

## Agreement: schools to get 2.25 percent increase in state aid (AUDIO) radioiowa.com

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*Tod Bowman*

A deal has been struck at the statehouse to boost general state aid for public schools by two-and-a-quarter percent. Senator Tod Bowman, a Democrat from Maquoketa, today said getting an agreement between Republicans and Democrats was difficult.

“Appears to be the best we can get,” Bowman said. “And it’s past time to let school boards know how much state aid they’ll receive for next year’s school budgets.”

Representative Ron Jorgensen, a Republican from Sioux City who is a former school board member, said it’s all the state can afford.

“We must always remember where all of this money comes from that we spend,” Jorgensen said. “It’s the taxpayers’ money and we need to spend it wisely and, whenever possible, return it to its rightful owner.”

Senator Herman Quirnbach, a Democrat from Ames, is a reluctant supporter of the compromise.

“I look at this budget, I look at this bill and I have to conclude that Iowa’s priorities are not for education anymore,” said Quirnbach.

Representative Cindy Winckler, a Democrat from Davenport who is a former teacher, said she understands this deal is the final product of negotiations between Democrats and Republicans, but she doesn’t support it.

“We expect so much of our teachers and our students, yet we are unwilling to give them the support that they need,” Winckler said.

Ten members of the House and Senate met today to unveil the deal in public (audio of the meeting is below). The compromise now has cleared its first step and will next be voted upon by the full House and Senate. Education groups are “relieved” to finally know the number, because school district budgets for next year must be completed by April 15th.

“(We’re) pleased that they came to an agreement, but obviously it’s inadequate...We’re glad they’ve got a settlement, so that will be easier for schools, but we anticipate that most schools are going to have to make reductions,” said Tom Narak of the School Administrators of Iowa.

That’s because the two-and-a-quarter percent increase is in per pupil spending, so the 112 Iowa school districts with declining enrollment won’t get more money from the state. Margaret Buckton lobbies for the largest and the smallest schools in the state.

“Both the Urban Education Network and the Rural School Advocates of Iowa are grateful to know the amount, but the budget-cutting scenarios have already began,” she said.

Emily Piper of the Iowa Association of School Boards said schools face new state mandates, like next year’s summer school for struggling readers and new assessments for students.

“That puts a lot of pressure in a budget that’s already pretty tight,” Piper said.

Senator Bowman is predicting more districts will be forced to merge because of the financial pressure.

AUDIO

