**RSAI Position Paper**

**Preschool: A 2018 Legislative Priority**

**Background:** Iowa’s Statewide Voluntary PK Program (SVPP) participation, first implemented in 2007-08, has grown to serve 29,344 4-year-olds in 2016-17. That means there were still an estimated 9,000 students registering for kindergarten that may not be served in SVPP. The importance of reading proficiently by the end of third grade is critical, as evidenced by the state’s continued investment in early literacy. The old adage, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, applies to this issue.

**Why does preschool matter?** The Perry Preschool Project, 40 years later, documents $17 savings for every dollar invested (earlier findings of $8 saved for every dollar invested are also often cited.)  Once considered a strategy just to support working parents with child care needs, the majority of states now view access to high-quality preschool programs as a critical long-term economic investment in the future workforce. Education Commission of the States, Oct. 2014, <http://www.ecs.org/docs/early-learning-primer.pdf>: *Six Rigorous long term evaluation studies have found that children who participated in high-quality preschool programs were:*

* *25 percent less likely to drop out of school.*
* *40 percent less likely to become a teen parent.*
* *50 percent less likely to be placed in special education.*
* *60 percent less likely to never attend college.*
* *70 percent less likely to be arrested for a violent crime.*

National Conference of State Legislatures quotes studies on long term return on investment. <http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/new-research-early-education-as-economic-investme.aspx>

Sarah Daily, *Initiatives from Preschool to Third Grade: A Policymaker’s Guide*, shows reductions in costly outcomes that quality preschool prevents. (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, October 2014) [http://www.ecs.org/docs/early-learning-primer.pdf](http://www.ecs.org/docs/early-learning-primer.pdf.)

**Barriers to Expansion.**  Improvements in access for students, especially students from low income families, depend on additional flexibility of funding. During the 2017 Session, district flexibility to use SVPP funds to serve student needs, as determined by the school board, was expanded. The list of allowable expenditures to broadened to include supplies, translation services, playground equipment and repair, snacks, safety equipment, facility rental, and slots for 3 and 5 year olds in SVPP (but those students are not counted to generate funds for the next year) Thankfully, transportation costs were previously allowed, beginning in 2016-17, but those costs eat into the 0.5 weighting assigned to preschool students very quickly in rural districts. Additional expenses to grow programs, such as outreach to market and create urgency that preschool is important, wrap-around services to accommodate working families, and costs of sharing programs with neighboring districts to achieve an economy of scale beyond instructional costs, remain barriers to reaching all children. Additionally, school districts need consistency, timeliness and predictability of funding.

**RSAI supports full funding of quality preschool.** Due to changing demographics in rural Iowa, significant transportation costs, and lack of quality day care access, quality preschool should be fully funded. Preschool students should be included in the regular student count at 1.0 per pupil cost.