I’m Stanton Rheingans, Superintendent of Dubuque Community Schools and this year’s chair of the Urban Education Network. Our UEN schools educate almost 40% of Iowa students and a much larger percentage of minority students, students living in poverty and non-English speaking students. Thank you for working on school funding very quickly. We appreciate your efforts to move the bills fast and support your efforts toward a speedy resolution. I have several things to share with you to demonstrate that we have reached the point of funding inadequacy in Iowa:

* During the recession, Iowa schools experienced record low or no increases in the cost per pupil.
* Some funding was lowered (dropout prevention, operational sharing incentives, mentoring funds in this year’s governor’s proposal, are all good examples)
* Some funding was eliminated (state contribution to Instructional support)
* HF 80 (House Education Committee) and the Governor propose a 1.25% increase for FY 16 and 2.45% for FY 17, continuing the trend of very low increases.
* Iowa’s percentage change in spending per student, inflation adjusted, from FY 2008 to FY 2014, is down $641 per student. Only 10 states have lowered spending more. (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, May 20, 2014 <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=4011>)
* The annual cost of doing the business of school in Iowa increases about 3.5% every year (that pays for staff salaries and benefits, transportation, utilities, workers’ comp, instructional materials and curriculum, mandated contribution to retirement, technology upgrades, training, etc.)
* 1.25% and 2.45% would result in 6 out of the last 7 years of funding increases below cost recovery. That means less staff and programs for students. In Dubuque, we’ve added 55 students, so the 1.25% increase results in $1.2 million in additional spending authority, known as “new money”. Although that seems like a lot, we need $2.4 million just to keep up with inflation and cost growth, not assuming the growing enrollment requires any new staff or textbooks or materials. That leaves our school district short $1.2 million, meaning another year of staff and program reductions.
* The Iowa per pupil total expenditures gap is now $1,612 below the national average per pupil, ranking Iowa 35th in the nation (<http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/NEA-Rankings-and-Estimates-2013-2014.pdf>)
* Increasing poverty, mental health issues, lack of adequate special education funding from the formula and the growing number of languages among our non-English speaking students have all made our educators’ jobs more difficult. Our committed staff is up to the task and works hard every day to meet these increasing needs. They need your financial support to be successful.
* We are raising expectations, working on college and career readiness and moving the needle forward on graduation rates.
* Dubuque isn’t giving up on students who have dropped out either, with new efforts directed at finding former dropouts and reengaging them in a school environment that supports them to a diploma.

Please consider the united request from all the education organizations involved with our Iowa public schools and set the increase per pupil at 6%, both in FY 2016 and FY 2017. We truly want to provide a world class education for our students and need adequate resources and your support to ensure we can. Thank you for listening today and representing our students.