

2008-09 Legislative Platform of the Area Education Agencies of Iowa (nonprioritized)

In 1974 the Iowa Legislature replaced existing county school systems with 15 area education agencies. The AEAs were created to equalize educational opportunities for students regardless of where they lived, or the size and budget of their school district. AEAs work as educational partners with public and private schools to improve education in Iowa. Iowa's AEAs are considered by many experts to be one of the foremost regional educational delivery systems in the country, offering programs and services which can be most efficiently and economically provided on a regional or cooperative basis. 2008-09 priorities are in **Bold**.

FUNDING ISSUES

1. *Increase funding for school improvement*

AEAs have identified school improvement as a key strategy to meeting economical, political, and societal needs. In addition, AEAs have determined that assistance to local schools in the areas of emerging technology, professional development and curriculum assessment is of vital importance to assist schools with the mandates of the federal “No Child Left Behind Act.”

Therefore, the AEAs urge the legislature to allocate additional resources to AEAs and LEAs to be used for curriculum development, student assessment analysis and action step planning, inservice training, professional development activities and technology assistance

Of equal importance, as we move toward a seamless educational system is the funding of special education. Special education programs and services provided to identified children are mandatory under both federal and state law and recipients of these services are also impacted by the regulations of “No Child Left Behind.” When funds are reduced and/or limited by instituting special education funding caps AEAs have no ability to modify services as a result. Local schools may be forced to use general education funds to make up any differences, and schools and AEAs could be placed in legal conflict.

2. *Set an allowable growth rate that encourages continuous school improvement and reflects actual cost increases experienced by school districts and AEAs*

Growth rates do not always reflect the actual costs necessary to operate a school or AEA. Anything less necessitates a reduction in some part of the operating budget. School improvement is an integral part of the educational system in Iowa and must be funded to a degree that makes it possible for schools to pursue and for AEAs to assist in the endeavor.

3. *Allow students in approved nonpublic schools to be counted for special education services, thereby allowing them full access to services.*

Historically, only public school students had been counted for special education funding, and services to nonpublic students have been very limited. The Iowa Code contains permissive language that would allow increased services to nonpublic school students, with an accompanying funding mechanism for schools but not for AEAs.

AEAs are concerned about the vagueness of the permissive language, its discriminatory nature, and the possibility of reducing services to public school students over time. The AEAs recommend that if the legislature wishes to expand services to approved nonpublic school students, it should expand the funding count to include those students. The result would be an adequate funding base for an increased number of students, rather than a reduction of resources for an increased number of students.

4. *Part B federal special education funding*

Any future increases in Part B funds are intended to provide services to children covered by IDEA and not to be used by the state as a means to balance the state budget.

5. *Create a separate funding mechanism for the operation and maintenance of AEA facilities*

Currently, an AEA must use funds allocated for services and programs to pay for capital expenses, which reduces funds available for the instructional needs of local districts. A funding mechanism for AEA facilities and capital outlay should be developed, either separately, or through inclusion of AEAs in any new funding mechanisms provided to local schools for infrastructure purposes.

Additionally, the current manner in which AEAs may acquire facilities through lease-purchasing may be cumbersome, inefficient, and not cost-effective; the code should be changed to allow better alternatives.

6. *Provide at-risk funding*

Programs should be created for at-risk children that promote prevention of school failure and increase school success. A cost per pupil weighted initiative that recognizes the impact of poverty and low socio-economic conditions by school district and building should be developed.

7. *Establish special education weightings*

The function of setting the weights for special education funding should be moved from the SBRC to the Department of Education. The Department has a better understanding of the needs within special education. The weights should be set annually based on real prior costs incurred by the school district of Iowa.

8. *December special education count*

To provide for a more accurate and equitable special education count the count date should return to a choice of a prior year December count or a current year December count.

9. *Increase allowable administrative costs - Penal Institutions*

Currently, AEAs are required to provide services to groups other than their original mission of serving local schools. Such an example is the requirement to provide special education services to inmates within the penal institutions of Iowa. The allowable amount for administrative costs is not sufficient to meet the real cost, thus it takes funding away from services to local schools. Only 2.8% can now be collected for administrative costs, while actual costs range between 15% and 20%. AEAs urge the legislature to increase the allowable cost to reflect the actual costs.

