



NEWS FROM THE URBAN EDUCATION NETWORK

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Contact Information:

Dr. Lew Finch,
Executive Director
Urban Education Network
319-329-0547
lfinch@mchsi.com

Dr. Paul Gausman,
UEN Chair & Superintendent
Sioux City Community School District
712-203-1088 — cell
712-279-6643 — office
gausmap@siouxcityschools.org

Dr. Gary Norris,
Superintendent
Waterloo Community School District
319-215-7040 — cell
norrisg@waterloo.k12.ia.us

UEN: IOWA MUST ADDRESS FUNDING FORMULA, STUDENT ASSESSMENT, CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS AS KEY PARTS OF TRANSFORMING EDUCATION

WATERLOO, IOWA - The leaders of Iowa's largest school districts are urging participants in the July 25-26 Iowa Education Summit to address real issues facing the state's school districts, from how Iowa assesses student progress to how public education is funded to the state's changing demographics. The Urban Education Network, representing the state's largest school districts, is urging for greater support of public education to continue Iowa's tradition of providing all students with access to great schools.

"Our public schools are doing more than at any point in history and our students are accomplishing more than ever before, and so rhetoric that suggests education is somehow broken and needs to be fixed contributes nothing to how we continue to improve and transform our schools," said Paul Gausman, Superintendent of the Sioux City Community School District and current chair of the Urban Education Network. "Education does not need to be 'fixed,' but it does need to change in order to best serve a changing population of students. That requires a meaningful discussion about a range of issues, including the commitment of our state to provide the resources needed for success."

The UEN believes that Iowa policy makers need to focus on finding solutions in three major areas:

- **Improve the Assessment of Student Learning:** Promote the development of a process to assess student learning that accurately and adequately measures 21st Century learning needs. It is time for Iowa to abandon the use of norm-referenced standardized tests as the sole measure of student learning.
- **Review the Current Funding Formula:** Develop a consistent definition of "at risk" students and conduct a study of resources needed to address the issue of underachieving students. The study should include an analysis of the current Iowa funding formula to determine the degree to which the current system does or does not adequately support underachieving students.
- **Improve the Evaluation of Instructional Staff:** In collaboration with instructional staff, develop a process for the inclusion of student learning as one factor in the evaluation of educators, remembering that the primary purpose of evaluation is to inform educators what supports and additional learning are needed to consistently improve practice.

Although well intentioned, it is quite likely that none of the panel discussions at the Iowa Education Summit will specifically address the significant changes in the state's student population in recent years and what that might mean for education. For example, the number of minority students in Iowa has more than doubled in the past 15 years, the number of English Language Learners has more than quadrupled in the past 20 years, and the percentage of children in poverty has gone up by more than a third in the past decade.

UEN leaders insist that the changing demographics of Iowa are no excuse for giving up on a single student or groups of students.

"Although changing demographics may create challenges – requiring changes in how we deliver education in Iowa – these challenges come with great rewards in knowing our quality staff and dedicated educators are up to the task. It will take both time to collectively study and resources to properly meet the needs of every student," says Dave Benson, Superintendent in Cedar Rapids. "Every single student who doesn't graduate lives the life of a future unfulfilled at a cost to themselves, their families and society of a less productive, lower quality of life and contribution to community. This burden is on the entire state of Iowa and we need to address it together."

"People long for a 'golden age' in education, but when was that? Was it 40 years ago, when the graduation rate in Iowa was just 52 percent? Was it 15 years ago, when fewer than half of Iowa high schools offered an advanced math class beyond Algebra I? If Iowa's path to the future is a longing for the past, it is a route to failure," said Nancy Sebring, Superintendent of Des Moines Public Schools and past chair of the UEN. "The fact is Iowa students are better educated today than at any time in history. At the same time, our students are more diverse than ever before. Any discussion of how to improve education must be both honest about the successes as well as recognize we can no longer underfund programs critical to 'at risk' students."

The Urban Education Network is currently comprised of the state's eight largest school districts: Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Davenport, Sioux City, Iowa City, Waterloo, Dubuque and Council Bluffs. UEN schools educate more than one out of four K-12 students in Iowa. Some key facts about the UEN member school districts include:

- Educate 25.4%, or 122,125, of Iowa's K-12 students
- Administer 45% of Iowa's Advanced Placement examinations and enroll 36.45% of Iowa's students taking AP examinations.
- Enrolled Iowa's top male and top female AP scholars in 22 of the past 24 years.
- Employ 23.6% of Iowa's K-12 certified staff.
- Teach 54.1% of Iowa's K-12 students of color.
- Serve 50% of Iowa's limited English speaking students.
- Educate 35.1% of Iowa's K-12 students receiving free/reduced price lunches.

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