

## Capitol Comments

Written by Sen. Shawn Hamerlinck  
Monday, 14 February 2011 08:44

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Iowa funds K-12 education through a funding formula referred to as allowable growth. Think of allowable growth as a percentage of change of the base amount of state aid offered for the education of each student in the state. In reality, the vote for or against allowable growth is many times more complicated and it is debatable whether or not those who vote on the bills understand the full implications.

Though there are many variables, think of the state as funding roughly \$5800 per student who attends our public k-12 schools. House Republicans have announced, through House File 185, their intentions of funding this amount at 0% allowable growth which means this number will not change. Senate Democrats in Senate File 166 and Senate File 167 have approved, through the committee process, that this number should be increased by 2%.

A short look at history shows how legislative promises in February failed to come to fruition after school districts certified their budgets in April. In FY 2009 the legislature approved 4% allowable growth then after the realization of overspending, the Governor cut state expenditures across the board by 1.5% resulting in a \$32 million cut to schools. In FY 2010 the legislature again approved a 4% allowable growth promising schools increases then realized due to over spending they cut the expenditure in May by \$31 million and in October of the same year Governor Culver cut state expenditures to schools by another \$238 million. In FY 2011 schools were promised 2% allowable growth in February then cut in May by \$156 million.

No matter where you stand on the issue, there is a realistic problem between the funds which

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are promised and the follow through of the legislature. In the past four years our schools have had \$459.7 million taken away from them resulting in \$445.6 million of that spending authority falling on your property taxes.

Each year allowable growth is a political football which offers two weeks of media sound-bites. Somewhere in the noise you will hear our local school leaders pushing common sense requests. If the legislature promises something then follow through. If the legislature mandates something, pay for it. If the legislature appropriates money in February, make sure it really has the money in May.

While in the subcommittee on the 2% allowable growth bills I asked where the additional \$64 million appropriation and backfill \$266 million would be coming from. One of the floor managers of the bill said, "Maybe cash reserve," and the other gave the most honest answer, "I don't know." While you ponder this issue also take into consideration Iowa's top three expenditures of Medicaid, school aid and salaries will eclipse total revenues to the state in FY 2013.

Shawn Hamerlinck  
State Senate District 42