10. *Provide full funding for administrative costs - Juvenile, Shelter homes*

Originally, many juvenile and shelter homes were at the same site. As numbers have grown, these sites are now separate in many cases, thus maintenance costs have grown. The AEAs urge full funding for the actual costs of providing these services.

11. *Increase funding for early childhood efforts*

Research tells us early childhood is a critical time for students to be exposed to learning environments. Some schools are providing early childhood education, but are forced to either cut other budgets or charge tuition. This sets up an inequity among schools and students. Early childhood education should be provided to all students and schools on an equitable basis.

12. *Increase Current funding levels to provide approved reading programs*

Many students in Title 1 and special education programs are identified because they are having difficulties learning to read. We encourage continued and increased funding to support improved reading intervention programs to aid such students.

13. *Additional funding for year- round services*

As more students require summer instruction as part of their Free Appropriate Public Education, and as more school districts increase to year round schedules, it is necessary to provide additional funding for AEAs to provide services and make staff available on a year round basis.

14. *Provide an AEA budget guarantee*

As enrollments decrease it is necessary that a 100% guarantee be provided to AEA educational services and media divisions so they can provide the level of services being requested by LEAs.

15. *Restoration of AEA budget cuts*

The AEAs urge the legislature to restore the remaining budget cut to AEA controlled budgets. The manner in which the AEAs were legislated to make the cuts, specifically in only those areas representing 20-25% of the total AEA budget has in reality resulted in funding losses disproportionate to the AEA budget.

ICN ISSUES

16. *Retain the current level of ICN support for education*

The AEAs oppose the sale of the ICN system in its entirety, but would support the sale of the networks excess capacity.

OTHER ISSUES

17. *Effective and efficient structure of AEA services.*

There is staunch support of the AEA structure from every professional education organization in the Iowa, including the Iowa State Board of Education. These groups have very clearly communicated to their elected officials that they do not support moving AEAs to an inefficient and inequitable “sale of service” model

We encourage the Iowa Legislature to continue ensuring, through the current AEA structure, that:

- a) Children in sparsely populated areas have access to the same services as children in urban areas.
- b) Educators in rural areas have the same access to the same services and opportunities for professional development and licensure as their counterparts in urban areas.
- c) The state of Iowa meets federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements and special education compliance issues, and therefore continues to receive federal funds.

18. *Election of AEA boards*

AEA board members should continue to represent the school districts they serve by being directly elected by director district on a vote cast by the local school boards of that director district.

19. *School transportation appeals*

The AEAs support a repeal of legislation relating to the AEA board role in the appeal of transportation issues between LEAs and between LEAs and parents. The current appeal procedure creates a conflict of interest on the part of AEA board members inasmuch as they are expected to rule on decisions made by the local school boards that directly elect them.

20. *Collective bargaining*

AEAs oppose any effort to remove local boards from the teacher termination process and to adding additional subjects to the current mandatory bargaining list.

21. *Arbitrator requirements*

AEAs support a requirement that arbitrators under Chapter 20 must consider a school district or AEAs financial stability, ability to pay and the effect the award would have on provisions of mandated services prior to issuing a decision.

22. *Expedite cooperative Efforts*

The AEAs encourage the legislature to expedite collaboration between governmental agencies as a way to promote and achieve greater efficiencies.

IPERS

23. *Enhancements*

The AEAs encourage the legislature to continue to enhance efforts to attract and retain teachers and administrators by implementing further improvements in IPERS.

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT ISSUES

24. *Revise bond issue legislation*

The AEAs support bond passage by a simple majority vote and to permit the local school board to levy a combination of property taxes and income surtaxes to pay the indebtedness.

25. *Fully fund Instructional Support Program*

The AEAs support full funding of the state portion of the Instructional Support Program.

26. *Restore budget guarantee*

The AEAs support restoration of a 100% budget guarantee for local schools as a means to provide an equal education opportunity for all students.