



March 28, 2022

Dear Honorable Members of the Iowa House,

The Linn-Mar Community School District Board of Education is writing today asking you to vote NO on HF 2577. The impact of this legislation, if passed, would drastically limit the ability of educators to adapt and meet the individualized needs of their students. It would also put additional financial strain on districts across the state in updating our technology systems to meet new transparency requirements.

As a district we are open to working with parents and community members that have questions about curriculum being used. Our concern comes from the requirement to publish course syllabi, lesson plans and course materials up to six months in advance of teaching. We recognize a recent amendment allows for some flexibility in timing, however we still feel this creates an undue burden on the profession and limits the ability to meet the daily needs of students.

The Iowa Department of Education's own Iowa Teaching Standards outline the importance of review, data and assessment to determine students' comprehension of course materials. Requiring the publishing of lesson plans so far in advance would eliminate a teacher's ability to adapt lesson plans and teaching strategies to help students who are struggling.

Every student learns in their own style and on their own time. Educators are trained to continually evaluate their students to look for areas that need review or to know when a concept has been mastered. This bill would make that standard practice of teaching nearly impossible and be detrimental to the progress and success of Iowa students.

As for the financial concerns this proposal brings. The process of updating technology systems and to cover classroom time for all teachers to create lesson plans that far in advance are high. The Legislative Services Agency's analysis has estimated this bill will cost \$27.4 million in substitute costs alone.

This legislation would put undue burden on our teachers and further entrenches the growing problem of teacher retention and recruitment. Our teachers are comprehensively trained to recognize the needs of our students and have devoted their lives to the most important work a society can undertake – the education of its children.

As a district we already have policies in place for curriculum or materials review and are open to dialogue with concerned parents and community members. We are asking you to oppose HF 2577. To further aid in your reflection of this topic, attached to this letter you will find testimonials from educators outlining how they adapt to their students each year and how this bill could impact their teaching abilities and retention in the profession.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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Brittania Morey,
School Board President

DISTRICT SCHOOLS

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Echo Hill, PreK-4
CJ McDonald, Principal

Indian Creek, K-4
Kelly Kretschmar, Principal

Linn Grove, PreK-4
Lori Manley, Principal

Novak, JrK/K-4
Carol O'Donnell, Principal

Westfield, K-4
Ed Rogers, Principal

Wilkins, PreK-4
Amanda Potter, Principal

Boulder Peak, 5-6
Dan Ludwig, Principal

Hazel Point, 5-6
Chad Buchholz, Principal

Excelsior, 7-8
John Christian, Principal

Oak Ridge, 7-8
Travis Axeen, Principal

High School, 9-12
Jeff Gustason, Principal

Compass Alternative Center
Steve Goodall, Principal

Teacher Testimonials

Here is some information from a 4th grade teacher's perspective.

In November, I had a new student join our classroom. I realized he was struggling quite a bit in math and after reaching out to his former teacher and doing a diagnostic assessment with him, I found that he was missing quite a few 1st grade math skills. The diagnostic assessment I was able to use with this student is not part of our curriculum, but it provided me with a place to start. I have had to create separate tasks and activities for him when he is working independently. I've also partnered him up with a buddy so that he can access 4th grade material.

Each grade level has priority standards that they need to teach, but we also have other grade level standards that need to be addressed. I can't anticipate which standard or skill students will struggle with, or how long it will take for them to master that skill or concept. I also can't anticipate how many students will struggle. On the other end of that, I can't anticipate how many students will need enrichment or what kind of enrichment they will need for a standard. Right now, I pretty much have 4 different lesson plans going for math; enrichment, on level, struggling, and then the student that is a few grade levels below 4th grade.

I currently arrive at school every day at 6:45 am and leave anywhere from 5:30-6:30 at night. (CJ and our custodian would be able to confirm that.) This is completely my choice, but I pretty much plan on a day-to-day basis, which is why I am there for so many hours. I have a general outline of the standards/skills/etc. I'll be teaching, but the differentiation of the lesson varies day-to-day. Sometimes, I can plan a few days in advance, but sometimes I cannot.

