

## 2020 Legislative Priorities

These priorities were approved by attendees at the RSAI Annual Meeting, Oct. 16, 2019 and by the Leadership Group Nov. 13, 2019.

**Adequate School Resources:** RSAI supports adequate base funding. The increased per pupil cost known as SSA is especially critical to rural students due to distance from school/opportunities, economies of scale, mandates, the need for AEA support, and the ability to attract and retain staff. Rural schools depend on an investment of meaningful new resources to prepare students for a successful future. The rate of increase in SSA should be no lower than anticipated growth in state revenue (adjusted for legislated tax cuts), should keep up with other economic factors such as personal income or state gross domestic product over the long term, should maintain a balance of state and local property taxes, provide predictability, and be set timely to assure adequate notice for budget planning and staffing. The SSA rate for the 2020-21 school year should be set no lower than 3.75%, if the revenue adjustment controlling for tax cuts is lower than 3.75%.

**Student Mental Health:** RSAI supports increased access to and funding for mental health services for children. In addition to adequate funding for AEA services and access to other service providers, an array of services should also include telehealth services received at school. The state, Medicaid and insurance providers should not pass on administrative or billing work to schools, and schools should not be mandated to be providers of mental health services for children.

**Educator Shortage and Quality Instruction:** RSAI supports maximum flexibility to hire staff to provide great instruction and support to all Iowa students. RSAI supports 1) district flexibility to meet offer and teach requirements, 2) teacher or other staff shortage loan forgiveness programs and incentives to encourage staff to work in rural schools, 3) a special education generalist credential to teach special education across all grades, 4) creation of a Public Service strand in Iowa's CTE system to prepare Iowa's future teaching workforce, 5) continued state support of Iowa Learning Online (ILO), 6) flexibility to hire retirees without a negative IPERS impact, 7) elimination of barriers to licensure for teachers and administrators, and 8) allow associate degree for substitutes. The BOEE should accept evidence other than strict transcripts to show skill mastery for administrators from other states.

**Formula and Transportation Equity:** RSAI supports formula and transportation equity. The Legislature should accelerate the commitment to close the \$165 gap between the state and district cost per pupil within ten years and continue transportation equity support, bringing down all districts to no more than the state average per pupil transportation cost, without requiring burdensome reporting requirements from school districts.

**Opportunity Equity for Low SES:** RSAI supports resources for at-risk students. Resources should be based on need, such as the percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL), in addition to enrollment of the district. The current disparity in dropout prevention capacity, (some districts held to 2.5% and others allowed to access up to 5% of regular program district cost) is arbitrary, based on history no longer relevant to supporting student needs. All school boards should be able to realize the full 5% dropout prevention funding. The formula must further recognize the disproportionate cost of providing equal educational opportunities to low-income students. School districts should be granted spending authority for FRPL eligible students' fees mandated to be waived by state and federal law.

**Sharing Incentives and Efficiencies:** RSAI supports extension of sharing and efficiency incentives. Rural students benefit from opportunities to achieve efficiencies, share capacity to operate, and redirect resources to educational programs. Whole Grade Sharing, Reorganization, and Operational Sharing Incentives should be extended and expanded.

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

**School Safety:** RSAI supports school safety investments. Rural schools need the resources, training and support necessary for Iowa student and staff safety at school, including additional funding for security personnel and training to protect against active shooter and other emergency situations presenting harm.

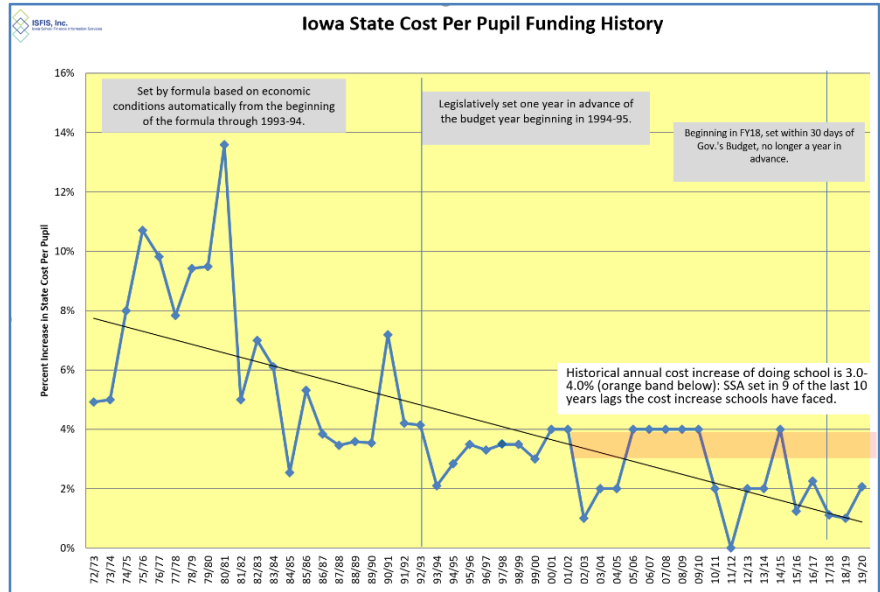
**Bonding Capacity:** RSAI supports a simple majority, 50% plus 1, voter approval for school bond issues.



