

Remarks by Ann Swenson

Public Hearing on House File 80

January 26, 2015

Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight. I am Ann Swenson. I teach elementary music in the Waukee School District and I have been teaching 11 years. I have a master's degree, and I am a National Board Certified Teacher.

Growing school districts face funding dilemmas. While Waukee gained 485 new students this year, we will not receive any Supplemental State Aid for these students until the 2015-2016 school year. The teacher-pupil ratio in my building's kindergarten classes is 26 to 1 because we can't afford to hire additional teachers. I know many of you in this room believe the teacher-pupil ratio is much less, but it is not. Our teacher pupil ratio is not ideal.

These students come from many socioeconomic backgrounds, some having had no preschool experience. Twenty different languages are spoken in our building. Several students who attend our school are refugees. They are new comers who know little to no English. Teachers overcome these hurdles in addition to teaching their curriculum and make sure all their students receive the love, attention, and differentiated instruction they deserve. Quite simply, we need more teachers, but there is no money to hire additional staff.

Fewer education support professionals are employed in our district because of tepid state support for public schools. These support personnel covered recess duties, door duties, and traffic duties. Those duties are now assigned to professional teachers who could, and should be collaborating, planning, and preparing lessons, and working with students rather than supervising on the playground or in the parking lot.

If Supplemental State Aid is set at 1.25 percent Waukee will have no choice but to run in the red. At 2 percent SSA, the district will overspend for the next four years. At 3 percent, the district would just barely run positive balances. It's easy to say, "just cut back." Unfortunately, you can only cut back on supplies so much. The only significant savings to the district would be a cut in employees, which isn't possible when student enrollment is increasing. Some might suggest a cut in administration, but we rank last among all districts in the state on the amount spent per pupil on administration. We are running out of options. We need, and will wisely use a 6 percent increase in Supplemental State Aid.

Thank you for your time.