



Interstate 35



Community Schools



February 3, 2017

Dear Iowa House of Representatives,

I will attempt to be brief in my comments as I imagine there will be a great deal of others having things to say. Although we appreciate the targeted (categorical) funding we have received in the past several years, e.g., Teacher Leadership and Compensation (TLC) for instance, it is imperative you understand the financial strain you have and seemingly continue to place on local districts through 1-2% Supplementary School Assistance (SSA). The "problem" with low SSA and categorical funding is the reality we must pay our bills such as transportation costs, curriculum materials, utility bills, etc. from general fund. The estimated inflation rate used in preparing budgets is 2-3% per year for these costs; the paltry 1.1% SSA being championed simply means we have to cut other things in order to pay the bills on things we have little control of. In our district, this will mean going with more students in a class, not filling a literacy interventionist position, and virtually removing supplies from the hands of our teachers and other staff. Because this trend of low SSA has been going on multiple years, there simply isn't any "low hanging fruit" to pick; we will now be negatively impacting kids and their learning.

I've read the reports about how generous the state has been with education funding; perhaps this is the "new math" but the numbers don't add up. For instance, it appears those publicized numbers include additional state money when the legislature opted to move away from local property taxes to more state aid. The reality is this was a shuffling of the cards; it did not give an additional penny of money to local schools, yet it is included in the propaganda being promulgated. Further, money for the aforementioned TLC program was also included, which as previously stated is greatly appreciated and a good thing for helping student learning, but the fact still remains it was targeted (categorical funding). I'm not sure if any of you regularly visit public schools within your legislative district; if not you should. Talk to those people actually in the trenches doing the important work of educating our kids. I think you'll find the reality of the situation is in alignment with what I'm sharing; in fact I know that is what you'll find should you venture into the real world of public schools in Iowa. I do understand the realities of budgets; however, I don't understand the mentality of continuing to shortchange opportunities for kids because of inadequate funding as nothing should be as important for our society as quality education for our kids.

I would also implore you to look at the questions of inequity within the school funding formula, e.g., state cost per pupil, transportation costs, flexibility in some categorical funds, and flexibility for at-risk programming. As a member of the Rural School Advocates of Iowa (RSAI), these issues hit especially hard at rural schools. Although we desperately need a higher number for SSA, movement in these areas would help soften the blow and minimize the negative impact on our kids (as well as other students) at I-35.

Please, please, please do everything you possibly can for public education; do not believe some of the propaganda out there as the truth of life in schools now and into the future is much different. We are bleeding and desperately need help.

Respectfully,

Kevin W. Fiene, Ed. D
Superintendent

"Developing life-long learners and responsible, productive, successful citizens in an ever-changing society."

P.O. Box 79, Truro, Iowa 50257
Phone: 641/765-4291 • Fax: 641/765-4593
www.i-35.k12.ia.us