January 26, 2015

To the Legislators of the Iowa Senate and House,

As you begin the difficult work of budgeting this session, I want to share my thoughts about public education for the children of our State. We have a long history of providing high quality education for our children. Even as the demographics in our State continue to change with more students living in poverty and coming to our State from all corners of the world, our educators have stepped up to ensure that every student has the strongest supports necessary for success.

Funding for Public Education is not “supplemental” or something that is “allowable.” It is a critical investment and necessary for ALL of Iowa’s children and remains our civic obligation. The private and charter school movement across the nation, has in the words of Diane Ravitch, created an “*ideological crusade by the far right to turn education into a consumer choice rather than a civic obligation. Abandoning public schools for a free-market system eviscerates our basic obligation to support them whether our own children are in public schools, private schools or religious schools, and even if we have no children at all.*

*The campaign to "reform" schools by turning public money over to private corporations is a great distraction from our system's real problems: Academic performance is low where poverty and racial segregation are high. Sadly, the U.S. leads other advanced nations of the world in the proportion of children living in poverty. And income inequality in our nation is larger than* *at any point in the last century.”*

I am disappointed that although the current rhetoric would indicate that there is a strong commitment to public education in this State and to Iowa’s children, the per pupil funding over the past several years has been at a record low and has certainly not allowed Iowa to keep pace with all of the cost increases associated with operating our schools and districts so that all children have an equal chance. 1.25% for 2016-17 amounts to around $80 more per pupil, or about $.44 cents per day per child. More and more allowances have been made for private and home school operations across the state while public education has had to do with less and less.

Because of this lack of funding, Iowa now ranks 35th in the nation for per-pupil funding which is $1612 below the national average per student expenditures. In the 44 year history of the formula, the Governor’s proposal for 2016-2016 is shocking. The categorical funding for the Teacher Leadership and Compensation, Early Literacy and Teacher Salary Supplement are all great supports for children and teacher practice, however these funds can only be spent on educators and programs and cannot be utilized for any other supports. Neither the Mason City or Clear Lake School District will receive the TLC funds this next school year so our districts, like many others will be faced with significant budget cuts once again.

We have to right the ship. If we are to accomplish this task it means the funding for Public Education must once again be a priority in this state. Our teachers, administrators, support staff and communities are working hard on the right work, every day so that our children can have the skills necessary for careers, college and citizenship.

Iowa’s economy is strong and is well positioned to sustain any difficult economic issues that may come our way. Increased costs for Public Education are typically around 3-3.5% annually, just to keep doing the day to day operations of a school and district. If a two year budget is what is being sought, then I would propose that 2016-2017 is set at 6% and 2017-2018 is set at 6%. If FY 2016 is lower, than FY 2017 should be even higher. These rates would allow for the annual increases and would provide additional general fund dollars to support all aspects of our schools and districts in the State.

I know that you have a very challenging task, but our children and their families are watching how we demonstrate that what we say matches what we do in this State. For Iowa to regain its educational status across the nation, we must fund Public Education at a level that will accomplish the tasks set before us.

Thank you for your service and for your consideration of these comments in your decision making.

Sincerely,



Dr. Anita Micich