



Think. Learn. **Grow.**

...becoming the model for urban education in the United States.

10 December 2019

Dear Members of the School Finance Formula Review Committee,

We Must Close the Opportunity Gap for Disadvantaged Students

The path to graduation of a socio-economically disadvantaged student is very different from that of a non-disadvantaged student. What districts must do to support students who are socio-economically disadvantaged to provide equitable opportunities places an additional burden on district budgets. The quality of our workforce, prevention of taxpayer funded societal costs and ultimately, the prosperity of our entire state, depend on an investment to close the opportunity gap for disadvantaged students.

Background

- Des Moines Public Schools has seen a steady rise in the number of students that qualify for free and reduced lunch - now 77% of the nearly 33,000 students who attend school in Des Moines.
- Students who qualify for free meals may not be charged fees. In the case of athletics, districts with a high number of socio-economically disadvantaged students must either do without or find another way to fund the opportunities that in wealthier districts the parents can support. The fee is not unique to athletics, but applies to any curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular class or activity for which fees are charged; driver's education, lab fees for science and art classes, musical instrument rental, etc.
- When districts have to spend dollars to cover what other districts use fees to pay for, it means there are fewer dollars for everything else.
- Also, children from economically disadvantaged homes tend to enter school with a much more limited vocabulary and having had fewer educational life experiences (e.g. being read to at home; having regular access to age-appropriate reading material; opportunities for travel; etc.)
- Poverty knows no zip code. According to the Child and Family Policy Center, every Iowa county -- all 99 -- has children living in poverty. Children who "are much more likely than their peers to experience stress and deprivation that hinders development and readiness for school and life."

Why This is a Good Investment

- **Students Receive Equal Access:** Increasing weighted funding for socio-economically disadvantaged students takes some of the additional financial burden off of districts, allowing them to provide comparable educational opportunities to wealthier districts.
- **All Students Learn Better:** When a district has appropriate resources to support students from socio-economically disadvantaged homes, culture and climate improve and all students become better learners.
- **The Whole State Will Benefit:** Providing funding that eliminates obstacles facing districts with high numbers of socio-economically disadvantaged students will increase the likelihood all students in those districts become successful, healthy Iowans with lifelong careers, no matter if they live in a town of 200 or a city of 200,000.

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Why This is Urgent

- Right now districts across the state with high numbers of socio-economically disadvantaged students are struggling with resources not keeping up with the additional financial burden to appropriately educate disadvantaged students. Districts will continue to draw from other sources, money wealthier districts collect from families to provide the same opportunities. Voting for weighted funding for socio-economically disadvantaged students is an immediate action every Iowa legislator can take to improve the lives of students in Des Moines, and all 99 Iowa counties.

Yours respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas M. Ahart", written in a cursive style.

Superintendent Dr. Thomas Ahart
Des Moines Public Schools