RSAI 2019 Legislative Priorities

Set by members attending the RSAI Annual Meeting, Oct. 24, 2018

**1. State Penny for School Infrastructure Extension:**The Iowa Legislature should extend or repeal the sunset of the state penny for school infrastructure. Since voters in Iowa’s 99 counties approved the sales tax for public schools, any change in use of the revenue should be dedicated to educational purposes.

**2.Teacher Shortage and Quality Instruction:**Rural school districts require maximum flexibility to provide great instruction to all Iowa students. RSAI supports 1) district flexibility to meet offer and teach requirements, 2) reinstatement of the teacher shortage loan forgiveness program and additional incentives to encourage teachers to work in rural schools, 3) creation of a Public Service strand in Iowa’s Career and Technical Education system to prepare Iowa’s future teaching workforce, and 4) elimination of barriers to teacher licensure such as Praxis test requirements.

**3. Transportation and Formula Equity:**The Legislature should build on the commitment to minimize inequity of school transportation costs that compete with general funds otherwise spent on educating students and close the $170 gap between the state cost per pupil and district cost per pupil in the formula.

**4. State Supplemental Assistance:**Formula funding is especially critical to students in rural Iowa due to transportation costs, economies of scale, unique needs of students, mandates and compliance, the need for quality AEA services, and the ability to attract and retain staff. The sustainability of a quality education in rural schools depends on the return of education as the state’s top priority with an investment of meaningful new resources to improve opportunities for students.

**5. Student Mental Health:**Given lack of access to mental health services and increasing mental health challenges for students, especially in rural Iowa, RSAI supports increased access to and funding for mental health services for children, including telehealth services as received at school reimbursable in Iowa’s Medicaid services plan.

**6. Sharing Incentives and Efficiencies:**Rural students benefit from opportunities to achieve efficiencies, share capacity to operate, and redirect resources to educational programs.  Whole Grade Sharing Incentives and Reorganization Incentives should be extended and Operational Sharing Incentives expanded, including the addition of a school resources officer position to generate weighting, to provide capacity to school districts to improve educational outcomes for students.

**7. School Safety:** Rural schools need the resources, training and support necessary for Iowa student and staff safety at school, including 1) resources for technology and facilities by extending the state penny, and 2) additional funding for security personnel and training to protect against active shooter and other emergency situations presenting harm.

**8. Funding Equity for At-risk Students:** Resources for serving at-risk students should be based on need, such as the percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch, in addition to enrollment of the district. The current disparity in dropout prevention capacity ceiling, with some districts held to 2.5% and others allowed to access up to 5% of regular program district cost is unfair, arbitrary, and based on old history no longer relevant to supporting student needs.

**9. 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.