

## RSAI Pre-Legislative Update Dec. 22, 2014

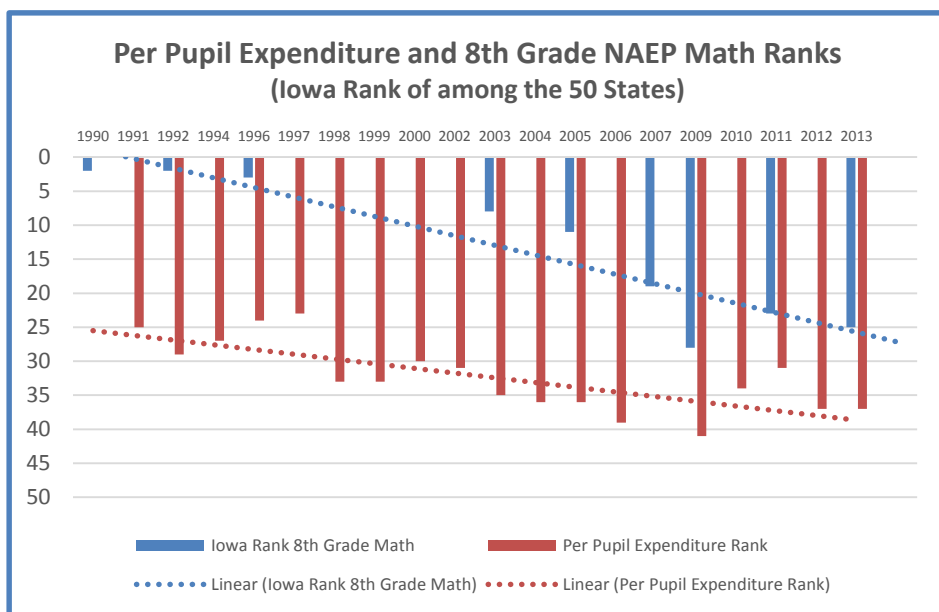
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Although the Legislature does not convene the 2015 Legislative Session until January 12, 2015, there has been a recent flurry of activity related to legislative issues in which RSAI members have much interest, among them, School Finance Interim Committee, DE Director notice on school start date, and Attendance Center Performance Rankings. We also share details of the Joint Education Coalition Reception on Jan 26<sup>th</sup> in Des Moines, following the IASB Legislative Conference and hope to see a strong contingent of RSAI school leaders there. Please contact ISFIS with any questions or comments and have a joyous holiday break!

Margaret

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**School Finance Interim Committee:** The Committee met on Monday, Dec. 15. RSAI provided information on the Iowa School Foundation Formula, including a copy of the RSAI position paper on [transportation inequities](#) (found on page 4 of this link) and the RSAI priorities approved at the [2014 annual meeting](#) (which include 6% increase in the state cost per pupil, issues on flexibility of categorical and PPEL, funding, adequate weighting for at-risk students, and continued commitment to operational sharing incentives.) Margaret Buckton participated on a panel in the afternoon with Jeff Anderson, IASB Board President and Board President, Boone Community School District; Mary Jane Cobb, Executive Director, ISEA; and Dan Smith, Executive Director, SAI. Panelists talked about challenges of uncertainty and strained timelines of budget compliance without the state cost per pupil set 18 months in advance, as well as budget reductions still on the table if the cost per pupil is not adequate. They talked about funding inadequacy and the extreme challenges of many years of constrained budgets forcing program and staffing reductions. All organizations represented on the panel support at least a 6% increase in the state cost per pupil for the 2015-16 school year, as does RSAI. Margaret's presentation, prepared at the request of the UEN, but certainly important to all school leaders, showed Iowa's slip in comparative rankings nationally, both in expenditures per pupil (2013 rank of 37<sup>th</sup>) and NAEP (2013 ranks in the mid-20s). The presentation depicted slight growth in Iowa students' NAEP scale scores over time, despite doubling of the number of



students from low income families and growth in ELL student population. Meanwhile, other states' students have grown more. The entire PPT and testimony is posted on the legislative page, but this chart demonstrates the conclusion of the presentation: student achievement ranks mirror expenditure ranks. As the Legislature considers how to reinvest in Iowa schools, issues of funding equity (including

transportation), student weightings based on need, investment in school improvement and the appropriate mix of state and local revenues are all on the table.

After all the presentations and discussion, the Interim Committee members unanimously included in their recommendations to the legislature the following:

- 1) Set the percent of state supplemental assistance (state cost per pupil) early as per law (RSAI Priority of at least 6%)
- 2) Address transportation cost inequities (RSAI Priority)
- 3) Increase flexibility in categorical funds, although the recommendation was generic, they talked specifically about dropout prevention and at-risk funding earlier in the day (RSAI Priority)
- 4) Gather cost analysis of proposals of the Solutions Group of Stakeholders (funding adequacy at the national average, transportation inequity, and flexibility are among the list of proposals)
- 5) Address property tax poor districts and inequity
- 6) Consider funding issues surrounding half day kindergarten (they discussed earlier that 27 districts still offer some form of half-day kindergarten while receiving the full state-cost per pupil for those students.)

