Sunday, January 25, 2015

I have been an educator in rural Iowa for seven years, and we are currently on our first year as a consolidated school after four years of sharing. In that time, I have seen many years of limited to no Allowable Growth/Supplemental State Aid, and I have even seen funding cut mid-year.

I am a teacher of Gifted and Talented and Technology in a K-3 building. We have access to technology, four portable carts; however, all of the devices run Windows XP, which is no longer supported. How are we “…to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information in order to function in a knowledge society..” and meet the needs of the 21st Century Skills described in the Iowa Common Core when our technology is outdated, unsupported, and funds aren’t available to upgrade? The 21st Century Skills ask us to create and collaborate, investigate real-world issues and solve problems, and practice appropriate and safe skills for lifelong learning while using technology. Meeting those goals is very difficult when technology is changing and we don’t have the funding to keep current.

The elementary building is also under extra pressure with the Early Literacy Initiative. To comply, the only option seemed to be to adopt the FAST Assessments. However, our internet speed would not support the use of the tests, and the computers in the lab couldn’t be updated enough to run the tests. We were able to update that lab and internet, but at what cost? Many other projects had to be set aside for following years, and now the proposed funding will ensure those projects will be set aside again.

With the consolidation of our districts and the adoption of the Iowa Common Core, our district needs to be adopting new curricula. We haven’t been on a textbook replacement cycle for years. We have been using two to three different series in each subject area in the elementary. We have been able to update math curricula, but how will we be able to adopt a unified ELA, Reading, Social Studies, or Science curriculum if the school will not receive funding?

Iowa is not keeping pace with the National average in terms of student funding. We’ve heard Iowa is stagnating; our scores aren’t going down, but others are growing faster than us. Perhaps that growth is matching the trend in student funding. The past six years shows very limited growth; more funding would mean more resources for schools to provide to students. We have many students in the low-income category in my district and many at-risk and high needs students. Support is needed to give those students the best chances for success.

I support a 6% increase in the SSA to help all districts, rural and urban, meet the needs of the 21st Century sills of students, update curriculum material, and comply with the ELI.

Thank you for your time,

Marleta Smith