

Choosing Leaders Who Strengthen Education and Promote Human Flourishing

2026 IOWA GOVERNOR'S RACE · CANDIDATE COMPARISON



Rob Sand
DEMOCRAT



Zach Lahn
REPUBLICAN

The following comparison is designed to help pastors and Christians consider how the candidates' stated beliefs, records, and policy priorities relate to the biblical principles outlined in *Choosing Leaders Who Strengthen Education and Promote Human Flourishing*.

1 Does this candidate recognize that parents have the God-given responsibility and authority to direct the education of their children?

ROB SAND

Sand recognizes a role for parents in directing and protecting their children. His children's online-safety proposal would increase parental oversight and require parental consent for 16- and 17-year-olds to use social media. ^[S6]

ZACH LAHN

Lahn explicitly places parents at the center of educational decision-making. He argues that parents, rather than political or educational institutions, should have greater authority over their children's education and has repeatedly emphasized that schools should respect the role and expectations of parents. ^{[S3][S9]}

2 Does this candidate support an education system that prepares children for lifelong success and flourishing?

ROB SAND

Sand says Iowa should restore its public schools to their former position among the best in the nation. His education agenda emphasizes strengthening public schools, supporting teachers, improving reading and math outcomes, and preparing students to succeed. ^{[S1][S5]}

ZACH LAHN

Lahn says every Iowa child deserves access to a "world-class education." He proposes reducing excessive standardized testing and refocusing education on mastery of reading, writing, math, science, and practical skills students need to thrive. He also advocates hands-on learning, apprenticeships, outdoor activity, and educational models designed around the different ways children learn. ^{[S3][S7]}

3 Does this candidate believe government and educational institutions should serve children and families?

ROB SAND

Sand emphasizes strengthening public schools and increasing accountability for schools receiving taxpayer funds. He argues that Iowa's ESA program "takes resources away from public schools" and criticizes the state for "sending our taxpayer dollars to Iowa's wealthiest families to pay for the private school tuition they were going to pay on their own anyway." ^[S2] He proposes restoring income limits to Education Savings Accounts, annual audits, limits on tuition increases, and additional oversight of ESA spending. ^{[S1][S2]} Sand also argues that private schools receiving ESA funds should not be permitted to turn students away, saying, "If you take public money, you take the public—no picking and choosing what student can come in the front door." ^[S1]

ZACH LAHN

Lahn says "the governor of Iowa should be the number one advocate for public school kids in the state" and argues that education policy should focus on the needs of children. ^[S9] He supports strong public schools alongside school choice, local control, and greater flexibility for families and educators. Lahn describes school choice as a "foundational freedom" and says parents should have more say over where their children attend school and where their tax dollars are spent. ^[S3] While supporting accountability for how ESA funds are spent, Lahn has said reforms should also allow private schools to maintain "privacy and autonomy." ^[S4]



4 Does this candidate recognize the importance of the physical, relational, moral, and spiritual formation of children?

ROB SAND

Sand has pledged to veto additional legislation he describes as “book bans” and “culture war bills,” including during a conversation involving children’s books about transgender families. ^[S8] Iowa law currently restricts certain sexually explicit materials in school libraries and classrooms and certain instruction concerning gender identity and sexual orientation. ^[S11] Sand has criticized legislation of this kind and pledged to veto additional measures, but we found no statement indicating whether or how his administration would enforce the existing law.

ZACH LAHN

Lahn says classrooms should be places for “truth, discipline, wonder, and learning” and that children should be taught “how to think, not what to think.” ^[S3] He opposes what he describes as ideological indoctrination in schools and has explicitly addressed children’s access to sexually explicit material. Lahn says, “No public school or library in Iowa should allow children access to explicit material. Period.” ^{[S9][S10]} He supports age restrictions and other safeguards intended to prevent children from accessing sexually explicit material.

5 Does this candidate recognize the importance of education in strengthening families and communities and preparing the next generation for the future?

