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Dear Iowa Legislator,

I hope this letter finds you well. As a concerned member of our community, parent, and educator, I am writing to bring your attention to the crucial role Area Education Agencies (AEA) play outside of special education. I am a lifelong citizen of Iowa, parent of a high school student and college student, and have been an educator for over 21 years. In my current role, as the Curriculum and Special Programs Director (special programs include special education, Talented and Gifted, English Learners, At-Risk, and Teacher Leadership), I see first hand the positive effect our local AEAs play every day to support all teachers and all students.

As a part of my Director role, I oversee special education and understand the importance of ensuring our students with IEPs have high quality education, but all of those students are general education students first. If we take away the support AEAs provide for our general education students, we are hurting success for all students. Below are general education supports Grant Wood AEA provides for the Monticello Community School District and the effect on our students.

- Crisis Management Team and School Counselor Consultants - Monticello has utilized this team more in the last year than we ever have. In our district over the past year we have had the death of a teacher, death of a student, drive-by shooting death of a local Fareway employee and pillar in our community, and death of a substitute and parent who was on her way in to sub at our high school. The AEA crisis management team are the experts who helped our students and staff during these difficult times. We do not have trained staff to deal with these tragedies, but were fortunate enough to have the AEA crisis management team and school counselor consultants support us.
- Literacy Consultants - the Governor and Department of Education have literacy as a priority, but if we do not have literacy consultants who are experts in best practices training our staff and coaching them, all students will suffer. In Monticello, we have a literacy consultant from the AEA who has been training and coaching our staff for the past 3 years and seen an increase in all students and subgroups. Taking this service away will mean we will have to train staff internally by sending them to training and taking them away from teaching in their classrooms with their students, which is next to impossible with the shortage of subs and already full plates for our educators.
- Math, Science, and Social Studies Consultants - without these positions, all of these academic areas will suffer the same way Literacy will.
- Infinite Campus Student Information System (SIS) Support - Grant Wood AEA provides us with high quality staff who work directly with our technology team to ensure we understand and utilize our SIS to the highest capacity and most effectively to communicate to parents, students, staff, and the Department of Education. If this service is not provided by our AEA, we will have to contract with Infinite Campus out of Minnesota which will cost more and have less availability. The staff at Grant Wood have worked in schools and can come to our district to support us, this will be impossible if we have to pay for services directly to Infinite Campus.
- Computer Science Consultants - Not only do our computer science consultants provide our teachers and students up-to-date and relevant best practices, they train staff in this high need area with our ever changing technological society.

- Talented and Gifted and English Language Consultants - As a small district, we have a small number of these students, so without the expertise of the AEA, we would not know best practices to ensure we are meeting the needs of these subgroups of students and following all state regulations and guidelines.

I could go on and on because I see first hand every day how much all of the AEA staff affect ALL student outcomes. Remember, special education students are general education students first. If we move away from supporting our general education and core instruction, we will see more students in special education. This is a huge concern for me as a community member, parent and educator.

Thank you for your time and considering my perspective as a lifelong citizen of Iowa, parent of high school and college students, and educator for over 21 years. Please reach out to me if you have any follow up questions or would like more information. I always welcome you to come visit the Monticello Community School District and see first hand how AEA's support all students.

Sincerely,

Robyn Ponder

P.S. - I also hope you support the HF 2010 to allow schools to start the Tuesday following the Iowa State Fair.
Thank you!