## RSAI Position Paper: Adequate Education Funding 2020

There is a cumulative impact to low per pupil funding increases in Iowa over many years. This chart shows the historical percentage increase in Iowa's state cost per pupil, previously called Allowable Growth, now State Supplemental Assistance, since the funding formula began in 1972-73:

**Current reality:** Annual cost increases have not been enough to pay for staff salaries sufficient to compete with the private sector, employee benefits, and all of the other costs of operating schools and meeting student needs. Low funding impacts the weightings, or multipliers, assigned to students with special education needs, English-language learner supports, college credit courses and preschool.



The funding percentage is also applied to Teacher Salary, Professional Development, Teacher Leadership and Compensation (TLC) and the new Transportation Supplements. Although the transportation funds are for any general fund purpose, the other expenditures are strictly regulated for specific purposes. AEA special education and school improvement is also dependent on an adequate increase in the per pupil cost. Unfunded mandates from the state and federal level are paid from the per pupil amount. When the costs of doing the business of school increase more than funding, program and staff reductions follow. Declining enrollment requires even further reduction.

**Benchmarks/Economic Measures for Comparison:** When comparing the state cost per pupil to economic benchmarks and other states, Iowa school funding falls short. For example:

- ❖ The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for Iowa grew 20% controlling for inflation, 2011 to 2017, compared to the state cost per pupil which grew 14% without controlling for inflation (means the gap is even larger.) <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/publications/FTNO/966760.pdf>
- ❖ Expressing the state cost per pupil as a percentage of one billion GDP shows a disturbing trend. In the 1990s, the SCPP ranged between 52-44% of one billion GDP. In the 2000s, the SCPP ranged from 45-37% of one billion GDP. Since 2010, the SCPP has ranged from 37-34% of one billion GDP; the last 4 years show the lowest comparison in the formula's history.
- ❖ Iowa Per Capita Personal Income increased 31.5%, 2010-2018 <https://fred.stlouisfed.org>
- ❖ Historical Real Median Family Income for Iowa (controlling for inflation) increased by \$6,440 or 9.8%, 2010-2017. <https://www.deptofnumbers.com/income/iowa/>

**Recent Iowa Investments in Education:** Some have touted the investment in elementary and secondary education of \$864 million since 2012, which is a 35% increase in state funding. Some additional context explains how school leaders understand this statistic:

State funding did increase by \$864 million over those 8 years. However, \$90 million of that was state money that offset reductions in property taxes (see HF 2230 [fiscal note 2018](#)); \$159 million was the Teacher Leadership Program; \$86 million paid for new teachers and classrooms for 13,802 new students (enrollment data from DE Education Statistics web site <https://educateiowa.gov/education-statistics>). Although \$529 million still sounds like a lot of money, this remaining amount supporting the



regular education classroom, over 8 years and divided by student enrollment, translates into 66 cents per student per instructional day.

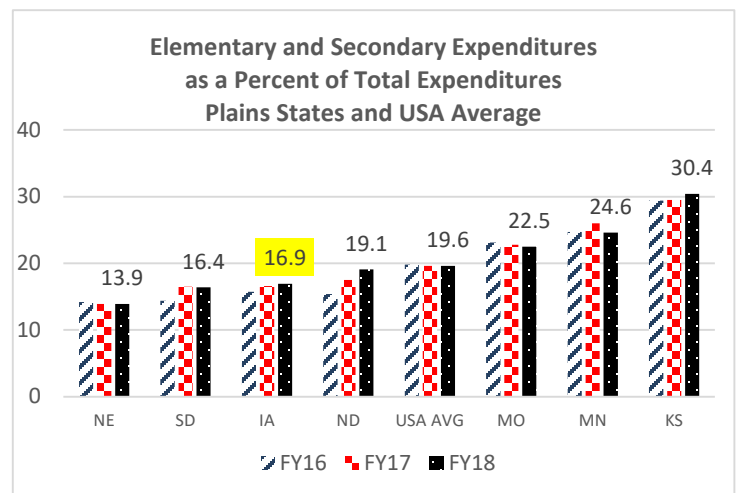
**Other State Comparisons:** First, from 2017 US Census data updated May 2019

