

WATERLOO COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 5
UNIT OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT
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James W. Helton

Superintendent

January 13, 2014

Good afternoon, I want to welcome you to our community, and most specifically Waterloo High School.

I have known Senator Luechtefeld for quite some time, whenever he asked that our district host the *Senate Funding Advisory Committee*, Senator Manar, we were honored to do so.

I have read the notes/handouts from the past several months; you have had intelligent and thoughtful testimony. One item I have not read though, is your /the State's (IL State Board/General Assembly's) definition of "primary responsibility for financing the system of public education." With great power comes great responsibility; I have to believe that is why you are here today.

How do you define adequate education? Identifying a minimum per-pupil Foundation Level based on the "actual cost" of providing a quality education. The Education Funding Advisory Board (EFAB) in its annual report to the General Assembly delivered a year ago, called for an increase in the GSA foundation formula to \$8,762. The continually prorated \$6,119 GSA foundation dollar doesn't approach that...in fact, the last year the EFAB recommended statutory foundation level was met was 2002.

So, you need to decide, what is your role? When I took my first principal's job in 1999 the IL School Code was 650 pages long; today, it exceeds 1,600! Between 1991 and 1999, there were 12 unfunded mandates on public schools; the IL Association School Board (IASB) Governmental Relations Department has identified over 110 unfunded mandates between 2000 and 2013.

We understand the fiscal constraints of the State, but to believe that "we get everything for nothing" is a fool's game. General State aid needs to be fully funded; re-slicing the pie won't solve the problem.

Power and responsibility: you have the power to determine your role, please define the fiscal responsibility that coincides with that role.

Our mission is to provide excellent educational experiences for the total development of each student so they can become well-adjusted citizens, making positive contributions to society.

While the intent of most mandates is laudable, school districts have no funding with which to implement them. Give us the opportunity to decide through local public hearings whether mandates are right for us.

We are a diverse state; please understand that diversity. As an example, use the holiday waiver model; this very auditorium is packed with a community recognition event each year on Veteran's Day, a student attendance day in Waterloo. We invite veterans into our classrooms and engage in real conversations with real heroes throughout the day...that is a local decision. Casimir Pulaski Day? We attend as well, but not for the same reasons; we exercise local control.

The real issue is the lack of adequate funding for public education in IL. I have spent 33 years in public education, 17 of those in the classroom as a teacher; I truly believe public education is the core of our democratic process in IL, the great equalizer. One's zip code should not increasingly define quality; that is unfair. As you know, any change to the formula will create "winners and losers". Local resources should be a "player" in this, but only in addition to what the State defines as their responsibility.

So again, we ask, "What is your role in public education for all students?" Define that first, then support it with the fiscal resources needed for the great responsibility that comes with it; don't waiver, don't pro-rate, and place a moratorium on the mandates.

On behalf of our educational community, Waterloo CUSD5 welcomes our esteemed visitors, and commends your interest in our students; without a doubt, they are the best resource for the State of Illinois.

Thank you.

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