**RSAI Legislative Group Meeting Minutes**

**August 14, 2019**

**10:00 – 2:00, ISFIS Office**

**1201 63rd Street, Des Moines, IA 50322**

NW - Scott Williamson, Sioux Central CSD, Laurens-Marathon CSD & Clay Central Everly CSD, and
At-large member, Dan Smith, Van Buren County School Board,
were not in attendance today, but participated in a gotomeeting on Aug. 9 to provide input on by-laws, membership, and priority issues.

**Leadership Group Members in attendance:**

NE - Barb Schwamman, Osage CSD & Riceville CSD

SE - Joel Pedersen, Cardinal CSD

SW - Tim Mitchell, Riverside CSD

Dennis McClain, Adair-Casey CSD & Guthrie Center CSD

Duane Willhite, North Fayette Valley CSD

**RSAI Staff:**

Margaret Buckton and Larry Sigel were in attendance.

Meeting convened at 10:14. After introductions, Buckton reviewed the Legislative Group Responsibilities expected throughout the year.

Elect officers of the Legislative Group. Buckton called for nominations or volunteers. Schwamman nominated Willhite as Chair of the Legislative Committee. Pedersen seconded. No other nominations. Unanimously approved. Pedersen volunteered for Vice President. Schwamman seconded. No other nominations. Unanimously approved. Schwamman volunteered for Secretary. McClain seconded. No other nominations. Unanimously approved.

The group reviewed the RSAI Membership map, membership report and Key Values. After reading the key values and selecting their favorite two on the list, the group discussed. There was much consensus around the first value – students first. But the second tier of values were varied. Although the values of Flexibility, Local Control, and School Sustainability rose to the top, the conversation elicited lots of overlap in the challenges that rural school leaders face. The following thoughts were shared:

* General frustration with funds required to spent certain ways – so many categoricals, little trust that local leaders will spend funds wisely.
* The internet is increasingly important, not just for schools but for families and businesses in rural Iowa. Two challenges – sufficient access and band width. “It’s harder for us to sell a house in our community without Internet than it is one without water.”
* The school is one of several critical community services/needs; hospital, mental health services, housing and amenities essential to attract both families and young employees.
* Sparsity of population often equates to sparsity of services
* Rural economic development has a tie with the Governor’s initiatives in Empowering Rural Iowa and Future Ready Workforce.
* Grow your own staff is increasingly important. We should have a CTE track of public service, to recruit our rural students to teaching or other important public service positions (law enforcement, nursing, counseling, etc.)
* Rural schools need flexibility – they should have the right to meet accreditation standards in many ways. The strength of generational relationships has value that will be lost of rural schools are forced to close.
* The economics of the school formula in Iowa – we have to attract more students unless the formula can find a way to increase the dollars per student. Some other states have sparsity factors or small school weighting.
* Partner with other rural organizations – Farm Bureau and who else? April 29 next year, the Iowa Rural Development Council, has a summit at Kirkwood in Cedar Rapids.
* How do we attract and retain great staff with limited resources? What kinds of benefits are appropriate for public use? Day care free for employees? A welcome to XCSD t-shirt on the first day of PD for teachers? Membership at the local golf course or to the YMCA down the road? Public Purpose statement: such benefits attract and retain quality of staff by offering quality of life. Affordable housing – can local district have a part in that?
* Connecting members at regional meeting via zoom or other technology/Can RSAI provide the connection for free to members?

Review RSAI Bylaws – no changes recommended.

Reviewed premeeting notes of Aug 9 gotomeeting with Dan Smith, Scott Willliamson. Discussed economic development and special education. Scott had mentioned residential facilities and the lack of funding that follows students. Mitchell mentioned South Dakota law which requires former district of residence to prorate the per pupil funding X number of days educated in the new location. Buckton mentioned it could be treated like the state schools, off the top of state aid. There was also a lengthy discussion about election laws – going back to 3-year terms and September elections and restore lost special election dates.

Report of RSAI Regional Meetings: Buckton reviewed the tracking sheet which indicated every region’s priority discussion at the summer meeting and tracked new priority suggestions. The group discussed the similarities and differences and talked through implications.