<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2017/econ/school-finances/secondary-education-finance.html>

- Iowa ranks 25<sup>th</sup> in per pupil public elementary and secondary school system revenue, which is \$742 below the national average.
- Iowa ranks 22<sup>nd</sup> in state sources of revenue, which is \$595 higher per pupil than the national average (Iowa's local taxpayers contribute \$1,138 per pupil less than in other states).
- Although Iowa per pupil spending on Salaries for Instruction is \$167 above the national average, Iowa per pupil spending on employee benefits (pension and health insurance, etc.) is \$400 per pupil below the national average. Iowa's total instructional spending is \$458 below the national average. Iowa per pupil spending on School Administration is \$26 below the national average.

A true apples-to-apples comparison is found if you consider what percent of total state resources are spent on education. NASBO (National Association of State Budget Officers) [State Expenditure Report](#) analyzes all state expenditures:

- In FY 2018, Iowa's education expenditures were 16.9% of total state expenditures. Plains states averaged 20.5%. All states averaged 19.6%.
- Iowa ranks compared to all 50 states: FY15 Iowa ranked 33<sup>rd</sup>. FY16 Iowa ranked 36<sup>th</sup>. FY17 Iowa ranked 34<sup>th</sup>. FY18 Iowa ranked 32<sup>nd</sup>.
- RSAI calculates it would take an additional \$612.4 million for Iowa to reach the national average of 19.6% which is \$1,194 per pupil.



**Impact:** Iowa has seen slight growth in NAEP

scores despite significant growth in poverty and ELL students. Iowa continues to rank first in the nation in graduation, with over 91% of our students graduating with their class in four years. Schools are committed to school improvement efforts, such as TLC, early literacy and STEM initiatives. More students are taking higher level courses and achieving college credit while in high school. These efforts will be compromised if the basic foundation of school funding is not sustained. There are not enough qualified applicants to fill jobs, generally indicating that the profession of teaching is being outpaced in the marketplace. Class sizes are going up. Programs are being eliminated. Districts are offering fewer extracurricular and fine arts opportunities for students, especially in middle school. SSA is the life-blood of rural schools. Declining enrollment combined with low SSA means more rural schools will have to consolidate or face closure by the state.

**Adequate School Resources:** RSAI supports adequate base funding. The increased per pupil cost known as SSA is especially critical to rural students due to distance from school/opportunities, economies of scale, mandates, the need for AEA support, and the ability to attract and retain staff. Rural schools depend on an investment of meaningful new resources to prepare students for a successful future. The rate of increase in SSA should be no lower than anticipated growth in state revenue (adjusted for legislated tax cuts), should keep up with other economic factors such as personal income or state gross domestic product over the long term, should maintain a balance of state and local property taxes, provide predictability, and be set timely to assure adequate notice for budget planning and staffing. The SSA rate for the 2020-21 school year should be set no lower than 3.75%, if the revenue adjustment controlling for tax cuts is lower than 3.75%.



## RSAI Position Paper

### Mental Health Services for Students: A 2020 Legislative Priority

**Background:** All school districts in Iowa, including rural schools, are observing an increased incidence of mental health challenges for students. Unmet mental health needs inhibit the learning experience of the student and may interrupt learning for others. The following statistics demonstrate the significance of this issue to students, as reported in: *A Strategic Plan for a Children's Mental Health Redesign in Iowa DRAFT*

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among persons aged 10 – 24.
- 90% of those who die by suicide experience mental illness.
- Over 20% of children have a seriously debilitating mental illness during their lifetime.
- Over 45% of children have had any mental illness.
- Half of all lifelong cases of mental illness begin by age 14 (75% by age 24).
- 80% of children who need mental health treatment never receive treatment.
- 50% of youth in the child welfare system have mental illness.
- Treatment works. Treatment of mental illness reduces disability, leads to recovery and is most effective during the brain's development from birth to age 26.

