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Tama-Toledo News Chronicle

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PHOTO BY ROBIN OPSAHL/IOWA CAPITAL DISPATCH
Gov. Kim Reynolds signs the "Students First Act," legislation establishing a private school scholarship program into law Tuesday at the Iowa State Capitol in Des Moines after it passed in the early hours that day.

Students First Act passes in Iowa

VANESSA ROUDABUSH | vroudabush@tamatoledonews.com

DES MOINES — On Jan. 24, Governor Kim Reynolds signed the Students First Act (HF68). An Act connecting education programs and funding by establishing an education savings account program, modifying school district categorical funding supplements and supplementary weighting, making appropriations, providing penalties, and including effective date and retroactive applicability provisions.

"For the first time, we will fund students instead of a system, a decisive step in ensuring that every child in Iowa can receive the best education possible," she said in a statement. "With this bill, Iowa has affirmed that educational freedom belongs to all, not just those who can afford it."

The Student First Act will provide Iowa students with \$7,598 each year to use for private school tuition and costs. Currently enrolled private school students must meet income limits to qualify in the first two years of the program. All private students will be eligible in the third year.

Public school districts will receive an estimated \$1,205 for each student living within the boundaries of their district who attend private school, even if they've never been enrolled in a public school. All public school students will be eligible for an educational savings account (ESA) starting in the 2023-2024 school year.

"I voted against this bill last year. When it became obvious that the bill was going to pass, no matter how I voted, I went to work to help make it better for schools and the students in my district," said Sen. Annette Sweeney, who represents most of Tama County in the Iowa Senate. "This was a difficult decision for me. The votes were there to pass the bill, so I worked hard to make HF 68 better and to keep the best interests of our students first and foremost."

The effect of the new Student First Act on rural communities will present unique challenges compared to their larger district counterparts. The operation-sharing incentives for rural schools that were to end in 2025 have been extended until 2035 along with the Teacher Leadership Compensation (TLC) being included in the recent amendment. Critics of the bill, which did not receive a single Democratic vote in the House or Senate, contend that it will take funds away from public schools.

"The goal of the Students First Act is to create educational options for Iowa students. If this act were to defund public schools, the objective of this act would not be accomplished. Rather, the exact opposite would be done, less educational options for students," said Sen. Sweeney.



The entrance of the new STC Middle School

ALL SCHEMATIC DESIGNS WERE PROVIDED BY ISG

The transformation from eyesore to educational door

STC establishes middle school project design within budget

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While the old Iowa Girls Juvenile Home is still under demolition by the city of Toledo. The South Tama School District, alongside ISG Architecture Firm, has been working hard to prepare for the new middle school.

"As an administrator, it's kind of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. This will be my second opportunity to be a part of a project like this. It's an exciting time," STC Superintendent John Cain said. I think specifically for this project, from the community's perspective, being able to take the juvenile home, which was an 'eyesore' in Toledo, and be able to repurpose it, add an addition to it and make it a heart of the community is an exciting thing to see."

Keeping in line with the budget

"We went into the design phase looking for what would be ideal, and when [the estimate] came in, we had to scale back," said Superintendent Cain.

The initial design was over budget, but adjustments to design and layout helped shave \$6 million off of the initial costs. Adjustments such as an asphalt parking lot instead of cement saved the school district over \$100,000 on the project, opting for a flat gym roof rather than mimicking the high school's gym dome and moving the administration to the lower level of the existing building rather than adding a suite addition.



PHOTO BY VANESSA ROUDABUSH

Community members will be happy to know the middle school project team is honoring their request to keep The Wester-Leander Clark Bell. The bell will be making a new home for itself in the middle school's green space amongst its mature barked counterparts for generations to come.

MIDDLE SCHOOL | P 2

A new home: Displaced Ukrainian family recounts journey to Marshalltown

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As Russia's war in Ukraine rages on and continues to draw global attention, Marshall County has become an unlikely home for families displaced by the devastating and far-reaching conflict occupying Eastern Europe.

One Ukrainian family in particular, now living in Marshalltown, is hoping to start anew and lay down fresh roots in the Hawkeye State after losing their home and fleeing countless miles halfway across the globe to settle in the United States.

The Stenkins family, Marina, Roman, and their son Nikita hail from the embattled city of Mariupol, which has seen some of the war's worst destruction and ruin at the hands of the Russian Army.

Before the war, the Stenkins family enjoyed a relatively typical and successful existence. A trained engineer, Roman owned his own



PHOTO BY T-R NICK BAUR

From left to right, Roman, Marina, and their son Nikita Stenkins alongside translator Marina Gromov at their home in Marshalltown.

business, which used self-built machines to drill water wells and complete other excavating enterprises. Marina worked as a quality assurance technician, and the pair raised their son along the way, similar to many other working parents.

Looking back, with the benefit of hindsight, they said, speaking together

through a translator, "we had everything that we actually really wanted" in regard to their life in Mariupol.

Yet Mariupol, and by extension, the Stenkins were located in the "buffer zone" between Ukraine and neighboring Russia, with their home roughly 20 miles from the hotly contested

border.

As such, when Russia invaded Ukraine in late February of 2022, Mariupol bore the brunt of the havoc wreaked by the invasion. On-the-ground fighting, large-scale bombardments, and missile strikes have pounded the city since the

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WEEKEND FORECAST:

Saturday: MOSTLY CLOUDY
High: 22 / Low: 11

Sunday: MOSTLY CLOUDY
High: 11 / Low: -1



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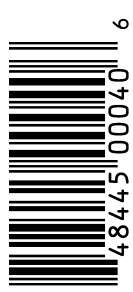
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