**RSAI Position Paper: Quality Instruction in Rural Iowa 2018**

**Background:** All students, regardless of their zip code, deserve and require access to a great education for future success, which has always depended on great teachers. Although rural Iowa schools have traditionally been full of excellent teachers with a strong work ethic, flexibility, and dedication to student success, conditions in rural Iowa are making it difficult to attract and retain great teachers for the future.

Teacher shortage areas exist in many content areas, but especially at the secondary level (math, science, music, career and technical areas, foreign language and agriculture) and special education, school counselors and teacher librarians across the spectrum (PK-12). See the complete list on DE’s web site: <https://www.educateiowa.gov/teacher-shortage-areas>

When there are shortages, the market tends to compel teachers from rural areas to move toward higher paying urban and suburban districts. Rural schools are finding fewer qualified candidates, and sometimes no candidates at all, to fill vacant and mandated positions.

**Current Reality:** All Iowa districts are facing some level of teacher shortage today, but that 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.
* Teachers in rural areas are very likely to have multiple preps, whereas teachers in urban centers may be able to focus on teaching one or two classes multiple times per day. 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 compensated rural teachers and nearly unattainable for new teachers given the starting pay of the new teacher in a rural area. Additionally, new rural teachers most likely will be learning their jobs for the first time as well as being saddled with nearly unmanageable multiple preparations.
* 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 obtain the appropriate degree and license required.
* Teachers new to the state and willing to work in rural communities must endure licensure and Praxis test fees paid even before they begin earning a salary.
* 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 the market shortages and amenity deficits.

**Quality Instruction for Rural Students:** In order to maintain student access to great teachers, rural school districts require maximum flexibility to meet licensure requirements. RSAI supports district authority to create online alternatives and allow dual enrollment courses to meet offer and teach requirements to ensure students in rural Iowa have access to great instruction and support district compliance with accreditation standards. RSAI also supports reinstatement of the teacher shortage loan forgiveness program and consideration of additional incentives to encourage teachers to work in rural schools.