**Chronic Absenteeism** is defined as missing 10% or 18 days a school year. Children with mental illness are more likely to miss school due to depression or anxiety, and are then further more likely to miss school to get the mental health care they need. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, [School Attendance, Truancy & Chronic Absenteeism: What Parents Need to Know](#), missing school means missing a chance for success.

"Missing just two days a month of school—for any reason— can be a problem for kids in a number of ways. Children who are chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade are less likely to read on grade level by the third grade. For older students, being chronically absent is strongly associated with failing at school—even more than low grades or test scores. When absences add up, these students are more likely to be suspended and drop out of high school. Chronic absenteeism is also linked with teen substance use, as well as poor health as adults."

**Current Reality:** Unless a student with is receiving special education services, and the IEP so authorizes, there is no funding available to provide mental health treatment. Mental health services are not readily available in many rural communities requiring either time away from school or no service at all. Although virtual mental health counseling is promising as an effective tool to minimize absenteeism and get students the help they need, there are barriers in providing and billing for virtual mental health counseling when delivered at school.

The 2019 Legislature and Governor initiated a solution, forming the Children's Mental Health Workgroup, creating a structure for services. An appropriation of \$2.1 million to the Iowa AEAs to provide mental health awareness training for educators was a critical first step, but must be continued. A bill in the Senate Human Resources Committee, [SSB 1240](#), to provide telehealth screening and treatment in the school setting. Another bill, [SF 376](#), would include suicide prevention and mental health content in High School health curriculum. These bills should get serious attention in the 2020 Session.

**Student Mental Health:** RSAI supports increased access to and funding for mental health services for children. In addition to adequate funding for AEA services and access to other service providers, an array of services should also include telehealth services received at school. The state, Medicaid and insurance providers should not pass on administrative or billing work to schools, and schools should not be mandated to be providers of mental health services for children.



## RSAI Position Paper: Rural School Staff Shortage and Educator Quality 2020

**Background:** Although rural Iowa schools have traditionally been full of excellent teachers with flexibility and dedication to student success, conditions in rural Iowa are making it difficult to attract and retain great teachers, indeed school employees in many different job roles, and it's getting worse.

Many content areas are experiencing a shortage, but especially at the secondary level. The Iowa DE compiles a list, which for 2018-19 included physics, family consumer science, agriculture, foreign language, special education, school counselors and teacher librarians. See the complete shortage list on DE's web site: <https://www.educateiowa.gov/teacher-shortage-areas> Rural school leaders would add math, science, music and even some elementary positions. Almost all districts in Iowa are struggling to find bus drivers, paraprofessionals, office staff, and food service workers.

When there are shortages, the market tends to draw teachers from rural areas lacking social amenities to higher paying urban and suburban districts. Fewer qualified candidates, and sometimes no candidates at all, are applying to fill vacant and mandated positions. Private sector competition is also compelling. Iowa's 2.5% unemployment rate means employers are looking for a strong work ethic, communication skills, and the ability to get to work on time. The Future Ready Workforce list of High-Demand Jobs includes educators.

**Current Reality:** The qualified worker challenge is more difficult in rural Iowa:

- The implementation of the teacher leadership and compensation system has further increased demand for teachers to fill vacant positions to replace teacher leaders. TLC may also have slowed the pipeline of individuals willing to take on the work of school administration.
- Teachers in rural areas are very likely to have multiple preps. For example, a teacher in a rural district may teach and prepare lessons and activities across an entire content area, such as Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, trigonometry, Calculus and a Statistics course. Despite lower class sizes, multiple preps increase the workload significantly.
- Some rural schools have been able to help a willing and capable teacher obtain certification in a shortage area of content, but the rules require provisional licensure status no longer than two years. Access to fewer colleges and universities within a short distance add to this burden. With student loans to pay, additional tuition and costs of coursework may be beyond the financial capacity of lower paid rural teachers and nearly unattainable for new teachers given the level of starting pay in a rural area.
- Some community members, dedicated to the rural area, may be willing to teach in areas of their expertise, but can't afford to quit working for two years to become certified. Some programs in CTE areas have provided avenues to on the job training, which is a good start.
- Educators new to the state must endure licensure challenges, have to take additional coursework rather than getting credit for experience in an area missing on their original transcripts.
- Additional transportation costs come off the top of the per pupil revenues, leaving even less revenue to pay teachers at a rate needed to overcome market shortages and amenity deficits.

