

Connect with a policy maker: Go to the Iowa Legislative Website and look up your senator/Representative <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find> Do one (or more) of several things:

1. Send them a thank you note for their service. Let them know their job is tough and you can empathize. Ask them to support an increase in the state cost per pupil no lower than 4%. Check out the UEN web page for recent <http://www.uen-ia.org/legislation.htm> call to action on school aid for talking points.
2. Sign up to get their newsletter.
3. Click on their name, go to their website or do a Google search and see what you can learn about their educational background or experience.
4. Send them an email or letter asking a question about education. (Could be as simple as "how do you best like to get information about how the issues before you may impact your schools?")

Writing your legislator: Personal, thoughtful letters have a considerable impact.

- Focus on one issue or bill per letter and identify the bill, if known, by name and number.
- Express your point of view, explain why your legislator should support it, be brief and courteous.
- Briefly explain the local impact of the legislation – just the facts.
- Request that your legislators take a specific position on the bill. If you want their support, you may want to ask them to cosponsor the bill or to vote for its passage,
- Ask for a response from your legislator.
- When writing an individual letter, use your signature and personal letterhead and state your role. If it is a collective letter consider who signs, what letterhead and why.
- Make sure your return address is on the letter (envelopes often get lost) so that your legislator can respond.

For the fastest response to letters, address them to:

The Honorable [Full Name] or State Representative / Dear Representative [Last Name]
State Senator
State Capitol
Des Moines, IA 50319
Dear Senator [Last Name]:

E-mailing your legislator is also an option for shorter or time-sensitive messages. Because of the volume of e-mails legislators receive, however, yours may be retrieved by a staff member or accidentally deleted and never seen by your legislator. A hard copy letter mailed is by far your best choice, but you can print and mail a copy of your email to ensure it gets noticed.

Refer to the Legislative web site www.legis.state.ia.us legislators' interim and regular session snail mail and e-mail addresses and phone numbers and committee assignments.

Letter Outline: Introduction during Interim:

Date, 2016

Honorable (*legislator name*)
(*street address*)
(*city, Iowa #####*)

Dear ("Senator" or "Representative")(last name):

Before the beginning of the next legislative session, I would like to arrange a time to sit down and talk about our school district (or get to know you and provide information on educational issues important to you.)

(*Second paragraph: subject of the visit such as : – how our students are learning, how we dedicate our budget to improving quality teaching, and to answer any questions your legislator may have, or just to make an introduction and connect them with names and numbers to call in the district when considering a vote on education policy.*)

Please let me know what might be a good time to get together. Perhaps we could meet for coffee at _____. I can be reached at (*area code*) ###-####.

Or invite the legislator to a board meeting or other event: The (*your school district*) Board of Directors would like you to participate at our ("*open house*," "*legislative forum*," "*student awards program*," *etc.*). We feel our district has a lot to offer our students and we'd like you to come and see for yourself the good things that are happening at the (*your school district*). We strive to provide educational programming that constantly challenges our students and improves their achievement levels.

Please let me know if you will be able to attend. I can be reached at (*area code*) ###-####.

Thank you for your consideration and leadership for Iowa's students.

Sincerely,

(*your name*)

Title
(*your school district*)

Letter Outline: Advocating for Adequate Funding:

Date, 2016

Honorable (*legislator name*)
(*street address*)
(*city, Iowa #####*)

Dear ("*Senator*" or "*Representative*")(*last name*):

I know your job is difficult and there are many competing priorities for state resources. I want to share with you why education should be the highest among your list of priorities:

- Education expenditures have a return on investment that's significant and measurable. We either pay to educate people or pay to support them and mitigate the impact of uneducated actions in adult life.
- Quality education drives productivity, work ethic, entrepreneurship, creativity and our future success.
- As Iowa is aging, our seniors will depend on efficient, safe and caring service providers and a tax base that supports their needs. Iowa can't take care of our elders without having high performing young adults.
- Children are our future. We have a moral obligation to give them our best effort at a world class education.
- Even if we are selfish about our taxes, investing in education is less costly than paying for ignorance.

(*Second paragraph: what do you want them to do*) The education community is united in their call for timely and adequate funding in the cost per student for both FY 2017 and FY 2018. Please do your very best to support the most you can for our students.

Thank you so much for listening to my concerns and I look forward to your response. I can be reached at (*area code*) ###-#### if you'd like to talk in person.

Thank you for your consideration and leadership for Iowa's students.

Sincerely,

(*your name*)

Title
(*your school district*)

Parents, grandparents, staff and neighbors, take and action and recruit someone else to help!

Call or email Gov. Branstad and Lt. Gov. Reynolds and your legislators and leave a message that schools need sufficient school funding with a decision early in the 2016 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/) (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> Click on their name and you'll see their home mailing address (for letters) and their email address.
- They get lots of email, so a real letter on paper is noteworthy and more likely to be read. Also please note, some legislators don't access legislative email when not in session.
- During Session (January through late April) call the House Switchboard. Leave a message for your representative at 515.281.3221
- During Session (January through late April) call the Senate Switchboard. Leave a message for your senator at 515.281.3371

Write a letter to your representative and senator. Use the attached sample as a guideline, but put it in your own words and describe what's happening in your school and what they can do to help.