ROB SAND

Sand emphasizes strong public schools as essential to Iowa’s future and says Iowa should restore its schools to their former position among the best in the nation. His proposals focus on improving reading and math outcomes, supporting teachers and rural schools, expanding preschool, providing school meals, and making education more affordable for families. ^[S1] ^{[S2][S5]}

ZACH LAHN

Lahn emphasizes education as foundational to the future of Iowa’s children, families, and communities. He supports strong public schools alongside parental choice and proposes greater local control, mastery of core academic subjects, hands-on learning, apprenticeships, and multiple educational models designed to prepare students for work and adult life. ^{[S3][S7]}

SOURCES

[S1] Rob Sand — Education Roundtable / Private-School Admissions and ESA Accountability. Sand's campaign reports that he supports additional accountability requirements for private schools receiving ESA funds. Sand says, "If you take public money, you take the public—no picking and choosing what student can come in the front door." He also argues that private schools receiving public money should be subject to additional rules and financial accountability. ([Rob Sand — Education Roundtable](#))

[S2] Rob Sand — Education Savings Accounts and Public Education. Sand argues that Iowa's private-school ESA program takes resources away from public schools and benefits wealthy families who, he argues, would have paid private-school tuition without state assistance. His campaign says Iowa can help fund universal all-day pre-K by "no longer sending our taxpayer dollars to Iowa's wealthiest families to pay for the private school tuition they were going to pay on their own anyway." Sand proposes restoring income limits, annual audits, limits on tuition increases, and additional oversight of ESA spending. ([Rob Sand — Priorities for Iowa | Making Life More Affordable](#))

[S3] Zach Lahn — School Choice: A Fundamental Freedom. Lahn describes school choice as a "foundational freedom" and says parents should have more say over where their children attend school and where their tax dollars are spent. He argues that Iowa should promote excellence in both public and private education and that the debate over ESAs should prioritize children. ([Zach Lahn — School Choice: A Fundamental Freedom](#))

[S4] Zach Lahn — ESA Accountability and Private-School Autonomy. Discussing Iowa's Education Savings Account program, Lahn said the state should ensure accountability in how public funds are spent while also allowing private schools to maintain "privacy and autonomy." His position combines financial accountability with continued independence for participating private schools. ([Zach Lahn — ESA Accountability Interview](#))

[S5] Rob Sand — Education. Sand says Iowa should strengthen public education and focus schools on reading, math, and academic achievement rather than political agendas. ([Rob Sand — Education Ad and Priorities](#))

[S6] Rob Sand — Keeping Iowa Kids Safe Online. Sand's children's online-safety proposal emphasizes parental oversight and would require parental consent for 16- and 17-year-olds to use social media. ([Rob Sand — Keeping Iowa Kids Safe Online](#))

[S7] Zach Lahn — Education Reform. Lahn discusses creating more educational options for Iowa families, adapting education to children's different needs, hands-on education, apprenticeships, outdoor activity, and alternative educational models. ([Iowa PBS — Republican Nominee for Governor Zach Lahn](#))

[S8] Rob Sand — Statements on Book Bans and Culture-War Legislation. Sand has repeatedly pledged to veto legislation he characterizes as "book bans" or "culture war" legislation. In a conversation involving an author of children's books about transgender families, Sand said, "If they try to do any more book bans, I'm going to veto them," and pledged to veto "culture war bills." In a June 2026 Iowa Press interview, Sand similarly said that if the legislature sends him legislation that is "just culture war stuff," "I'm going to veto it." ([Original Instagram Reel | Iowa PBS | Daily Signal](#))

[S9] Zach Lahn — Public School Advocacy, Classroom Instruction, and Struggling Students. Lahn says "the governor of Iowa should be the number one advocate for public school kids in the state." He argues that parents send their children to school to develop critical thinking, communication, foundational academic skills, and the ability to work well with others, while also calling for ideological indoctrination to be rooted out of classrooms. Lahn also discusses students struggling because of malnutrition, sleeping in a car, or problems at home and advocates supportive interventions rather than simply punitive responses. ([Iowa PBS — Republican Candidate for Governor Zach Lahn](#))

[S10] Zach Lahn — Sexually Explicit Material in Schools and Libraries. Asked about sexually explicit material being accessible to children, Lahn said, "No public school or library in Iowa should allow children access to explicit material. Period." He said knowingly allowing such access should be a fireable offense and proposed age restrictions and a checkout flagging system. ([The Iowa Standard](#))

[S11] Iowa Senate File 496 — Current Iowa Law. Iowa law establishes requirements concerning age-appropriate school-library materials and instruction involving gender identity and sexual orientation. The law also contains parental-notification provisions involving certain student requests. Portions of the law have been the subject of federal litigation. ([Iowa Legislature — Senate File 496](#))