**Educator Shortage and Quality Instruction:** RSAI supports maximum flexibility to hire staff to provide great instruction and support to all Iowa students. RSAI supports 1) district flexibility to meet offer and teach requirements, 2) teacher or other staff shortage loan forgiveness programs and incentives to encourage staff to work in rural schools, 3) a special education generalist credential to teach special education across all grades, 4) creation of a Public Service strand in Iowa's CTE system to prepare Iowa's future teaching workforce, 5) continued state support of Iowa Learning Online (ILO), 6) flexibility to hire retirees without a negative IPERS impact, 7) elimination of barriers to licensure for teachers and administrators, and 8) allow associate degree for substitutes. The BOEE should accept evidence other than strict transcripts to show skill mastery for administrators from other states.





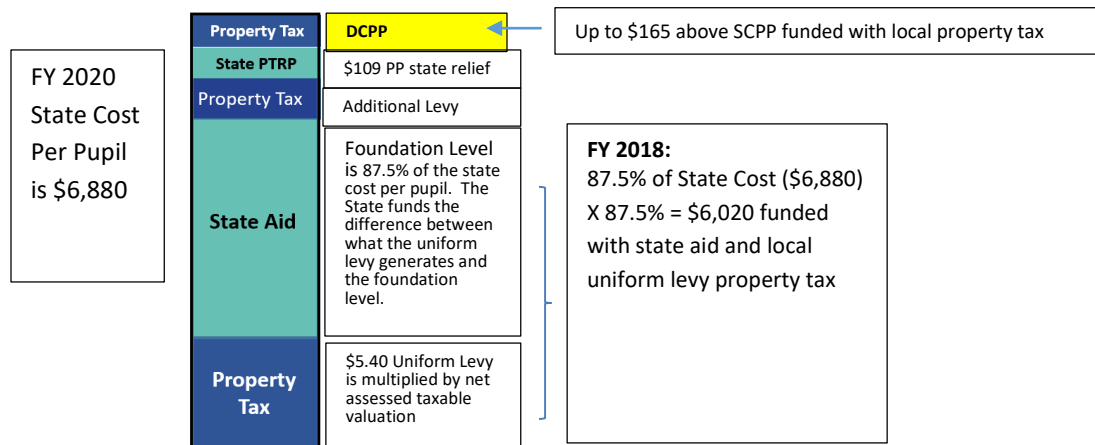
Policy Solutions Rural Schools Support:

- 1) Set the state supplementary assistance (SSA) rate for FY 2021 no lower than 3.74% but as high as the Revenue Estimating Conference revenue estimate is set if higher than 3.74%.
- 2) Expansion of temporary licensure to three years for teachers working for shortage area licensure to achieve the necessary credit hours.
- 3) Flexibility to meet offer and teach requirements – via partnership with another district (28E, Shared Students/teachers or WGS), online, or through access to community college courses. Waivers from DE should be granted for more than one year to minimize administrative work in the following years.
- 4) Ability to start a school year or semester with a long term substitute if the position is a late vacancy without requiring a waiver from BOEE.
- 5) Special education general endorsement alternative, allowing teachers an alternative credential to meet special education licensure from PK-12.
- 6) Direct BOEE to accept other evidence for experienced out of state educators to demonstrate mastery for licensure, including description of relevant experience.
- 7) Alternative models of licensure for shortage area teaching positions in Iowa (build on the CTE model that allows completion of student teaching on the job, with support from TLC and instructional coaches.)
- 8) Education Loan Forgiveness to help teachers pay student loan debt if they remain in rural school districts.
- 9) Define a CTE track for public service, including teaching (but could also include law enforcement, social work, criminal justice, etc.) Allow “internships” with teachers at school and completion of associates degree or other course work to minimize college tuition and living expenses.
- 10) Use of management fund to pay for certification course requirement costs for teachers working toward licensure in shortage area positions, especially special education. Softening the barriers of IPERs eligible employees returning to the workplace would also be helpful.
- 11) Allow individuals with an associates’ degree to substitute teach.
- 12) Finish the job of transportation equity through the formula so rural education dollars may be spent on the classroom, including teachers.