Write a letter to your local newspaper explaining to other citizens why Iowa's investment in education is important for our future, both for the success of our children and for the health of our state's future economy.

Recruit another neighbor, parent, family member or coworker to do the same.

Facts to include if you'd like:

- Iowa is ranked 35th in the nation in per pupil expenditures.
- Iowa's investment in education when considering all state revenues was 16.8% in the 2013-14 school year ("Iowa Elementary and Secondary Education spending for FY 2014 as a percent of total state spending", National Association of State Budget Officers 2013 report). That is below the 19.1 percent average for the plain states region, in which Iowa is categorized, and further below the national average of 19.5 percent for all states.
- The 1.25% increase in the cost per pupil for the 2015-16 school year was well below the growth in Iowa Net State General Fund Revenues, which finished the year at more than 6% growth.
- Although the Legislature was able to find common ground by adding \$57 million in one-time funding for schools in their budget for the 2015-16 school year, the Governor vetoed that funding, sending schools back to the drawing board to piece together a budget to support students.
- In 5 of the last 6 school years (FY 2011 through FY 2016), the per pupil cost set by the legislature fell short of the increased cost of doing business at our school. Since FY 2011, the average annual increase in revenues per pupil has been 1.87% while the average cost of providing education without budget reductions runs about 3-3.5%.

Talk about what you see in your school that shows lack of investment – increased work for teachers, more students in classes, less course offerings, increased fees and calls for

parents to provide for the school. Might also mention discussions of school closings or sending students to neighboring districts in order to save money.

SAMPLE E-MAIL/LETTER TEXT
(please personalize as much as you'd like)

Dear [*Sen. Or Rep. _____*] or

Dear Governor Branstad and Lt. Governor Reynolds,

As a [tax payer, parent, grandparent] I am concerned about Iowa's investment in education. I share and believe in the commitment to ensuring that every child has access to a high quality education. However, I have serious concerns about the delay in setting education funding decisions and how that is impacting my child's school and our community. I am worried that Iowa is not providing the education funding necessary for schools to do their job of educating my children and my neighbors' children.

The idea that the legislature wait until just months before the beginning of the school year to decide on funding jeopardizes school programs, puts schools at risk of additional lay-offs, increases class sizes, and further hampers schools' abilities to meet the needs of all students. The legislature has recently not followed the law by setting school funding within 30 days of the governor's budget release 18 months before the start of the school year.

I'm concerned that the costs of delivering education continue to grow while per pupil funding increases have been low for several years and the full impact of previous underfunding is still being discovered. Iowa ranks 35th in the nation in per pupil expenditures. Our students need us to do better.

As an Iowa tax payer, I am asking you to set education as the priority, make sure that students are funded first, and figure out everything else after you've determined what schools need for our students.

The bottom line is that education is an investment – not only in education itself, but also in our economic and workforce development and the future success of our children and our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration as well as your commitment to Iowa's children.

Sincerely,

[Your Name and Contact Information]

Re: Public School Funding

Dear Senators:

After attending the _____ Legislative Coffee on _____, 2016, I wanted to express my support for sufficient and prompt school funding.

It is my understanding that over the past five (5) years Iowa's net revenues have increased an average of 4.1%. However, the increase in per-pupil funding averaged only 2%. For the current academic year, school districts received only a 1.25% increase with the governor vetoing more than \$55 million of other support for schools. During this year of 1.25% increase in per pupil costs for schools, the state's general fund revenues grew by 6.2%. This seems like a big mismatch if education is truly the priority of our state leaders.

For our _____ Community Schools to continue the great momentum of student achievement, maintain current class size ratios, and avoid cuts in staffing and services, our district needs at least a 4% increase in funding. This increase in funding is needed to keep pace with rising expenses such as salary increases, utilities, transportation, and education materials. Anything less than a 4% increase will inevitably cause our district and most other districts to make program cuts, potentially having fewer classroom teachers and/or support staff.

Tell a little of your personal history if it's appropriate, such as . . . My husband and I were born and educated in Iowa. We are both currently small business owners in Iowa. After living in Nebraska for several years after high school, we made the decision to move back to Iowa a few years ago. We made this important decision, in large part, due to the reputation of the public schools in _____. *Provide an example of something great happening in your school district. . .* For example, the Council Bluffs Community School District is one of 425 school districts in the U.S. and Canada honored by the College Board with placement on the 6th Annual AP District Honor Roll and College View Elementary has an impressive International Baccalaureate Program.

Finish up with something about your child. . . My daughter is currently a first grader at College View Elementary and we are in the process of enrolling our son in the preschool program for next year. We decided to send our children to College View after visiting several elementary schools. We have been extremely happy with our decision. We believe Council Bluffs School District's academic rigor, focus on personal development, and administrative leadership are unparalleled in the Omaha metro area.

School funding not only benefits my children and all other current students, it also furthers community development. Maintaining the current level of educational quality offered in Iowa encourages highly educated and motivated business people to move to our great state. In addition, the future support of our aging population depends on strong public schools.

School funding is the most worthy investment of public funds. All of our futures depend on educated youth. My husband and I ask you to provide adequate and timely funding to our schools. Thank you for your hard work for all Iowans!

Sincerely,