

Summary of Remarks
Fiscal Committee of Legislature
Wednesday, December 17, 2003
Eric Witherspoon

In the fall of 2001, the first across-the-board cuts were announced by the Governor. That was just a little over two years ago. Since that time, the Des Moines Public School District has made \$22.7 million in cuts, averaging nearly \$1 million in permanent cuts each month. The latest across-the-board cut accounts for \$3.5 million of lost state funding for our school district. Delinquent property tax collections have further compounded the problem. We have had to make severe mid-year cuts.

Here is a summary of the most recent mid-year cuts:

\$657,500	21 positions cut, including crafts, operations, technology, associates, clerical
\$570,000	Textbook replacements (no science or health adoptions)
\$ 60,000	Library books
\$215,000	Overtime (snow plowing, emergency repairs and emergency cleaning)
\$650,000	Program reductions (special education, talented and gifted, English Language Learners)
\$ 35,000	School budgets (field trips, instructional supplies, paper)
\$560,000	Departmental budgets (cleaning supplies, staff development, paper, postage)
\$235,000	Career and technical programs (electricity/electronics lab, fashion design lab)
\$200,000	Professional development for teachers
\$200,000	Substitute teachers (not filling 20% of all absences)
\$100,000	Teacher positions not filled and reassigned, increased class sizes
\$250,000	Technology support, upgrades, purchases

These across-the-board cuts are on top of \$5.3 million of severe cuts that we made last spring as we prepared for the 2004-05 school year. We had already eliminated 26 teaching positions, 12 administrative positions, and 29 support staff positions. Budgets for materials, technology, supplies and equipment were slashed. Also, natural gas prices have jumped by 31% in one year, and the district is experiencing double-digit increases in health insurance. From FY01 to FY04, school foundation aid has changed by only 1.17% in three years. As a result, class sizes are increasing and programs to serve students are being cut. The amount allocated for allowable growth next year is inadequate and will result in the fourth straight year of budget cuts. If adequate funding is not provided for Iowa schools, the Des Moines School District faces the largest cuts, to date, in FY05. We have cut all we can without taking away whole programs that serve students. But it does not have to be that way. Iowa can adequately fund schools. It is a matter of choices and priorities. Education is the key to Iowa's future.