## RSAI Position Paper Student Equality - State and District Cost Per Pupil A 2020 Legislative Priority

**History:** Before the Iowa school foundation formula was created, school districts depended almost entirely on local property taxes for funding. The level of support varied due to many factors, including community attitudes about the priority of education and local property tax capacity. The formula set a State Cost Per Pupil (SCPP) and brought all districts spending less up to that amount. A combination of some local property tax and some state foundation aid provided funding. Those districts which spent more than the newly defined SCPP were allowed to continue, funded by local property tax payers. Although the formula was created in the mid-1970s, the difference between the SCPP and a higher District Cost Per Pupil (DCPP) has remained. This graphic shows the property tax and state aid components of the SCPP and the DCPP above the \$6,880 (FY 2019-20 SCPP).



**Current reality:** In FY 2020, 179 districts (54.7%) are limited to the \$6,880 as their District Cost per Pupil (DCPP). The other 148 districts (45.3%) have a DCPP ranging from \$6,881 to \$7,045, or \$1 to \$165 more. When the Legislature determines the increase in the SCPP, that dollar amount is added to the DCPP, so the gap continues at the same dollar amount. On a percentage basis, the \$165 is much less today than it was in 1975. However, when school budgets are tight, every dollar matters. This table shows the count of districts based on the range of authority in the formula to exceed the SCPP.

FY 2020 Count of Districts	Amount DCPP is Greater than SCPP
179	\$0
30	\$1 to \$14
29	\$16 to \$35
31	\$36 to \$58
31	\$59 to \$100
27	\$102 to \$165
Total = 327	

**Inequity impacting students:** The amount of funding generated per pupil for regular education is not the same for all districts. Thus, a student, based solely on the historical practice of the district of residence, can generate more or less funding. Another critical question for policy makers relates to the multipliers or formula weightings for special student needs. Those multipliers, applied to the DCPP, generate different amounts of support for students, such as special education students, by application of the formula.





**Solutions:** Possible solutions to promote equality without lowering the per pupil amount available for any school district include:

- The legislature could grant all local districts spending authority for the difference and allow school boards to decide locally whether to fund it. This solution maintains the state's funding commitment without increasing it and provides local property taxes to support community schools. However, not all districts have equal political capacity to assess local property taxes.
- Set the state cost per pupil at the highest amount but lower the foundation percentage threshold from 87.5% to an amount that balances the impact on the state and on property taxes.
  - While both of these solutions depend on local funding, since many districts have sufficient cash on hand, there would be little cash reserve levy impact for several years in many districts.
- Phase in a long-term commitment to eliminate the inequality over time. HF 307, enacted in the 2019 Session, increased the state cost per pupil by \$5 to further reduce the gap between state and district cost per pupil. This action required an increase in State school aid of \$2.9 million which also provided a decrease to property taxes of \$1.7 million. At this pace (\$5 per pupil per year) it would take 33 more years to get to full equity. A combination of the two options above would also be possible – authority in the meantime, close the gap over the long haul.

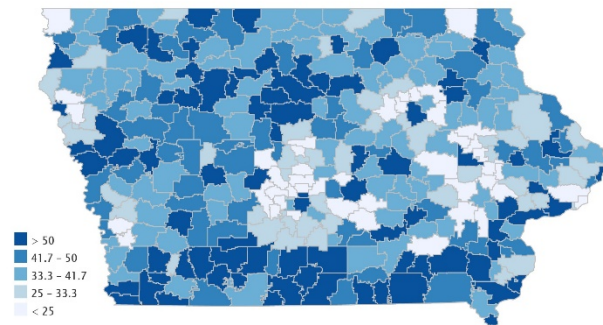
**RSAI supports formula and Transportation Equity:** RSAI supports formula and transportation equity. The Legislature should accelerate the commitment to close the \$165 gap between the state and district cost per pupil within ten years and continue transportation equity support, bringing down all districts to no more than the state average per pupil transportation cost, without requiring burdensome reporting requirements from school districts.



## Opportunity Equity for High-Poverty Students: A 2020 Legislative Priority

**Background:** Iowa's funding formula does not sufficiently recognize poverty as a driver of at-risk student programming. In 2001, about 28% of students were eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL), with the lowest district percentage of eligibility at 4.2%. That rate has since nearly doubled. Dropout Prevention funding is based on total enrollment count, not the percentage of students at-risk. Although flexibility for use of DoP funds has been legislatively expanded, DoP funding is still limited to 2.5% of the total regular program district cost or up to 5% of regular program district cost based on historical practice.

