



K-12 School Advocates Blast Republican Bill, Question Timing of Public Hearing

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An overflow crowd of advocates for K-12 schools came to the statehouse today, trying to stop a bill they say would severely underfund schools next year.

Advocates say the crowd would have been larger if the hearing had been scheduled in the evening when most public hearings at the capitol take place.

Minority Democrats cried foul when Republicans scheduled the hearing for 11 a.m..

Tammy Wawro with the Iowa State Education Association spoke angrily for those who could not attend.

“I speak before you on behalf of the 34,000 members and 408,000 students who could not be here for a public hearing scheduled specifically so you wouldn't have to listen to their stories,” Wawro said.

A large crowd did turn out, and more than two dozen educators, parents, and others testified.

They argued raising school aid by a little over one percent next year or \$40 million isn't an increase at all, given inflation.

They said layoffs, larger class sizes, and delayed technology and textbook purchases would result.

Mark Bussell of Marion has a child who'll be attending kindergarten in the fall and he calls the G-O-P's plan "dismal."

“It seems obvious that our educators and our students will suffer because of these actions taken by our state legislature,” Bussell said.

Cedar Rapids School Board member Gary Anhalt predicted reduced course offerings in his district.

"At \$40 million, we will only be spending about 50 cents per day, per student -- actually far less than a cup of coffee," Anhalt said.

David Wilkerson retired last year after a dozen years as superintendent in Waukeez, the state's fastest growing district.

He calls himself a "lifelong Republican" who's upset with the G-O-P plan.

"We ask more today of our teachers and our staff today than we have ever asked and then we throw one-point-one percent at them," Wilkerson said.

Only one person spoke in favor of the bill.

A representative of the conservative group Americans for Prosperity said putting more money into schools does not ensure student performance.

"The handout that's being distributed is by the Cato Institute that illustrates the lack of correlation between per-pupil spending and student achievement," said Drew Klein.

Republicans say with lower-than-expected state tax revenue, the state cannot afford more than 40 million extra dollars for the state's public school districts.

A new citizens group calling itself Iowans for Public Education was on hand to lobby for more school spending and against a bill to divert public funds to private schools.