Senator Quirnbach had proposed amending the list to include a goal of funding Iowa education at the national average, but the amendment was defeated on party lines with Democrats supporting and Republicans opposing. The above recommendations without the goal of funding at the national average were then unanimously supported by the nine committee members present. The Interim Committee membership, agenda and documents, including Margaret's testimony and PPT, can be found on the Legislature's web site here <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/committees/committee?ga=85&groupID=21383>

### **Start Date Waiver Changes:**

On Friday, December 12, Brad Buck, Iowa DE Director, sent a letter to school leaders indicating the DE will no longer grant automatic waivers to school officials requesting to begin classes before Sept. 1 or the week in which Sept 1 occurs. Director Buck's letter promised additional guidance in January, but said the DE only would consider a school district's request for a waiver if the request "adequately demonstrated that starting on or after the earliest start date specified would have a significant negative educational impact." He said each request would be reviewed individually and approved or denied on its merits. This is a departure from historical DE deference to local district decision making, including references in years' past to inadequate staff capacity at the DE to review over 300 waiver requests individually. The Governor sent a letter to Dir. Buck, asking for this DE action.

Many districts, including some RSAI districts, have already gone through the public process of setting their calendar for the 2015-16 school year. The timing of this announcement, especially since it's applicable to the 2015-16 school year, is both problematic and disruptive of local processes. In the meantime, DE has not yet communicated the criteria they will consider or evidence they will accept as proof of "significant student achievement impact." We will monitor activities at the state level concerning this development. In the meantime, please share your concerns with Dir. Buck and Gov. Branstad, but don't miss the opportunity to reiterate that a minimum 6% increase in the state cost per pupil is the critical priority for early Session action. A more in depth conversation about start date and other state executive branch policy actions will no doubt occur down the road. Talking points:

- Local leaders know best how to balance the needs of students and other stakeholders and should set the calendar.
- DE has a long standing precedent of deferring to local criteria on student achievement impact. Since there are no criteria set in administrative rules, such criteria setting should first proceed through the state board of education and the rule making process.

- Summer slide research shows a loss of reading skill, especially for low income students, and a loss of math skill, for all students over the long summer. If anything, state policy ought to support year-round calendars and local authority to set them based on student need.
- School districts work with community colleges, private colleges and universities, as well as with each other, to set calendars to maximize opportunity for students to leave high school with college credit (and parent college tuition savings).
- Although many long for the good old days, where every family had a week at the lake and enriching summer travels and learning experiences, Iowa's demographics have changed. With 41% of our children in low income families and many more with single parents working, costs of child care and even food in the summer are challenging. Many of our families cannot afford a ticket to the Fair (let alone parking and corn dogs) and do not have summer passes to the pool.
- Some districts have set a calendar based on 1,080 hours instead of 180 instructional days. If that action is intended to shorten the number of days of instruction, we anticipate the summer loss of learning to have even greater impact if those days are compacted between Labor Day and Memorial Day. With 41% of Iowa's enrolled students from low-income families, Iowa state and local policies should support more, not less learning to close the achievement gap and elevate outcomes for all students. Research also tells us that ongoing, job-embedded professional development for teachers is the best way to improve instruction. Districts must ensure enough time for teachers to study their practice and resulting student learning throughout the school year.

**Attendance Center Performance Rankings:** RSAI is fortunate to have Kevin Fiene, Superintendent at I-35 Community School District, at-large member of RSAI Leadership Group, as a representative on the stakeholder work group providing feedback to the DE on the attendance center performance rankings requirements legislated in HF 215 Education Reform, 2013 session. We thought it important to notify you of a shortened timeline and specific proposed metrics. The DE plans for an initial release of at least three indicators in mid-January 2015 (proficiency, growth and gap). The initial report to the Legislature last July anticipated a September 2015 release of the rankings. District leaders will not have enough time to learn about the indicators and be able to explain them to stakeholders. The group is scheduled to meet again on Jan. 9. We will keep you posted as further developments occur. See the original Attendance Center Performance Rankings report to the legislature, July 1, 2014, [here](#).

**Legislative Reception Jan. 26:** This effort continues with the Joint Education Coalition Reception, immediately following the IASB Legislative Conference, at the Embassy Suites in Des Moines, Jan. 26, 2015. This legislative reception is jointly sponsored by IASB, SAI, ISEA, UEN and the AEAs from 5:00-6:30 p.m. It provides a relaxed environment to talk with your legislators. Please invite your legislators to the reception and let them know you'll be there to speak with them. We look forward to seeing you there!

**Advocacy Plan: Continue to generate contacts from grassroots networks, staff and school leaders. Request that the Legislature set the state cost per pupil for FY 2016 ASAP in the 2015 Session. Target contacts to local legislators, legislative leadership, and the Governor and Lt. Governor.**

Find resources on the RSAI web site, including a position paper on adequate funding included in the [2014 annual meeting](#) report (found on page 7), supporting a 6% increase in the state cost per pupil, as soon as they come into the Session.

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