

All of us have things that are important to us, both personally, professionally, and in things as simple as our favorites. A belief I have about sustaining and promoting a community is a robust education system, not only PK-12, but even supporting post-secondary opportunities. The Iowa Legislature is tasked with a statewide budget and figuring out all of those priorities operating within a given budget. I appreciate the work that they do and all of the support for the varying priorities across the state of Iowa.

Recently, I learned more about not only State priorities, but also obligations that exist across the state. I attended a statewide lobby day on February 2, 2017 in Des Moines with a group of 150 superintendents across the state of Iowa. It was a great opportunity to meet face to face with Legislatures not only representing our district's locally, but other Senators and Representatives from across the State.

Education seems to be a priority in Iowa, since we dedicate approximately 43% of the budget to support education. However, one definition listed at www.dictionary.com, a priority is defined as: "the right to take precedence in obtaining certain supplies, services, facilities, etc., especially during a shortage". So I understand that state revenues are not growing as anticipated, but even in times of shortage, a "priority" must be addressed.

The Governor recommended 2% State Supplemental Aid(SSA) for both FY18 and FY19. This is the first time in my memory that 2 years has been sent from the Governor. This is a sign of progress. As I have lobbied that both timely and adequate funding is needed for schools so we can plan for the future. Since 2012, the average SSA has been 1.80%, that means on average, a 7th grade student in Iowa has never been adequately funded. With more and more required of schools with new mandates, with student demographics ever-changing, it appears that education's status of "priority" is slipping. The current bill will fund schools at 1.11% for FY18 and the Legislature wants to wait until the March revenue estimates are reported, before they set FY19 funding. The 1.11% is an increase of \$73 per student. To put some perspective into the increase, we sometimes purchase textbooks that cost more than \$73.

I acknowledge that we are in very challenging times in the State of Iowa, but during challenging times, "priorities" need to be addressed. Without continuing our commitment to education in Iowa, we risk not preparing our students for the future.

Collective Bargaining Changes

By now, most everyone is aware of the sweeping changes to Chapter 20 - Collective Bargaining. While I was in support of some “tweaks” to the Collective Bargaining Law, the sweeping changes I referred to have caused some concern for our employees. While many community members may not understand the implications of the changes, I have communicated to our employees that we can share our opinions but most of the public has no idea of what public educators do, or understand the scrutiny that we are increasingly under. So, I would encourage people to understand the entire complexity of issues before criticizing one opinion over the other. Most every person in education has known no other way of bargaining, since those laws have been in place for over 40 years. I will stand by each and everyone of employee’s of the Washington and WACO districts as we work through these changes together. I don’t understand all of the implications and both labor and management are trying to get a handle on procedures of these new bargaining laws.

In the end, our top goal is to provide a salary and benefit package that is satisfactory to our existing employees while being able to be competitive and attractive to potential employees. Changes to Collective Bargaining doesn’t necessarily meet both of those goals, certainly not when the average SSA is 1.8% over the last 7 years.

Open Enrollment Deadline Nears

The deadline for open enrollment is March 1, 2017. Any student wanting to make the choice of educational settings can do so by filling out the open enrollment paperwork by March 1st. By meeting the deadline, you are not bound to attend, you have just opened the door for that opportunity. Washington CSD has closed the gap of open enrolled out to in’s in the last year. In 2015-16 we had 152 out and 79 in, for a net loss of -73, compared to 2016-17 where we had 153 out and 97 in, for a smaller net loss of -56. That is an improvement of 17 students, and definitely a trend we want to continue until we are a positive of more “in’s” than “outs”. Again, the open enrollment deadline is March 1, 2017 for the Fall of 2017. If you have questions, contact me at Central Office at 319-653-6543.