

1.23.2015

RSAI Call to Action

State Cost per Pupil Must Be Adequate and Set Timely In the 2015 Legislative Session

The Issue: The Legislature should follow the law to set the cost per pupil within 30 days of today's release of the Governor's budget. The RSAI is calling for immediate action this Session to set the per pupil cost for FY 2015-16 ASAP, no lower than 6%, and the per pupil cost for FY 2016-17 by Feb. 12, 2015, no lower than 6%.

Old News: During the 2014 Legislative Session, the Senate affirmed a 6% increase in the cost per pupil multiple times, but no action was taken in the House. [Iowa Code 257.8](#) requires action within 30 days of the release of the Governor's budget. The Legislature is out of compliance with Iowa law to prioritize education by setting the rate nearly 18 months in advance of the budget year (FY 2016 decision was due Feb. 12, 2014). For a complete history of Iowa's per pupil increases, see today's Education Coalition Fact of the Week found here: <http://www.rsaia.org/legislative.html> RSAI has joined the Public Education Coalition and encourages all to attend the Joint Legislative Reception on Jan. 26 in Des Moines following the IASB Legislative Conference. Click [here](#) for more information.

Update this week: The House Education Committee passed their bills on school funding on Wed., Jan. 21, setting a 1.25% increase for regular program and categoricals for FY 2016 and a 2.45% increase for both in FY 2017. The bills were approved on a party line vote in committee with all republicans in favor and all democrats opposed. Rep. Jorgensen said he's heard from superintendents that they want three things: 1) give all the money to education you can, 2) act quickly, and 3) above all, keep your commitments and don't ever return to the Across-the-board cuts of the past. Given record low levels of funding and healthy cash reserves today, schools are likely better off with a higher per pupil number, even if it means an ATB cut in the future, since they don't lose spending authority. Bill numbers follow (RSAI is registered opposed to all):

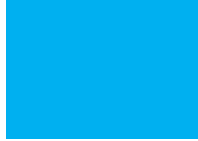
- [HF 80](#) Sets state cost per pupil increase at 1.25% for FY2016
- [HF 81](#) Sets categorical increase at 1.25% for FY 2016
- [HF 82](#) Sets state cost per pupil increase at 2.45% for FY 2017
- [HF 79](#) Sets categorical increase at 2.55% for FY 2017

Advocacy Opportunities: There is a Public Hearing at the Capitol, Monday, Jan. 26, in the Supreme Court Chambers, at 7:00 p.m. The public hearing is focused on HF 80, the 1.25% increase for regular program in FY 2016. Individuals indicate a pro or con position in submitting written comments or signing up to speak at the hearing (all education coalition associations are registered opposed to the bill which falls short of the 6% increase supported by entire education community.) Sign up to speak or submit written comments via this link: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/committees/publicHearings?ga=86> Also on Monday, Jan. 26, come to the joint legislative reception sponsored by the Education Coalition, including RSAI, at the Embassy Suites Hotel, Des Moines, from 5-6:30. Join us if you can for a relaxed conversation with legislators.

TALKING POINTS: This Legislature must set the 2015-16 cost per pupil at 6%.

- Iowa ranks 35th in the nation in per pupil funding, \$1,612 below the national average per student in expenditures. Our schools haven't recovered from the economic downturn and record low funding rates of the last several years.

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- In the 44-year history of the formula, in only two instances has the per pupil increase been lower than the Governor’s recommendation that came out today for FY 2016 and FY 2017. World-class schools take something more than third-class funding.
- Iowa’s economy is strong, state coffers are full. Although we can never be certain about the future, we are certainly well positioned to sustain any significant economic challenge in the next several years. Iowa ranks 9th in the nation in reserve funds on hand, has the 12th highest growth rate in gross domestic product nationally, and ranks 9th in growth of per capita personal income nationwide.
- Thanks to legislators for beginning this work quickly. Iowa Code requires legislative action within 30 days of the governor’s budget (the deadline for FY 2016 passed 11 months ago.) Schools should already be working on budgets, analyzing staffing needs to meet student needs, planning for education reform changes in staffing and practice, and determining pay increases with teachers and other staff, but since the per pupil rate for the school year starting July 1, 2015 isn’t known, this work today is all hypothetical. School timelines require more than a few months’ notice to be good stewards of over \$4 billion in combined state and local funds.
- Increased costs typically run 3-3.5% annually, just to keep doing the business of school, such as keeping on the lights, meeting expectations in the Iowa core curriculum, paying staff, covering increased costs of insurance, transportation, retirement, books and programs. Facing enrollment declines or increased route miles for busing further magnifies the impact of low funding for rural schools.
- Setting a low rate is devastating to schools. Setting a higher rate is preferable, even if it means a future ATB cut. The state’s reserve funds are full, estimated to be \$750 million in FY 2017 and school cash reserves are healthy, so we can withstand a future ATB cut if it happens. It’s time to prioritize resources for our students.
- Iowa schools are elevating student outcomes and opportunities. See the Jan. 19 education coalition fact of the week for details here: <http://www.rsaia.org/legislative.html>

Ask all of your legislators, both Senators and Representatives, in both parties, and the Governor to follow the law and prioritize funding for educating Iowa’s children.

Parents, grandparents, staff and neighbors, you can help!

Call or email Gov. Branstad and Lt. Gov. Reynolds and your legislators and leave a message that schools need sufficient school funding, at least 6% per pupil, determined this session.

Office of the Governor: State Capitol | 1007 East Grand Ave. | Des Moines, Iowa 50319,
Phone: 515.281.5211 | Contact Us (<https://governor.iowa.gov/contact/>)

To reach members of the Iowa House and Senate:

- Find your legislator here: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/Legislators/find.aspx>
- Email your legislators. firstname.lastname@legis.iowa.gov
- Call the House Switchboard. Leave a message for your representative at 515.281.3221
- Call the Senate Switchboard. Leave a message for your senator at 515.281.3371

Write a letter to your local newspaper explaining the information above in this call to action or sharing details from the education coalition funding fact of the week.