Free and Reduced Pct (FY 2019)



**Current Reality:** In FY 2019, 43.0% of students, or 207,835 children, were FRPL eligible.

- Poverty is now found throughout the state and it's a rural challenge. The map's darkest color shows districts with 50% or more of enrolled students eligible for FRPL. Of the 83 school districts with more than half of students eligible, 71 are rural. In districts below 300 enrolled, 50.3% of enrolled students are eligible. Rural Iowa communities further lack other resources to help low-income families.
- Iowa's funding for at-risk and dropout prevention translates into less than 10% funding commitment for students in poverty, well short of the national average 29% beyond the base for low-income students. (AIR, [Study of a new Method of Funding for Public Schools in Nevada](#), Sept. 2012)
- Students from low-income families are more likely to begin school academically behind, exhibit nonproficient literacy skills, especially in early elementary, and fall further behind over summer breaks, unless schools have the resources, staff and programs to meet their needs.
- Districts must waive student fees for FRPL-eligible families, meaning those districts with concentrated poverty have less resource for textbooks and drivers' education, further stressing the general fund.
- High-poverty School Investments boosts achievement. Education Week, [Student Outcomes: Does More Money Really Matter?](#) *Fresh research bolsters the case for K-12 cash—and a rough road without it*, Daarel Burnette II, June 4, 2019 reports: "Now, a growing number of researchers are pushing back against what they see as a simplistic, reductionist view of the role that spending plays in school quality and student performance. More money does, in fact, make a difference, they say—provided that you spend enough, and in the right manner. They point to research in the past five years that provides examples of instances where politicians and taxpayers invested more money in teacher salaries, school construction, and schools with high populations of low-income students and saw students' test scores jump."
- Low-income rural students are an important piece of Iowa's workforce puzzle, will stay in Iowa, and will either be the backbone of our rural communities' potential or a drain on future resources.

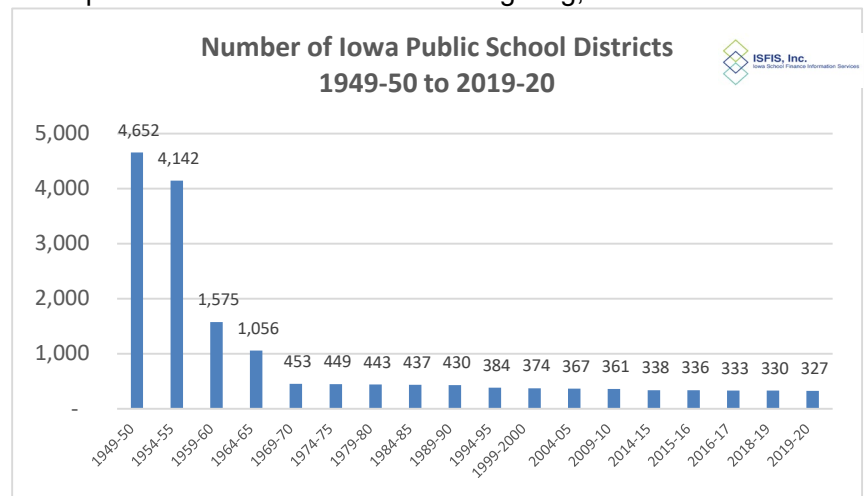
RSAI calls on the Iowa Legislature to provide **Opportunity Equity for High-Poverty Students:** RSAI supports resources for at-risk students. Resources should be based on need, such as the percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL), in addition to enrollment of the district. The current disparity in dropout prevention capacity, (some districts held to 2.5% and others up to 5% of regular program district cost) is arbitrary, based on history no longer relevant to supporting student needs. All school boards should be able to realize the full 5% dropout prevention funding. The formula must further recognize the disproportionate cost of providing equal educational opportunities to low-income students. School districts should be granted spending authority for FRPL eligible students' fees mandated to be waived by state and federal law.



## Whole Grade Sharing/Reorganization Incentives: A 2020 RSAI Legislative Priority

**Background:** Whole Grade Sharing and Reorganization Incentives are currently available to school districts through the budget year beginning July 1, 2019. These incentives provide an impetus for districts to work together to deliver greater educational opportunities for students through whole grade sharing, either one-way, which 43 districts are using in the 2019-20 school year or with two-way agreements, in which 14 districts are engaged. Three districts that previously participated in whole grade sharing were reorganized effective July 1, 2019, lowering the total number of school districts in Iowa to 327. In the 2019-20 school year, 239 districts also received operational sharing supplementary weighting. Of those, 93 districts qualified for the full 21 student weighting, or \$144,480.