Attendees split up into two groups and went through assignment of survey results to priority status of not important, somewhat important, or very important. They then discussed their choices. The group then agreed on the following priority issues to go forward to the Leadership Group for their August 20 meeting (some rationale follows each):

**RSAI Legislative Group Priorities:**

* **SSA #**1 School Funding hasn’t kept pace with costs of education. Education Wee gives Iowa an “F” in funding adequacy. Low funding is a driver of consolidation, which only increases transportation costs and closes school buildings in communities. Lack of adequate state funding means local property tax payers have to work harder to support schools.
* **Student Mental Health #2** Rural areas have mental health needs but little access to services. We need to be able to have telehealth and telemental-health services with providers billing Medicaid and Insurance providers directly so school staff, already overburdened in rural schools, don’t have to become insurance billers. Student success and school safety both depend on Iowa finding access to mental health services for all children regardless of where they live.
* **Quality Instruction Educator and Staff Shortage #3** Attracting and retaining staff is increasingly difficult in rural Iowa. Not enough amenities to keep young employees and all districts are short bus drivers, special ed teachers, paras, not to mention teachers. Flexibility in licensure, loan forgiveness if teachers will work in shortage area positions, grow-your-own programs to get rural kids associates degree in High School so they can then go to UNI for two years and come back home to teach are all strategies to scratch the surface. Reengaging retirees and adequate funding to have competitive pay with private sector jobs are also important.
* **Formula Equity #4 :** more than $5 per year to close the gap in district cost per pupil. Let’s set a goal of 10 years. Those at the higher number get property tax relief, those at the lower number get spending authority and state funding. It’s a win-win.
* **Human Capital Equity/Poverty/At-Risk** : Iowa’s formula doesn’t recognize poverty or provide resources for students who cost more to teach. Schools are required to waive textbook and other fees. Low income families exist in rural Iowa communities too, and we need to either educate them or support them through human services and law enforcement over their lifetime.
* **Quality PK** – transportation costs are so big in rural areas that we need to have full day PK in order to meet parent needs (they can’t transport in the middle of the day) and address lack of day care placements for half days when not in PK. Funding is only for half-time.
* **School Safety Personnel** – no funding outside of general fund exists for school safety personnel, yet rural schools still have to have emergency plans, conduct staff training, and should be able to provide the same levels of security as more urban districts.
* **Transportation equity** – keep it on the list as rules and reporting requirements unfold. Good progress last year, but we don’t want to burden rural schools with excessive reporting and the funds in the formula may be stretched if transportation costs increase.
* **Sharing incentives** – both operational and reorganization incentives have been recently extended. These are critically important tools for rural schools to create the urgency to right-size and invest as much in student learning as possible. It’s important to not forget about these but they don’t need to be prioritized with the legislature in the 2020 Session. Keep them on the list for future consideration and to encourage members to keep thinking about the benefits as they communicate with their legislators.

The group decided by consensus status of the following:

* State penny extension. Take this off the priority list. Mission Accomplished!
* Election Changes – need to return to 3-year terms and September school elections – long term – although important, the group decided to lay low on the election changes until the November 2019 combined city and school election plays out and revisit next year.
* Rural Economic Development – need to learn more about what successful rural economic development looks like and how to support it. Affordable housing and good jobs nearby are both critical pressure points. Quality of life issues, access to amenities are also important to attract new teachers. Working with the whole community to engage those new teachers and encourage them to stay is also important. ISFIS will do some research into what works for rural economic development and provide resources to empower RSAI members to engage locally, but not put this in on the 2020 Legislative Priority list.
* Also discussed responsibility for payment of students in residential facilities. Tim suggested looking at South Dakota law as a model.

The Group assigned Oct. 16 Annual Meeting responsibilities for leading on each priority (Margaret will assign seconds/back-up and provide talking points assistance.)

Duane as chair will introduce the committee and explain their process.

Transportation & Formula Equity – Tim

SSA – Barb

Sharing Incentives – Joel

Quality Instruction/Teacher shortage – Scott

Quality PK – Barb

Student Mental Health Supports – Dennis

At-risk Funding and Flexibility - Joel

School Safety – Dan

No Other Business was presented. Meeting adjourned at 2:08 PM.

Minutes respectfully submitted, Margaret Buckton