



Uniting for Iowa's Students and Families: A Superintendent Coalition's Call for Thoughtful AEA Reform

The following is a message from a coalition of Iowa superintendents. We want to share our deep concerns with those that care about Iowa's educational system and how we can implement the changes that we all desire to ensure improved student outcomes for ALL that we serve. This is not a comprehensive list of all superintendents that do not support the current AEA reform legislation, but it is a group of superintendents that represent many parts of the state and includes districts that are small and large, urban and rural, and various other demographics of representation.

Dear Reader:

As a coalition of superintendents from across Iowa, we are standing together at a crucial juncture for our state's education system and the students that it serves. With the Senate soon discussing reforms to Iowa's Area Education Agencies (AEAs), it is vital that we share our united perspective, based on our diverse experiences leading districts both large and small, urban and rural.

Our message is clear: we are deeply concerned about the proposed changes to the AEAs, especially the shift towards a "Fee-for-Service" approach. The value of the AEA system as designed is that it is a cooperative that ensures that every school district, regardless of size or location, has access to the services it needs to serve students. Rural school districts, in particular, rely heavily on AEAs for critical support. Disrupting a model that has largely worked over the past 50 years will have grave consequences for the students we serve.

We are also worried about the timeline for many of the proposed changes, starting as soon as July 1, 2024. Such haste in implementing fundamental shifts in AEA support services risks destabilizing our educational ecosystem, leaving little room for necessary strategic planning and adaptation. We believe our students and communities deserve better.

Additionally, the move to centralize control within the Department of Education, which does not appear to have the capacity and has leadership that lacks experience in education, undermines local expertise and decision-making, which are crucial in tailoring services to the unique needs of their communities. This proposal is an unnecessary overreach by our state government based on exaggerated claims about impending federal action which have now been largely debunked.

Over the past decade, funding has not kept pace with inflation for our schools and this has left us in a challenging position. The proposed changes might force us to choose between essential AEA services and hiring staff to meet immediate needs—a choice no district should face. Depriving schools of resources and then asking them to sacrifice critical services for their students is detrimental. Increasing state supplemental aid (SSA) to 3% or higher and raising teacher pay are essential steps towards a stronger system that supports students comprehensively.

The rationale behind the proposed AEA legislation was to enhance outcomes for Iowa's students, especially those facing the steepest challenges. The intention to narrow the gap between general education and special education students is noble and necessary. Yet, as we scrutinize the proposed changes, it's difficult to envision how this legislation will effectively achieve these aims.

We acknowledge the need for improvements, which necessitate a statewide review of our educational system including the department of education, our schools, and AEAs. This should be conducted with patience and inclusivity to identify areas for enhancement and devise strategies that uplift every student. We feel no legislation should be adopted until such a review takes place and we advocate for a process that welcomes all voices, including those of superintendents and stakeholders still awaiting the opportunity to engage directly with the governor.

Governor Reynolds has recently stated, "Elected leaders should always trust the people they serve, and I promise I would do it again." This statement should extend to education reform. While the intent to improve is commendable, it should not dismiss the collective wisdom and expertise of those embedded in the day-to-day realities of our schools. The majority of stakeholders, including us, have significant reservations about the proposed AEA legislation.

Change, when guided by a comprehensive, thoughtful approach, can lead to meaningful improvements. However, such change must be approached cautiously, ensuring it builds upon the strengths of our current system rather than undermining them. Let's strive for educational reform that is inclusive, equitable, and reflective of the diverse needs of our state, securing a bright future for all of Iowa's children.

Sincerely,

A Coalition of Concerned Superintendents in Iowa

Superintendents Signing This Message Include:

Marshall Lewis, Ruthven-Ayrshire and Grettenger-Terrill
mlewis@gt.ratitans.org

Erin Slater, Fort Madison
erin.slater@fmcscd.org

Dan Maeder, Davis County
dan.maeder@dcmustangs.com

Mark Taylor, Centerville
mark.taylor@centervillek12.org

Richard Montgomery, Albia
richard.montgomery@albia.k12.ia.us

Andy Crozier, Central Lee
acrozier@centrallee.org

Tim Veiseth, North Mahaska
veiseth@nmwarhawks.org

Mike Peterson, Wapello CSD and Morning Sun CSD
mike.peterson@wapellocsd.org

Scott Williamson, Eddyville-Blakesburg-Freemont
scott.williamson@rocketsk12.org

Patrick Wallace, Danville
patrick.wallace@danvillecsd.org

James Craig, Cardinal
james.craig@cardinalcomet.com

Darwin Lehman Forest City and Central Springs
dlehmann@forestcityschools.org

Barb Schwamman, Osage and Riceville
bschwamman@osage.k12.ia.us

Caleb Bonjour, Gladbrook Reinbeck
caleb.bonjour@gr-schools.net

Theron Schutte, Marshalltown
tschutte@marshalltown.k12.ia.us

Chris Hoover, Wapsie Valley
choover@wapsievalleyschools.org

Marty Jimmerson--West Branch
mjimmerson@west-branch.k12.ia.us

Greg Batenhorst, Mt. Vernon
gbatenhorst@mvcscd.org

Janelle Brouwer, Marion
jbrouwer@marion-isd.org

Kyle Koeppen, Vinton-Shellsburg
kyle.koeppen@vscsd.org

Julie Trepa, Boone
jtrep@boone.k12.ia.us

Mark Lane, Woodward-Granger
marklane@wghawks.school

Neil Gray, Northeast School
neil.gray@northeastcsd.org

Dan Peterson, Central Dewitt
dan.peterson@cd-csd.org

Tara Notz, Maquoketa
tnotz@maquoketaschools.org

Jenny Barnett, Harlan
jenny.barnett@hcsdcyclones.com

Tim Hood, East Mills/Sidney/South Page
thood@emschools.org

Paul Croghan, Nodaway Valley
paul.croghan@nodawayvalley.org

Brent Hoelsing, Lewis Central
brent.hoelsing@lewiscentral.org

Jay Mathis from Allamakee
jmathis@allamakee.k12.ia.us

Sarah Murray, Eastern Allamakee
smurray@kee.k12.ia.us