

Remarks by Beth Harmelink  
Public Hearing on House File 80

January 26, 2015

Good evening Speaker Paulsen and honorable members of the Iowa House of Representatives. Thank you for allowing me to speak to you.

My name is Beth Harmelink. I am a special education teacher at Ames Middle School. I have been a teacher in Iowa for more than 15 years, but I have been an educator all of my life. I started teaching kids from my neighborhood how to read on a blanket in my backyard when I was a young child. My passion for helping others learn has never wavered. .

As a special education teacher, I have seen a lot of tragic scenarios. It is my job as a teacher to help and administer the band aids that I hope will stick.

When I was teaching at the elementary level, I had a young girl with beautiful blue eyes and a long head of curly blonde hair. She came to school hungry, unclean and with chronic head lice. Her father was unemployed and her mom was trying to work and go to nursing school at DMACC.

She and I had a daily routine. She dropped her things on the floor. I went to my cabinet and took out a basket of hair ribbons, rubber bands and a lice comb. For the next 20

minutes – before the rest of the class came in- I combed out her hair. I worked through the gnarls in her curls and removed the nits that nested on her scalp. I'd help her wash her hands and face. Then, she would choose food from the pantry that I kept in my classroom. After this, we would work on our daily academic activities.

If this young student didn't have this routine with me every day, no peers would sit by her. How could this young gal have focused on her lessons when she had an empty tummy nagging at her and bugs tickling her head? We have lost our focus with larger class sizes and staffing cuts. I no longer have the time to focus this much attention on one student. How can I when my class sizes have doubled? Yet, there are still students like her coming into my room who would benefit tremendously from individual attention. Our students deserve this focus.

Classroom budgets do not buy boxes of Kleenexes, bottles of Germ-X, ribbons for hair, or food for the classroom pantry. The budget will not cover the rewards that are spelled out for the children in their IEP's – like treasure box treats, stickers, little toys and gadgets that kids will work hard to earn.

For the sake of our students and their long-term future, please do not cut our budgets. We simply must do more for those in our classrooms.

Thank you for your time.