I have created a LOT of lessons in Seesaw because not all the lessons in our math program align with our standards or students need more practice, and the math program we have doesn't provide enough practice for students to master the standard. So, that's when teachers have to go look for supplemental materials online or in other resources in order to provide that extra practice/repetition.

We also start every day with a morning meeting. Again, sometimes I can plan the topic in advance, but if a problem or issue pops up during the week, I make sure we address it the next day. For example, students were being called "cheaters", so we talked about that. Another topic was independent work time because we had students not on the correct website during independent work time. I can't anticipate what our topic will be 6 months out. Along with these morning meetings, I've had some pretty serious topics come up and had to cut my math short. I've had students share some personal things with the class (anxiety, health concerns with a family member, problems with friends, etc.) and instead of cutting these students off in order to get to math, I extended our morning meeting time. We had some pretty awesome conversations.

~ elementary level teacher

I teach Language Arts {8th grade}. While this is my third year there, this is my 24th year teaching. If I used “canned curriculum” strictly as written or decided what students needed for instruction before I actually met them, I would not be an effective teacher. I am responsible for planning for and meeting the educational needs of all learners in my classroom. This would not occur if flexible lesson planning was not an option. My teaching partner and I meet daily to discuss student performance and make adjustments as needed. Some of these changes affect whole-class lessons, while some impact small groups or individuals. The data analysis we do and the instructional choices we make are vital components of the RTI process (Response to Intervention) an integral part of our district’s PLC (Professional Learning Community). Just this week we used student task performance results to create new materials to review and research a concept students have not mastered. Essentially used student responses from a formative assessment students completed on Tuesday, reviewed and analyzed it, and then used student samples to create a new lesson on Wednesday. Just today we revised plans for a summative essay assignment because we recognized extra scaffolded instruction is needed in order to help our students be their most successful. At times, we simply cannot move forward without taking a moment to temporarily back up. We are constantly revisiting and adjusting tasks and timelines to better meet student needs. Solidifying plans sixth months in advance defies logic and absolutely goes against best practice. If the intent of these actions is meant to punish teachers, it is our students who will suffer.

~ middle level teacher

I teach 2nd grade. Every teacher has different strengths. That is the beauty of a good teacher. Some teachers are planners and plan every last detail. That is definitely not me! I have a skeleton for the week and I know the standards. I let the students direct the lessons at times. When ideas pop into my head on how to make the lesson better, I turn mid lesson and go with it. If they are just not getting it, I back up and try a different way. Sometimes I have to break down the learning to a handful of kiddos. Each day is different and each teacher does it their own way. Having to post lessons is a horrible idea. I thought the accountability was the standards being met. I am trying to figure out what the point of this is. I have a hard time with parents engaging in the messages I send. I truly don’t think parents will read these. If it’s making sure teachers are doing their job, my door is open, and I welcome my principal and instructional coach in to watch. Our reading program is all laid out and I follow that plan for the most part. So that would be easy to share. Math is changing and I am feeling more empowered on how and when to work on each standard.

This will turn a lot of great teachers off. This definitely should not happen. It takes the art of teaching and learning out.

~ elementary level teacher

I try to plan out two weeks ahead, but in pencil as things change all the time. Teachers respond daily to the different needs and learning styles of students. We have a general scope of units and know timeframes. Instruction should be based on student needs where we reteach with new methods or enrich as we observe learners. As a teacher, I evaluate and see if a skill needs more time. I will take that time to ensure meeting a standard. This can offset any set of plans. Setting a curriculum for 6 months would be an enormous task for what purpose? Curriculum changes have been constant. Teachers collaborate to view data and share methods that work for ensuring student success. We modify and adapt to this data and needs in our grade levels and classrooms. This can mean changing an approach or scope to meet needs. Teachers spend so many hours to provide learning opportunities that are fun and enriching. Don't take more time away from this focus to write out plans for six months.

~ elementary level teacher

While a focus on specific learning standards takes place in each high school classroom, these standards should be receiving constant review. The instructional decision-making process for teachers working to have students meet these learning standards is a reactive process. A successful teacher knows both the content, procedures, and actions to be taught regarding each standard, as well as the student they are teaching. The need to react and change instructional decisions for each student within a classroom at any given time is required for any teacher to successfully help a student learn in a way they learn best.

