

Special Edition

Education Funding at Risk



Des Moines Education Association

DMEA TEMPO

Governor Tom Vilsack drew the proverbial line in the sand during a press conference on Monday, February 11th when he called on the Legislature to dip into the state's cash reserve fund rather than cut the budget again. With just a few months remaining in the current fiscal year, the state budget—which has already been cut by \$200 million—is short another \$120 million. Law-makers are required by law to balance the budget by the time the fiscal year ends on June 30th. Their options at this point are few—make another 2.6 percent across-the-board cut, find \$120 million to cut from specific programs, or go along with Vilsack and borrow money from the economic emergency (Rainy Day) fund. Without legislative action, Vilsack's only option is to authorize an across-the-board cut.

A 2.6 percent cut would mean that K-12 schools would have to come up with \$45 million in savings before the end of the school year. That's on top of the \$78 million lost as the result of last November's 4.3 percent across-the-board cut. Because the budget reductions would hit during the last quarter of the school year,

they would have the same impact as a 10 percent cut spread over the entire year. While some school districts can use their cash reserve funds to make up for the shortfall, it's a short-term solution at best.

"The top-quality public education system that Iowans hold so dear may soon become but a distant memory."

"Iowa's schools simply can't withstand cuts of this magnitude without seriously jeopardizing the quality of education we're able to provide to our students," said ISEA President Jolene Franken. "It's gone way beyond just cutting field trips or reducing paper purchases—we're talking about devastating cuts in programs, staff, and learning opportunities," she added noting that it would mark the beginning of a downward spiral toward mediocrity.

"The top-quality public education system that Iowans hold so dear may soon become but a distant memory. If this doesn't constitute an economic emergency, I don't know what does."

Recent polls confirm that Iowans overwhelmingly support using the Rainy Day Fund to help the state get through the current budget crisis—especially if it protects education from deep cuts. But Re-

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DMEA Lobby Day Scheduled

All teachers, staff, administrators and parents are urged to attend the DMEA Lobby Day on Wednesday, February 20th. All participants should meet at the Capitol to lobby as soon as students have cleared the building. This means an approximate start time for middle and high schools of 3:00 p.m. Elementary will follow as soon as possible.

Talking points are available on page 2 of this newsletter. Extra copies are available on the DMEA web site and the DMPS Today. DMEA will also provide printed copies at the Capitol.

Directions:

1. You may have to walk a considerable distance to find parking.
2. You will need to enter by the east, west, or south ground floor entrances.
3. After clearing security, go to the second floor.
4. Fill out a request sheet for the Representative or Senator with whom you wish to speak.
5. Lobby, lobby, lobby.

Talking Points-What Should I Say to My Legislator

DMEA members must lobby like the future of public education depends on it . . . because it does. The window of opportunity is tight. Governor Vilsack has changed the date for when the Revenue Estimating Conference makes its final determination of how much the state can spend this fiscal year from March 7th to February 18th. The Legislature is then expected to make its decision before the end of the month. That only gives us a few short days to have an impact on shaping the future of public education.

Contacting your legislator can be intimidating if you don't have a good grasp of the issues. To help you develop some good supporting arguments here are some points to make in your contacts.

- According to the January 22nd Des Moines Register Iowa Poll, 70 percent of Iowans say public schools should be spared in the state's budget cuts. Iowans clearly prioritize education over the state's cash balance.
- Use the economic emergency fund in order to maintain current commitments and avoid a disastrous disruption to education. When the

economy turns around, revenues will come in higher than estimated (since revenue estimating works off the last 24 months of activity). Recessions typically last about 18 months, so the end is just around the corner. The turn in economic activity will fill the economic emergency fund right back up. Iowa could take \$50 million out of the economic emergency fund every year for the next eight years and still have a positive balance! Iowa shouldn't deny students what they need when the state has created a tool to carry us through difficult times.

- Hold the state to the same standard that school districts are held. The across-the-board cuts and governor's proposed spending authority allow school districts to use their "economic emergency funds" to stay afloat until times improve. The state should do the same.
- The state doesn't need the economic emergency fund for cash flow! Talk to your legislators about the state's ability to borrow against a deficit for those predicted 18 days when the state can't pay its bills, and make interest money in the process.

- The theme from recent legislative sessions has been to cut property taxes. Property tax opponents must advocate for using the state's rainy day fund. Further education cuts increase property taxes by forcing school districts to use next year's cash reserve levy.
- Because of this year's cuts, there will be fewer teachers in the classroom next year. Many of the teachers who will be laid off next year are the ones we spent this year mentoring.
- Tell your building's story. The Medicaid community took legislators to the edge of the cliff to peer over and see the chaos at the bottom. Legislators found the political will to use the senior living trust fund to make up the Medicaid shortfall. Take your legislators to the edge of the cliff by telling the true story of the impact another 2.5 percent across-the-board cut will have on the students and employees in your building.