Historically, these incentives have helped ease the financial burden of sharing. They sometimes, but not always, lead to reorganization. School districts have experienced significant reorganization in Iowa, which originally had over 4,600 school districts decades ago, now with 327 in the 2019-20 school year. Continued low SSA increases contribute to financial pressures leading to both sharing and reorganization necessity for rural schools.



### Current Reality:

- Operational Sharing Incentives create the capacity for districts to discuss efficiencies that may not otherwise be politically viable. These incentives promote good working relationships with neighboring districts and help smaller districts continue to meet accreditation demands with limited general fund resources while giving students access to more program offerings. Sharing also allows expertise and facilities to be concentrated in neighboring districts. In 2017, the legislature extended these incentives through June 30, 2024, added a social worker position to qualify for operational sharing. Rural school leaders will continue to stress the importance of these incentives as that sunset draws closer.
- WGS between districts may save on staff costs, typically increases transportation costs, but most importantly, provides additional opportunities for students. The incentives help to get students to the programs they need to be successful. The reorganization incentives timeline encourages school boards to work together in a timely fashion to provide what's best for students, but harmonious reorganization can take many years.
- Without the incentives after reorganization, since transportation costs and staff savings have already been incurred through WGS, additional efficiencies are not as significant. This hurdle can create a barrier to reorganization absent the incentive.
- Property tax rate differences can be significant between neighboring districts. Three years of property tax incentive following reorganization helps ease that transitional impact on taxpayers.

**Sharing Incentives and Efficiencies:** RSAI supports extension of sharing and efficiency incentives. Rural students benefit from opportunities to achieve efficiencies, share capacity to operate, and redirect resources to educational programs. Whole Grade Sharing, Reorganization, and Operational Sharing Incentives should be extended and expanded.



## RSAI Position Paper

### Preschool: A 2020 Legislative Priority

**Background:** Iowa's Statewide Voluntary PK Program (SVPP) participation, first implemented in 2007-08, has grown to serve 31,233 4-year-olds in 2018-19. That means there were still an estimated 8,000 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>

**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, preschool should be fully funded at the regular student count at 1.0 per pupil cost.



## **RSAI Position Paper: School Safety 2020**

**Background:** Safety at school for staff and students is of great concern to rural school leaders. Stories of school shootings and other dangers across the nation have taken place in schools and communities where people later stated, “we thought it couldn’t happen here.” Iowa rural school leaders are aware of the possibilities and have concerns about adequate resources to prepare thoughtful, effective emergency plans, train staff and students, and network with local law enforcement that may be long distances and too many minutes away to respond timely in a crisis.

The National Institute of Justice Report, [School Safety by the Numbers](#), shared information compiled by the Comprehensive School Safety Initiative regarding school safety and violence. “School officials have become more concerned about student safety, in part as a result of high-profile school shootings. School security measures have increased since the Columbine shooting of 1999. Nearly 100% of schools servicing 12- to 18-year-olds use at least one safety or security measure, such as locked doors, security cameras, hallway supervision, controlled building access, metal detectors and locker checks. School use of these measures varies by factors like population served and location.”

### **Recent Iowa Legislative Action:**

**SF 2364 School Security Plans**, enacted in 2018, required schools to develop and implement safety and security plans, work with local law enforcement, conduct annual drills, train staff, and required school boards to annually review the plans.

**HF 546 State Penny Extension**, enacted in 2019, expanded the definition of allowable “school infrastructure” expenditures to include school safety and security infrastructure such as (but not limited to) safe rooms, remote entry technology and equipment, security camera systems, card access systems, and communication systems with access to fire and police emergency frequencies. The bill specifically prohibited the use of sales tax revenue for the cost of personnel, development of safety and security plans, and training related to the implementation of safety and security plans.

**SF 284**, introduced in 2019, would have added school safety personnel or a school resources officer position (SRO) to operational sharing, but did not move forward in the Senate Education Committee.

**Current Reality:** Rural school budgets, already stressed by several years of low per pupil increases and declining enrollment, are not sufficient to cover the costs of developing and implementing plans and training staff annually without having to make reductions elsewhere. Rural schools are further disadvantaged in response time to emergencies due to remote locations, far from both law enforcement and hospitals.

**School Safety:** RSAI supports school safety investments. Rural schools need the resources, training and support necessary for Iowa student and staff safety at school, including additional funding for security personnel and training to protect against active shooter and other emergency situations presenting harm.