Relating learning standards and course content to students in meaningful ways requires that teachers have the ability and flexibility to instruct using all available strategies and resources. I am a firm believer in detailed lesson plans, however, as an administrator I expect teachers make any needed adjustment to manipulate a lesson plan in order to help their students. The most successful lessons I observe are of teachers who know exactly what is needed to be taught yet make multiple changes and overhauls as needed. This can be at the lesson level and also at the chapter/unit level depending on the circumstance.

Support for students who are either struggling with or already more than proficient with learning standards requires data-driven decisions and research-based strategies for instruction. However, teachers must always have the ability to make individual decisions depending upon the needs of a specific student. This may mean the entire process for some students will be non-linear. Asking teachers to turn in six months of lesson plans may sound like a verification of instruction. However, the intensity of the best teachers is created by the constant need to make in-the-moment instructional decisions in every class session. They already have their plans for the entire course and they update them constantly. This is not a need. What they need is the flexibility and support structures to do what is needed for the specific learners they have in any given term.

~ high school level administrator

Posting that far ahead (depending on what date it falls in the school year) seems like it would go against Iowa teaching standards in a way. Like planning for differences, meeting the needs of a variety of needs. So if I post a lesson today that I plan to teach six months from today, how do I hold true to standards 3 and 4 if I don't adjust based on the needs of my students as well as take into consideration assessments I've given/data gathered in student learning (standard 5)

~ elementary level teacher

{If lesson plans are pre-determined and posted six months in advance there's} no chances to re-teach and take time to allow for full understanding before moving on; or no time to go back for review of a topic. Schedule changes happening (like a snow day) and having a hard time to catch up to get back "on track" of the plans. {There's also the} lack of ability to differentiate, we don't know our kids until we begin working with them and find out what they need.

~ elementary level teacher

{setting up lesson plans that far in advance} defeats the purpose of PLCs...why should I teach a lesson if the students have mastered the content and if they haven't mastered and aren't ready for the lesson on a given day I have a responsibility to reteach/teach it differently.

~ elementary level teacher

The ripple effect of this bill would enormous. Teachers will be leaving in droves. Many teachers like myself are already considering a change. I think this bill would be the last straw for many to "pull the trigger" and leave the teaching profession.

Lastly, many teachers already feel undervalued and unappreciated. We are professionals and we should be treated and trusted as such.

~ intermediate level teacher

Lesson plans are always written weekly, even daily, depending on how far you can cover the objective within the day. Curriculum is written for a six month or one year period. This includes objectives to be met weekly. The reason for the daily/weekly lesson plans is to meet the needs of students. Understanding those needs is not clear always, until you are actually teaching the students and learning their needs through their own questions.

~ elementary level teacher

It would be extremely difficult to post lesson plans for an entire year in advance for any teacher. Posting general subject outlines, or themes is not an issue, which usually happens anyway. As a Math Support teacher it would be nearly impossible to know what would be covered for the entire year, since my groups are based on changing data from quarterly assessments. It would be hard to predict if my first graders would be under proficiency in fractions or place value, or addition facts, until they arrive for the year. Then, based on data I would know what strategies or holes to plan lessons. The groups are fluid and ever changing. For example, I recently started new math groups on February 7th, 2022. I had a rough plan to teach the doubles strategies to first graders in 2 weeks. We meet 15 minutes a day- four times a week. It ended up taking these groups 4 weeks to master that content. If I had submitted those lesson plans in advance I would be two weeks behind. Imagine being/feeling that way all year. Similarly I could end up moving through content faster than anticipated. Being transparent with families and parents is important, however, not every decision needs to be publicized for the entire world to see.

Another example, I recently had my taxes done. My accountant thought it would take around a week to complete. She was finished in four days. I was pleasantly surprised, however, she didn't tell me what page of the tax forms she was going to fill out at what time in advance. I trusted her professionalism, and knowledge of tax law to get the job done. Schools, and educators deserve the same trust and respect.

