

RURAL SCHOOL ADVOCATES OF IOWA



Our Collective Voices are Stronger Together



2023-24

ABOUT RSAI

Rural School Advocates of Iowa (RSAI) was formed in 2014 by leaders from Iowa public school districts coming together to work collaboratively towards legislative solutions around needs and issues specific to rural public schools. While RSAI is often thought of as the association serving needs of *small* school districts, the reality is our priorities are focused on issues faced by *rural* schools, regardless of their enrollment size. Since our inception, membership has continued to grow. We invite you to join RSAI members and lend your voice to our movement for quality rural education in Iowa, because our collective voices are stronger together!

We will work to:

- **Educate** others about the value of rural education to the state's economy and future of Iowa as an educational leader in the nation and the world;
- **Build the capacity** and understanding of other groups with similar interests on legislative and educational issues to create a strong voice;
- **Share best practices** of great education programs while under the budget constraints of fewer students, how best to innovate, share and promote efficiency;
- **Secure adequate resources**, academic and financial, to provide first-class educational opportunities for students in rural communities;
- **Maintain local control** through the flexibility and authority of locally elected School Boards.

We will accomplish these goals:

- **Locally** through the advocacy of community individuals and groups with our Legislators at home.
- **At the Capitol** through the services of a Professional Advocate to organize our collective voice and keep members informed.

Our mission is to advocate for students in rural schools to assure a fair, equal and quality education.



www.nrea.net

RSAI is Iowa's state affiliate of the National Rural Education Association and a member of the Iowa Rural Development Council.

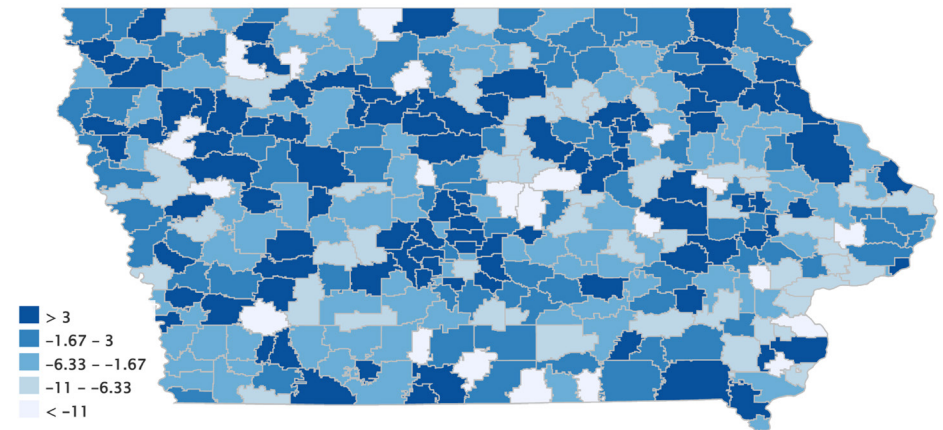
**IOWA RURAL
DEVELOPMENT
COUNCIL**

www.iowardc.org

RURAL TRENDS

The map below shows the 5-year percentage change in Certified Enrollment for FY 2024 looking back 5 years. Those districts in the bottom three quintiles experienced declining enrollment over time, losing between 1.7% and 20.8%.

Certified Enrollment (Row 7) – 5 Year Percentage Change (FY 2024)



- The Iowa school funding formula is enrollment based. Significant and persistent enrollment decline, compounded with low levels of per pupil funding growth, has strained school budgets and the ability to provide quality staff and programs for students.
- Due to consolidation, 47 Iowa school districts in 2003-04 no longer exist. They have been reorganized or dissolved, and they were all districts serving rural communities.
- RSAI advocacy for adequate funding, transportation reimbursement, operational sharing and increased staffing flexibility is critical to rural school district sustainability.
- Despite demographic changes, Iowa's rural school leaders remain hopeful and foster an all-hands-on-deck enthusiasm, ready to innovate, collaborate, and invigorate staff and communities to meet every student's need.



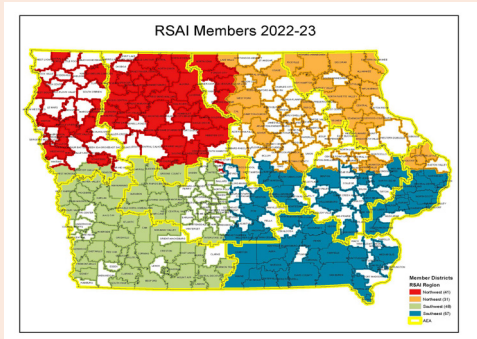
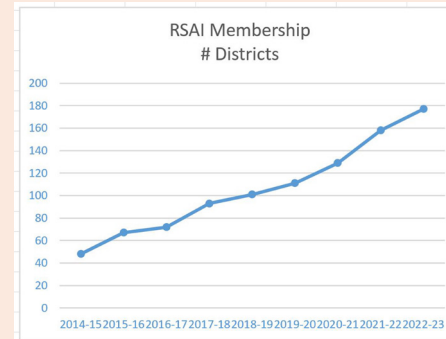
MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

RSAI offers many benefits to member school superintendents, board members, and school districts. Below are some membership benefit highlights:

- **RSAI Legislative Priorities:** Set by a truly grassroots process.
- **Advocacy Supports:** Position Papers associated with each legislative priority to share with legislators, board members, parent/advocacy groups or other organizations. Written and video reports on legislative actions and advocacy steps each week of the legislative session. Calls to Actions on priorities at key points during the session when advocacy action is required.
- **Testimony:** RSAI provides written and/or verbal testimony regarding proposed issues, rules and legislation to key legislative and executive branch decision-makers.
- **Representation:** RSAI Advocates, Margaret Buckton and Dave Daughton, represent RSAI member schools at the statehouse during the Legislative Session and work with the executive branch during the interim. RSAI also recruits participants for policy makers seeking rural school input.
- **Media:** RSAI engages media to connect with rural school leaders and helps inform the public and policy makers of needs of rural schools, creative approaches improving efficiency and effectiveness, and the amazing education rural schools deliver to students.
- **Networking:** RSAI is a member of the Iowa Rural Development Council, the Iowa affiliate of the National Rural Education Association (NREA) and the National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium (NREAC), which share federal actions important to rural schools, notices of grants and funding opportunities, and best practices.
- **Member-Only Programs:**
 - ***NASDTEC Licensure Checks:** RSAI members receive free licensure checks through the National Association of State Departments of Teacher Education and Credentials, which otherwise could cost \$100s of dollars.
 - ***TPRA Pipeline Grant Consortium:** Submission of a grant on behalf of RSAI member districts for Governor's Teacher Para-educator Registered Apprenticeship funding.
 - ***ISFIS Discount with Board/Policy Hosting Service:** ISFIS also provides a \$100 reduction to RSAI membership fees if schools use ISFIS Board/Policy Hosting Service.
- **ISFIS Support:** Iowa School Finance Information Services (ISFIS) provides RSAI association management and legislative advocacy functions, maintains the website and membership database, staffs meetings, and provides communications, school finance and legislative support services.

RSAI MEMBERS

RSAI membership is divided into four regions and continues to grow. Join your voices with other rural schools to strengthen rural education for Iowa students. RSAI appreciates our nine Area Education Agency partners, Iowa State University and the University of Iowa, who have all pledged support as associate members.



RSAI WEBSITE



Advocacy supports, tools, and information for members and others interested in issues important to rural education can be found on RSAI's website. Check out our weekly RSAI Capitol Recap videos for a quick update on activities each week during the legislative session. Visit us at www.rsaia.org.

LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

The RSAI legislative priorities are established through a grassroots effort beginning at the summer RSAI Regional Meetings. RSAI's Legislative Committee recommends the platform for the upcoming legislative session, based on member input, for member approval at their Annual Meeting each October. Top Legislative Priorities from 2023 were:

- **Adequate School Resources:** The increase in SSA requires a consistent and sustainable commitment. To rebuild a **World-Class Education**, RSAI estimates an investment of at least 10% SSA. To **Sustain Current Status**, an investment of at least 5% would position school districts and AEAs to maintain current status with Iowa's competitive economy, high inflation and increased student needs. An investment of 2.5% would deliver continued erosion of Iowa public education. Iowa's school foundation formula must maintain balanced state and local resources, be predictable and assure adequate time for budget planning and staffing.
- **Education Staff Shortage:** In addition to sufficient SSA, strategies to rebuild Iowa's education workforce must address both recruitment (hiring incentives, grow-your-own educators, certifications and loan forgiveness) and retention (more flexibility in hiring, credentials and offer-and-teach requirements, rehire retirees without IPERS impact). In both the short and long term, legislation, policy and public support will not only provide improved compensation for educators but also foster respect for the education profession that is well deserved.
- **Public School Priority:** Public schools must be adequately funded and supported by the state. Investments in education savings accounts, voucher programs, school tuition organizations or homeschool, whether by tax credit or direct appropriation, remove resources from public schools. RSAI is opposed to all forms of education savings accounts/voucher programs/additional public funds appropriated for private or homeschool.
- **Sharing Incentives/Efficiencies** requires extension of Whole-Grade Sharing and Reorganization and Operational Sharing incentives. The 21-student cap should be expanded to allow access to new flexibility. Weightings should be sufficient to encourage and support sharing opportunities.

Other Legislative Priorities from 2023 included:

- **Quality Preschool**
- **Opportunity Equity for Low SES**
- **Student Mental Health**
- **Local School Board Authority / Local Control**
- **Formula and Transportation Equity**

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

RSAI is proud of its grassroots lobbying efforts, connecting local school leaders to legislators resulting in many legislative accomplishments. Some of the recent accomplishments around rural equity, flexibility, local control and funding include:

- **More Board Authority:** through statutory home rule, locally-driven dropout prevention plans and board authority to redirect funds to needs of students, since one-size does not fit all. Most recently, TLC flexibility and proposed changes to Chapter 12 in the 2023 Session.
- **Transportation & Formula Equity:** funding is now incorporated in the formula and will grow by the SSA rate annually. Progress to close the district cost per pupil gap continues, but the pace must be accelerated.
- **Operational Sharing Incentives:** expanded and extended through 2035.
- **Staff Flexibility:** CTE options for hard-to-staff content, minimize the barrier of praxis testing, local offerings of online learning, and relaxed licensure requirements allowing rural schools to better work with the staff we have to support student learning. Most recently, compensation limits for IPERS eligible individuals were increased in 2022 and several other hiring and staffing barriers were removed in 2023.
- **Broadband Expansion:** state and federal investment to connect all areas to high-speed internet supporting education, telehealth, diversity of services, and a workforce that can connect virtually while enjoying a rural quality of life.



CONTACT US



WWW.RSAIA.ORG

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RSAI LEADERSHIP GROUP

Consists of a representative from each of 4 regions across the state, plus 3 at-large representatives, each serving a 3-year term

RSAI LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

Consists of representatives from each of 4 regions and 9 AEAs across the state, and also includes the 3 at-large Leadership Group members, each serving a 1-year term

See the RSAI Website for current Leadership Group and Legislative Committee members and their contact information.

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