using margarine to prepare a meal to be served to students as part of the school district’s breakfast or lunch program.

The bill prohibits school districts, charter schools, and innovation zone schools from serving meals to students as part of the school’s breakfast or lunch program that contain blue dye 1, blue dye 2, brominated vegetable oil, green dye 3, margarine, potassium bromate, propylparaben, red dye 3, red dye 40, yellow dye 5, or yellow dye 6. The bill also prohibits schools from permitting the sale of any beverages that contain such ingredients during a school function or school-sponsored activity unless the sale does not take place on school district property or unless the sale takes place at least 30 minutes after the end of the school day.

On House debate calendar.

HF 150 - Letter Grades Only (M) - This bill prohibits school districts from using standards-based grading to evaluate the performance of students who are enrolled in grades 6 through 12. The bill defines “standards-based grading” to mean a method of evaluating student performance in which traditional academic subjects are broken down into smaller learning objectives or skills and a student’s performance is evaluated based on the extent to which the student has mastered each particular learning objective or skill. Referred to Education. Approved by subcommittee.

HF 80 - Student Names (M) - This bill prohibits school districts and charter schools from taking disciplinary action against employees, contractors, or students for the use of legal names, the use of student names as listed in school registration forms or records, or for the failure to use personal pronouns in official communications. Referred to Education. Approved by subcommittee.

HF 9 - School Resource Officer Grant Program (M) - This bill establishes the school security personnel grant program within the department of education. The bill provides that the amount of an annual grant provided to a school district that has provided matching money pursuant to this provision shall not exceed \$50,000. Referred to Education

HF 8 - School Nurses and Broad-Spectrum Cannabidiol (M) - This bill requires school boards and authorities in charge of accredited nonpublic schools to establish procedures for a school nurse to provide a broad-spectrum cannabidiol product to a student. The procedures shall provide that a school nurse shall only provide a broad-spectrum cannabidiol product to a student if the product was provided to the school district or accredited nonpublic school by the parent or guardian of the student and if the product is provided in accordance with written instructions provided by the parent or guardian. Referred to Education

HSB 10 - Athletic Trainers As School Nurses (A) - This bill provides that beginning July 1, 2025, school districts are required to employ either a school nurse or an athletic trainer licensed under Code chapter 152D (athletic training) to provide health services to students. Referred to Health and Human Services. Approved by subcommittee.

HSB 84 - Gender Identity Education (M) - This bill prohibits school districts, charter schools, and innovation zone schools from providing any program, curriculum, test, survey, questionnaire, promotion, or instruction relating to gender identity or sexual orientation to students in grades 5 through 12, extending the current prohibition that applies to such students in kindergarten through grade 6. Referred to Education. Approved by subcommittee