In a recent TV speech (March 1st, 2022) Governor Reynolds spoke about how important it was for the parents not to let the government control their kids' education. That is exactly what she/ the GOP are doing with this bill. They are allowing sensational laws that address problems that don't exist.

I offer this solution to this bill that addresses a problem that doesn't exist. Iowa schools are required to follow the Common Core. It would make much more sense to post the standards by each content for parents to see, then they would know what students are working on mastering. It shouldn't matter if I meet that math standard by using fraction cubes, or by drawing pictures. We need common sense strategies to address the concerns that seem to be materializing from false narratives.

In a profession that is fighting burnout, lack of teacher candidates, laws like this will perpetuate the problems plaguing us. If the Iowa legislature truly wants to make a difference, this is not a solution to do that.

~ elementary level teacher

If I submit my lesson plans at the beginning of the year, how does that allow for differentiation? You do not know your student background knowledge, skill level or needs before the year starts. Do they just want robots teaching their students with the same thing every day regardless if you are ahead or behind?

This would eliminate the ability to provide enrichment opportunities to students who are successful with a concept.

If a student comes to me but can't decode words but I didn't include decoding instruction in my plans because typical 7th graders can decide, I have now been forced to teach the student what I turned in but not what they need. It is impossible to guess before you meet your students what they will need.

Also, how do you plan to pay teachers for this time? They also have to get their classrooms ready, have professional development, meet with parents, and the staff all before the year is started.

I honestly feel that teachers are not appreciated and this will be the straw that breaks the camels back for me. I have missed lots of time with my kid because I am working at home to do what is best for my students at school. I will find a job that allows me to enjoy time at home and not worry about my school work.

My brother tragically died this recently. My sister works for the private sector and she has not had to worry about anything while we have been with him and his family. I have worried about if I had a sub, are my students okay, did my colleagues have to cover for me, answer emails about issues at school, while knowing all of what I will walk into on Wednesday when I return. My team and administrators have truly been amazing and so supportive but I wonder if I worked in the private sector if I could have just unplugged and not worry about my students, team, and school. The requirement of turning plans in at the beginning of the year may really cause me to look outside of education. I am a seasoned teacher but as a new teacher that requirement will be so overwhelming and I wonder how many new staff will truly have the stamina to make it through these challenging times.

What is the legislation's plan for an incredible teacher shortage? Will the legislation also provide their plans for the year in advance for one year? Do even one of you who think this is a good idea have any educational experience, been in a classroom recently, spoken with public school classroom teachers about this bill, or volunteered to support a school? What makes you think that you know what is best for education and teachers without ever walking in their shoes? Please reach out to teachers on both sides of the aisle before voting for something that does not directly impact you.

~ middle level teacher

"This bill takes away from treating educators as professionals. In an already trying past two years, this would require many hours outside of school, taking away from our families. I come from a household of three young children and a spouse that also teaches. Outside of school we should be able to dedicate our time to our children rather than appeasing people with our lesson plans when the volunteer option in our classrooms is always open. Putting phones down and communicating openly with children about their days would be the perfect substitute of this bill. This would be a really big disappointment for educators all across Iowa."

~ intermediate level teacher

The requirement for lesson plans even two weeks in advance reflects absolutely no understanding of the teaching profession and is incredible insulting.

Teaching is an art and a science. The science is the instructional design and assessments based on sound pedagogical approaches. In theory, the science of teaching might allow for lesson plans a month or two in advance.

But the art of teaching is about meeting each individual kid's needs on any given day. Some amazingly pedagogical methods may completely fail the students you have in front of you. Sometimes you plan for a grade level text and realize that many of the kids can't decipher it. On the spot you have to pivot to find new materials that they can read.

As an American History teacher, yes, I know the general units and topics I will cover for the year. It's pretty easy when you cover a certain time period in a certain place. But the nuances of each topic can only be planned at most a week in advance, often day-by-day as you reflect on their learning and pivot the direction they need you to go.