The Top Five Things You Can Do

We can't do it alone. If we're going to be successful, we must generate public support—and outrage—and mobilize parents and other concerned citizens to join in the fight. Here are just a few things you can do to make a difference:

1. Meet with your administrators to develop a list of cuts—both short-term and long-term—that will have to be made if the Legislature fails to tap into the Rainy Day Fund. Get specific examples of what those cuts would mean to students. Please also send that information via e-mail to ISEA headquarters (WMaster@isea.org).
2. Contact your legislators IMMEDIATELY via phone or e-mail (Visit the Legislative Action Center on the ISEA Web site—<http://www.isea.org>—for contact information and handy e-mail links. While you're at it, be sure to contact the Governor and thank him for trying to protect education funding.
3. Set up a meeting with your legislators this weekend. Be sure to bring along administrators, parents, and community leaders who can speak with a unified voice. Plan regular follow-up contacts as events unfold.
4. Hold a meeting with Association members in your school building. Urge them to contact their legislators as well as encourage their friends and neighbors to do the same.
5. Write letters to the editor and/or contact local reporters with information about what another across-the-board budget cuts would do to your school. Click on the "Media Guide" link in the ISEA Legislative Action Center (<http://www.isea.org>) for contact information.

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For a list of legislators in suburban Des Moines visit the DMEA web page at <http://www.dmea.org>.

Tips on Phoning Your State Legislators

Since we only have a short time to contact legislators a simple phone call may be the best method of contact. Keep in mind that most telephone calls are taken by a staff member and not the actual legislator. If they are not available, you may also leave a message. If you speak with someone other than your legislator, take down their name.

Upon reaching your state legislator on the phone, it's easiest to follow these four steps:

IDENTIFY yourself by name and the organization that you represent or the town from which you are calling.

EXPLAIN why you are calling: "I am calling to support/oppose using the rainy day fund to offset cuts to the education budget." Be polite and concise. Creating 1 or 2 talking points will focus the content of your message. Too much information may confuse your message. Ask your legislator his/her position on this issue. Don't assume that your legislator has prior knowledge of your issue. Be calm, respectful, and be prepared to educate, using local examples to accentuate your point. If the legislator requires further information, provide it as soon as possible.

THANK the person who took the phone call for their time and consideration.

**Des Moines Education
Association**

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Tips on Writing Your Legislator

Many members are hesitant to contact legislators. If you follow the format below the task will be much easier. Remember that you represent all educators in the state for spelling and grammar are important. When writing a letter or e-mail, this list of suggestions will improve its effectiveness:

Individually written letters, rather than mass generated form letters, make a greater impression on your legislator. Type your name, address, and phone number at the top.

Addressing correspondence:

To a State Senator:

The Honorable (Full Name)
Iowa Senate
Iowa State Capitol
Des Moines, IA 50319

To a State Representative:

The Honorable (Full Name)
Iowa State Capitol
Des Moines, IA 50319

Dear Senator (Last Name):

Dear Representative (Last Name):

Be specific. Your purpose for writing should be stated in the first paragraph of the letter. Specifically mention the use of the "rainy-day" fund. Try to send your letter while the issue is still alive.

State your position. Explain why you support or oppose this particular issue. Keep in mind that local examples concerning the impact of this legislation are very powerful. Be courteous and to the point, keeping your letter focused on one issue. Some of the Talking Points can be used here.

Ask for a response. Indicate to your legislator that you would appreciate a reply containing his/her position on the issue. "Sincerely yours" is a proper way to conclude your letter.

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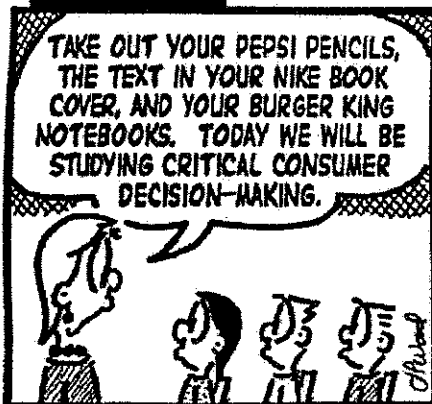
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current budget crisis—especially if it protects education from deep cuts. But Republican House Speaker Brent Siegrist remains opposed to the idea. "That's the absolute wrong answer," said Siegrist in his February 11th issue of *Edu-Mail*. "That's money used to cash flow the state. If having to cut schools isn't bad enough, then not being able to pay them at all would be the insult to add to the injury," he noted.

But THAT, according to Franken, is the wrong answer. "It's not as if the Governor wants to use the entire Rainy Day Fund and it's not as if it would be gone forever. As state revenue comes in, the fund is constantly replenished. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out that it's better to get your money late rather than never."

Visit the DMEA Web Page
<http://www.dmea.org>

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How to solve education's financial woes.