

INCREASE FUNDING FOR STUDENTS IN POVERTY

The Community Legislative Action Team recommends changing the state per pupil funding allocation to recognize at-risk student challenges by providing additional weighting in the foundation formula for students qualifying for free/reduced lunch.

Background

- The path of students living in poverty to graduation is very different from that of non-disadvantaged students. Providing equitable opportunities to students who are living in or near poverty places an additional burden on district budgets.
- Des Moines Public Schools has seen a rise in the number of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch - now 75.7% of the more than 31,000 students who attend school in Des Moines.
- Students who qualify for free meals may not be charged regular school fees. In the case of athletics, districts with a high number of socioeconomically disadvantaged students must either do without or find another way to fund the opportunities that the parents can support in wealthier districts. The fees are not unique to athletics, but apply to any class or activity for which fees are charged including driver's education, lab fees for science and art classes, musical instrument rental, etc. When districts must spend dollars from the budget to cover what other districts use parent fees to pay for, it means there are fewer resources for everything else.
- Children who live in or near poverty tend to enter school with a much more limited vocabulary and having had fewer educational life experiences.
- Students from disadvantaged backgrounds may suffer from associated trauma. This year, DMPS has identified more than 800 homeless students. One in five students (more than 6,000) is food insecure. Many students will not have had access to regular medical care and cannot easily access supplies they need for school.
- Children who come from families in poverty are more likely to be withdrawn, aggressive, and unable to complete school projects. Those students will need extra interventions and supports.
- Poverty knows no zip code. According to the Child and Family Policy Center, every Iowa county has children living in poverty. Children who "are much more likely than their peers to experience stress and deprivation that hinders development and readiness for school and life."

Why This is a Good Investment

- Students Receive Equal Access: Increasing weighted funding for students living in or near poverty takes some of the additional financial burden from districts, allowing them to provide comparable educational opportunities to wealthier districts.
- All Students Learn Better: When a district has appropriate resources to support students from socioeconomically disadvantaged homes, culture and climate (student behavior and experiences) improve and all students become better learners.
- The Whole State Can Benefit: Providing funding that eliminates obstacles facing districts with high numbers of students living in or near poverty will increase the likelihood all students in those districts become successful, healthy Iowans with lifelong careers.

Why This is Urgent

Right now, districts across the state with high numbers of students living in or near poverty are struggling with resources and not keeping up with the additional financial burden to appropriately educate all students. In addition, districts will continue to draw from other funding sources the same money wealthier districts collect from families to provide the same opportunities. Voting for weighted funding for students living in or near poverty is an immediate action every Iowa legislator can take to improve the lives of students in all 99 Iowa counties.