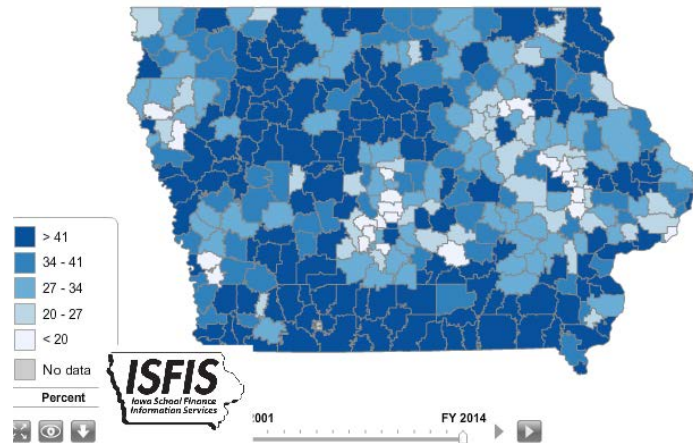




RSAI Position Paper Funding and Flexibility for At-Risk Students: A 2015 Legislative Priority

Background: Iowa has traditionally been a homogenous state with relatively low rates of poverty compared to the rest of the nation. In 2001, about 28% of students were eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch, with the lowest district percentage of eligibility at 4.2%. As such, Iowa's funding formula has little recognition of low income as a driver of at-risk student funding or programming. Dropout Prevention funding is based on total enrollment count, not the percentage of students at-risk. DoP funding is limited to 2.5% of the total regular program district cost or up to 5% of regular program district cost based on historical practice.



Current Reality:

- Free and Reduced Lunch eligible children now exceed 41% of school enrollment in 2013.
- Poverty is no longer concentrated in Iowa's urban centers but found throughout the state. Of the 73 school districts in FY 2013 with more than half of their students eligible for Free and Reduced price lunch, 56 are rural school districts.
- Iowa's funding for at-risk students and dropout prevention resources, combined with targeted grant funds for high-needs schools, translates into a 9.8% additional funding commitment for these students.
- Other states invest resources in educating needy students. The national average investment is an additional 29% funding beyond the base for low-income students.
- Students from low income families are more likely to begin school behind their peers academically, exhibit nonproficient literacy skills, especially in early elementary grades, and to fall further behind over summer breaks, unless schools have the resources, staff and programs to meet their needs.
- Current requirements for dropout prevention expenditures are very restrictive, not allowing school districts to truly engage in prevention for younger students at-risk of early and subsequent failure.

RSAI calls on the Iowa Legislature to address the issue of **Funding and Flexibility for At-risk Students:** Resources for serving at-risk students should be based on need, such as the number/percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch, rather than enrollment of the district. Districts should be given flexibility in determining the expenditure of at-risk resources to support students to graduate college/career ready for success.

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