I'm sure you have seen the social media posts about how teachers make more minute-by-minute decisions than brain surgeons. I don't know how accurate that is, but decision fatigue is a real stress on teachers. And it is also an essential part of our job that is not something that gets put in a lesson plan.

Honestly, this legislation is just another attack on the teaching profession. The disdain for educators is so apparent and it is funneling down to the kids.

I can practically guarantee you that if any teacher in our district were honest they would admit to having explored other career options in the past two years. I love my job, my fellow teachers, my admin, my subject and my students, but the belittling and degradation of the career I have dedicated my life to has forced me to actively consider other options.

Ultimately there is no real reason to have lesson plans posted in advance. By the end of the first week of school they would be obsolete. Our profession demands continual trial and error, reflection, and adjustment so it would not even be best practice to write them that far in advance. The only thing that will come from this legislation is that teachers will resign in even greater numbers.

~ middle level teacher

As an instructional coach, I work with teachers every day and I have done so for the last 8 years. They work tirelessly every day to meet the needs of ALL students and give them what they need. To ask them to make plans for the entire year is the craziest thing I have ever heard of. Teachers use curriculum maps that each department has for every course that we teach. This map includes the standards for the course and all the common assessments given by each teacher of the course to ensure that ALL students in a course are getting the same material and being tested in the same format. If you want maps to be

public, that is reasonable. Daily lesson plans involve making the lessons come alive for the students that are presently in our classes.

I'm a National Board-certified teacher and there are 5 propositions to this certification. The two propositions to get certified related to this topic are 1) Teachers are committed to students and their learning and 5) Teachers are members of learning communities. These mean that we adjust our teaching to fit our students. Would you ask a doctor to schedule all the surgeries they would need in the next year in advance, before they met their patients or knew what they needed? Would you ask them for a list of all medicines they would prescribe for the whole year before it began? This is the same craziness you are asking for if you want lesson plans a year in advance, before teachers have met the students they will serve or had the ability to meet with their learning communities to discuss these students. YES, we can provide maps of what we intend to teach and the assessments we will use; but how we will get the students from where they are to where they need to be, can't be determined until we meet them and to think otherwise is ignorant and shows no knowledge of the work we do.

Teachers need to understand each student as an individual and thus differentiate learning. It is important to realize that practically everything about the learner is relevant to instruction. Teachers use learner centered strategies, activities, and instructional approaches that differentiate learning. This is important for students, because they do not learn in the same way. They become more accomplished when we find a strategy that best meets their learning style, as a strategy that works for one student may leave another in confusion.

In order to make sure that the lessons are differentiated and meet the needs of students, we must first get to know our students and their educational backgrounds. For some students, education is not a priority, due to family or personal issues in their lives. Other students have had negative educational experiences in their past and struggle to trust teachers. No matter what the reason, it is our job to find out their backgrounds so we can understand them as much as possible and teach them as individuals. This isn't the easiest of tasks, as we have approximately 170 new students each year. We learn about our students, their families, their past experiences and their learning styles. Our goal is to familiarize ourselves with their family situations and include their families as partners in their children's education. Our interactions allow us to learn about each student as an individual. We are able to gain insight into parents' expectations and aspirations for their children, elicit parents' ideas about their children's interests and ways to motivate them. It is always important to respond thoughtfully and thoroughly to parents' concerns, treating families with respect and understanding. Even though we have 170 students, it is important that each student feels like he or she is the only student.

Once we learn about our student's interests and family situations, we can take advantage of their interests and personalize our lessons as much as possible. We can use their curiosities and eagerness as assets to enhance learning. Teachers' daily lessons are well thought out and student centered. They use a variety of methods from visual to kinesthetic, including technology. They must be highly motivating, hands-on activities that engage multiple senses. They look for challenging ways to keep students actively engaged. Trying to create plans a year in advance is not authentic and not what anyone really wants for

their child. Who wants some cookie cutter lesson, with no regard to the children who are learning the lesson or their individual needs?

Signed, a teacher/coach who is tired of your dumb politics and disregard for education, as well as common sense and respect for those who do one of the most important jobs in the world, educating YOUR CHILDREN!

~ high school level instructional coach
