
January 6, 2006

Report on the Survey of Iowa Superintendents

*** A special thanks to all of the school administrators who responded to this year's survey ***

As advocates for children, PTA members need to be concerned about education in Iowa. The national average for per pupil spending is \$1,058 more than Iowa spends. Iowa PTA recently conducted a survey of public school superintendents to find out what they could do for students if they had an additional \$1,058 per pupil. A report on that survey is attached.

This is the fourth consecutive year that Iowa PTA has surveyed administrators to determine needs and concerns. The tone of the responses has gotten progressively more depressed, discouraged, and disheartened. In the words of one superintendent:

*We are tired. We have too few people trying to do too many different jobs.
We waste oodles of time on reports and mandates that do not enhance our learning environment.
We could be doing so much better if we only had the resources to do it!! Iowa is losing its best economic development tool – its top-notch schools.
I have never seen such a bleak period in Iowa education in all my 33-year career!*

Iowa superintendents identified many ways that additional resources could be used to enhance the education of Iowa students. The following six areas were mentioned most often:

1. Add and Update Technology (Listed by 52% of superintendents)

Computers support and enhance instruction and provide opportunities for students to use technology in ways that will prepare them for postsecondary education and the workforce.

2. Update Curricula, Textbooks, Materials and Resources (Listed by 48% of superintendents)

A quality educational program requires curricula and instructional materials that are current, relevant, and regularly reviewed and updated.

3. Reduce Class Sizes (Listed by 45% of superintendents)

Small class sizes enable teachers to provide students with individual attention, establish individualized goals and benchmarks, and prepare lesson plans that are rich in “hands-on” activities and exploration.

4. Provide More Professional Development Opportunities (Listed by 43% of superintendents)

Research indicates that the most important factor in student learning is the teacher and his or her ability to motivate and communicate. Teachers need assistance in implementing new research-based instructional practices that will increase student achievement. They must be provided with opportunities to update content (especially in science and technology), improve their skills, collaborate with colleagues, and renew their commitment to teaching.

The following two areas were each listed by 33% of the superintendents:

5. Support for Early Intervention Programs, “At-Risk” Students, and English Language Learners

An increasing number of students are living in poverty, homeless, unable to speak English, have behavioral problems, or lack support at home. Meeting the needs of these students requires additional teachers and staff, specific courses, instructional strategies, before- and after-school programs, and enrichment opportunities.

6. Increase Teacher Pay

Forty-one other states offer teachers more money than Iowa does, and many other professions are available to teachers at a higher salary. It is essential that Iowa schools be able to hire and retain highly qualified teachers for every grade and subject.

Many other needs were mentioned by superintendents, but not as often as the six listed above. Some of the other needs that could be met with additional funding included:

- Reading specialists
- Guidance Counselors
- Media specialists
- Added course offerings
- Field trips and exploratory experiences
- Restored funding for foreign languages, music, art, drama and physical education
- Before- and After-School Programs and Preschool Programs

A major concern for superintendents this year is the expected increase in costs for fuel and utilities. Declining enrollment continues to be a major concern, along with aging or inadequate facilities, increasing cost of health insurance and staff benefits, and the ability to retain/replace quality teachers. Superintendents also listed government mandates, student learning, student behavior, and parental support as concerns.

It is essential to the future of Iowa's children that they receive a world-class education, and it is essential to the economic development of our state that we maintain excellent schools. The 2006 legislative session begins January 9. Legislators **MUST** hear from parents about their concerns for their child's future and the challenges their schools face due to inadequate or inequitable funding. **Urge your legislators to return Iowa schools to a level of funding that is AT LEAST equal to the national average.** Contacting your legislators takes only a few minutes!

Don't know who your legislators are?

Go to: <http://www.legis.state.ia.us/>

Click on Legislators on the left sidebar, then select Find Your Legislator.

Simply enter your address to find your senator and representative.

Most legislators are very responsive to e-mail messages, which makes this a very simple and effective method of communicating with your legislators. Send a short e-mail message to your representative and senator. If possible, include a personal story or experience. You **MUST** include your home address so they know you are a constituent!

To find your legislator's email address, go to: <http://www.legis.state.ia.us/>

Click on Legislators on the left sidebar

Select House Email Addresses for a list of representatives

Select Senate Email Addresses for a list of senators

To leave a phone message for your legislator, call the capitol switchboard:

Call (515) 281-3221 to leave a message for your representative

Call (515) 281-3371 to leave a message for your senator

NOW is the time to ACT!

To read about current news events regarding Iowa's public education system visit MY IOWA SCHOOLS:

http://www.myiowaschools.org/in_the_news.asp

You can also visit MY IOWA SCHOOLS for facts on education funding in Iowa:

http://www.myiowaschools.org/iowa_education_funding.asp

The full report and a summary report on the Iowa PTA survey of school administrators can be found in the Legislative Section of the Iowa PTA website at www.iowapta.org. Choose Legislative Activities on the left sidebar.

Thank you for being an advocate for children!

National PTA Legislative Information –

- To receive National PTA's weekly e-newsletter, "This Week in Washington", go to: capwiz.com/npta2/mlm/signup
- For information on National PTA issues, go to: http://www.pta.org/ia_issues.html

Iowa PTA Legislative Information –

- To subscribe to Iowa PTA "Legislative News", go to: www.iowapta.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=legislative.network
 - To view previous issues of the e-newsletter, go to: www.iowapta.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=updates.main
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