

I'm a bit more unorthodox Professional & Scientific Council President; I don't work on campus every day, I serve 17 counties in SE Iowa for ISU Extension. I'm also a rural, southern Iowa farmer, livestock producer, and a small business owner, BUT I've been an educator most of my career. I don't fit just one political narrative, nor do many of the 3,700 P&S employees I represent. We're all united on one front: when it comes to investing in education, we wish party lines and political labels didn't exist.

In my 11-year career with Iowa State Extension, the growing lag behind cost-of-living increases has been a big frustration. It's simply felt like education in this state has been under attack. Knowing my 5 minutes in front of this Board won't single-handedly change the course of higher education, I'm going to spend the rest of my time driving home the need for INVESTING in education through the best analogy I've come across: youth baseball.

My wife and I are travel ball parents; we'll spend countless hours at baseball complexes across the state from now 'til August. Travel ball is basically Little League on steroids, where parents spend an obscene amount of money equipping their 7-14-year-old kids with \$400 bats to chase competition. In 2017, there were 29 10 year-old travel ball teams in Iowa. This year, there are 112.

Despite this, retention is still a huge problem in youth baseball. The growth of 14 year-old teams is only 5%. So what's missing? The answer is actually pretty simple: hitting lessons. With all the emphasis on chasing trophies and equipment, parents have lost sight of the entire reason to play...to develop skills to get better at a sport and prepare them for life. Basically, we're buying kids the \$400 bat, but we're not teaching them how to swing it. Most parents feel like they've spent enough money for their kid to get better at baseball. In reality, it is investing in skill development that truly matters. No major league scout cares how many tournaments a kid won when they were 10.

The parallels to higher education are uncanny. Parents send their child off to college, and most feel like that ought to be enough to get them a job. In other words, they bought the \$400 bat. However, it's their skill development while they're in college that truly lands them a career. P&S staff are the individual 'hitting coaches' needed to make them marketable employees. State appropriations for the Regent institutions are a direct investment in the Iowa workforce of tomorrow.

So you might be wondering why I'm spending so much time on baseball in such a serious environment. Here's why. My son loves baseball, but the game wasn't loving him back. We bought the expensive bat, but I then invested in individual hitting lessons. In about a month, my son tripled his batting average. The best part...his reading and math scores improved significantly at school, and he's a much happier, more confident kid. Yes, his mental health improved because of hitting lessons. I have no doubt that investing in skill development for college students is just as important. As state funding for higher education has regressed, the demand for mental health services has increased dramatically in that population. P&S Staff play a HUGE role in the mental well-being of the student body!

The answer is not an even more expensive bat. The answer is a solid, continued investment in hitting lessons. The people I work alongside every day care deeply about the success of every student, as well as every Iowan across our 99-county campus. From financial aid staff that help students rest a bit easier that they can pay for their education, to the P&S staff conducting mock sales calls for companies like Vermeer, Holmes-Murphy Insurance, and Kent Feeds. They're training 522 students with only 2 employees! It was P&S Staff who helped guide the poultry industry through High-Path Avian Influenza, including the mental anguish that comes along with it; now, we have to potentially do it all over again for the dairy and beef industries. We teach, we advise, we conduct research, and most importantly, we turn students into the heavy hitters demanded by companies in Iowa. Thank you for all you do on this Board, please keep investing in staff, and don't be afraid to swing for the fence!