

## UEN Legislative Priorities for 2020 Session

Approved by Steering Committee Nov. 20, 2019

**Invest in Iowa's Future:** Public schools educate a diverse workforce with the skills necessary to fuel our future. Adequate funding is required to:

- fulfill the goal of restoring Iowa's first in the nation education status,
- deliver world-class learning results for all students,
- prepare creative, caring and motivated citizens
- develop a world-class workforce to secure Iowa's economic future, and
- recruit, retain and reward Iowa's school staff and educators of today and the future.

The cost per pupil must be sufficient to fuel school districts and AEAs and must be set no lower than 3.75% for the 2021 school year, but adequacy is not enough. Equity requires a needs-driven formula that funds programs for low-income, non-English speaking, and at-risk students. Early investment increases access to quality preschool programs which prevent higher costs later. Barriers to preschool access must be eliminated and schools must have the funding and authority to provide preschool and wrap around services for a full day, prioritizing high-need students first.

A strong school finance system is based on the principles of primacy, adequacy, equity, and flexibility. Iowa's investment in public education should mirror economic growth and make up for shortfalls when the economy is robust. Iowa's future depends on stable and balanced tax policy that generates enough money to fund Iowa's priority of educating our children.

A strong system also requires a diversified revenue portfolio. New state resources must supplement, not supplant existing resources. Increased state funding for schools must increase spending authority rather than simply using the school aid formula as a vehicle for property tax relief. Iowa's 31<sup>st</sup> in the nation ranking of local school funding as a percent of total education revenues demonstrates that our revenue portfolio is out of balance.

**Teacher, Administrator and Staff Shortage:** Adequate funding is essential for public schools to compete with the private sector for employees. In addition to adequate base funding, other steps must be taken to help schools meet the challenge of attracting and retaining tomorrow's educators and recruiting teachers that mirror the diversity in our students, including flexibility in certification requirements, acceptance of alternate evidence such as experience for Iowa licensure, licensure reciprocity agreements with other states, loan-forgiveness for shortage areas, creation of a public service track within Iowa's CTE plan, creative grow-our-own programs and a strong IPERS and employee benefits system.

**Student Mental Health Services:** Iowa must fund services, eliminate barriers, and clarify funding sources and responsibilities, including critical partnerships and wrap-around services. An array of services must include telehealth counseling provided virtually to students while at school without burdening school employees with additional insurance billing and administrative documentation. Schools should not be mandated to screen for mental health needs or provide mental services without adequate funding to do so.

**Resolve Formula and Transportation Inequalities:** Eliminate the \$165 district cost per pupil difference in the school aid formula within 10 years and strive for transportation equity so no district has transportation expenditures above the state average.

**School Safety:** Urban schools need the resources, training and support necessary for Iowa school, student and staff safety at school including funding for security personnel and training to protect against active shooter and other emergency situations presenting harm.

**District Authority:** School boards are responsible to make decisions on behalf of their students, staff and communities to meet the goals of their district.