



## FROM THE DESK OF REPRESENTATIVE DE BOEF

February 12, 2009

### Short-Changing Our Kids

One of the big news items in the Capitol is the fact that Senator Matt Mc Coy has filed a bill which would force all schools smaller than 750 students to consolidate with other small schools with the ultimate goal of having only one school district with one superintendent per county. This would hit my district very hard! Williamsburg is the only school in my district which would survive as is under this proposal. As a parent of adult children who have graduated from a small school, I feel my own family experience provides proof these small schools have educated my children very well. All four of my children are college graduates. One is a dentist, one has a Master of Divinity degree and is a minister, and one is finishing her third year of medical school.

One example of success is Keota High School, which was determined by a *Des Moines Register* survey to be second in the State on preparing students for college. Small schools provide one-on-one attention that is unmatched anywhere else.

### Short-Changing Preschool Kids

In 2007, the Legislature passed a statewide voluntary Pre-School Program. This law created expanded opportunities for Iowa's young children to attend a quality pre-school before they enter kindergarten, funded by grants through the Dept. of Education.

The funding for these pre-school "slots" would be distributed to our schools through a competitive grant process. The funding started at \$15 million per year, and it would eventually grow to \$110 million in funding each year. School districts that are selected to receive funds would get a grant based on the number of four-year-olds in the district. Because of this state's commitment to providing our kids the best education possible, there has been a lot more interest in the program than there is funding. As a result, ninety-seven school districts applied to be part of the program but did not get funding. Among these schools were Sigourney, Keota, Tri-County, Pekin, BGM, & HLV. Pre-school, administrators, Area Education Agency, and interested parents from these school districts were concerned about the re-application for and the availability of pre-school grants for the coming budget year. They spoke of reasons cited by the Dept. of Education as to why they didn't receive their grants this year.

My school superintendents are concerned about the lack of funding for their existing pre-schools. Only one of my school districts, English Valleys was awarded the preschool grant. Because of difficult economic times, parents can often no longer afford to have their children enrolled in private preschools. The redistribution in state aid due to declining school enrollment is also putting their pre-schools at risk. These districts are penalized under the current scoring system because they already have a pre-school in existence. According to state rules, they should close their pre-school for a year to take advantage of the state's scoring system. Why should we punish the kids to qualify for a grant?

To add insult to injury, I found out that the Dept. of Education had money left over from last year's \$15 million grant allotment. \$2.8 million remained unused. Because of over estimation and some deferrals of grants by some districts, additional resources could be made to those applying

districts. The law setting up the pre-school grant program allows money not used this year to be carried over into the next fiscal year, increasing the monies that would be available.

Will more school districts be able to provide pre-school to kids in the coming year because we have this left over money? No. Instead of saving it for next year, the Director of the Department of Education used this money to cover the Governor's 1.5 percent budget cut. Some education programs ended up not being cut at all, because the Director decided to cut the pre-school program by twenty percent. This decision has angered a number of legislators, including me. This is just another example of how bureaucrats in Des Moines decide that they know better than your elected officials. And who pays for this decision – our kids.

Governor Culver has talked of the importance of protecting our pre-school program from budget cuts in next year's budget. We all agree this is important. I just wish the Governor would have protected this year's funds from his education director. Over eight hundred kids would have gotten a head start in the education if he had.

### **Question of the Week...**

Do you favor consolidating our rural schools to only one district and one superintendent per county?

*Visitors to the Capitol this week---* Alice De-Rycke from Victor with Iowa Right to Life. Homeschoolers Crystal Gingerich of Kinross and her children Andrew, Anthony, Danielle, Danae, and Andrea Farrier and her daughter Rachel.

***I would appreciate your input. My phone number at the Capitol is 515-281-3221, or e-mail me at [betty.deboef@legis.state.ia.us](mailto:betty.deboef@legis.state.ia.us). I would welcome visitors at the Capitol, too!***