

February Legislative Update

Governor's Budget and School Funding:

SSA: Gov. Reynolds gave her condition of the state speech on Jan. 14, which started the 30-day clock ticking on the required enactment of the SSA rate (percentage increase in the state cost per pupil.) The Governor's budget recommendation was a 2% increase. That includes \$49 million for TSS, which is estimated to fund the Department of Management's recalculation of funds required to meet the increased teacher pay minimums next Fall. We are hearing that DOM will keep the same tiers/cohorts of districts by enrollment that were used last year.

Teacher Pay: minimums increase to \$50K for beginning teachers and up to 12-years of experience, and \$62,000 for those with 12-years of experience or more. DOM is using the Fall BEDS data from Oct. 2023, since the DE has not yet released Fall BEDS staff data from last October. If you have vacant positions or big swings due to retirement, this older estimate could be problematic for your district. Keep legislators informed of your concerns about the district's ability to afford the teacher pay increases. Additionally, this is the last year of the DOM calculation; going forward, the TSS per pupil determined for your district will grow by the SSA dollar increase applied to the state TSS per pupil.

Hourly Staff: The Governor's recommendation also includes a continuation of \$14 million state appropriation for FY 2026 for districts to supplement hourly paid staff. There are not yet any details on requirements that may apply to distribute those funds.

RSAI supports SSA higher than the inflation rate and adequate funding for school districts to meet mandated teacher pay minimums. RSAI also supported the \$14 million, but would like to see that as a standing appropriation that would continue going forward.

RSAI Priorities:

SF 68 Operational Sharing: specifies that, in addition to college and career coordinators, SROs, social workers, and mental health professionals general operational shared weighting without contributing to the 21-student cap (districts already at the cap can add these positions and generate additional weighting.) This bill was approved last week by the Senate Education Committee.

SSB 1027 Recruitment and Retention Program: allows school districts to implement programs aimed at recruiting new teachers and retaining current ones by using funds from the district management levy. The bill stipulates that any recruitment or retention incentive cannot exceed 10% of an initial teacher's salary and can only be paid for a maximum of five school budget years. Additionally, school boards must choose between adopting early retirement benefits or teacher incentives, but not both concurrently. Requires a public hearing before the board can approve the program. The Subcommittee of Sens. Evans, Campbell and Winckler recommended the bill move forward to the full committee. The Iowa Farm Bureau was at the Subcommittee and expressed their opposition, believing the bill would increase property taxes.

IPERS fix for Returning Retirees: Gov. Reynolds mentioned in her Budget Recommendation a fix to the \$55,000 calendar year IPERS earning ceiling related to hiring back retirees. That legislation has not yet been introduced.

SSB 1077 Chronic Absenteeism Clean-up: sponsored by Sen. Evans, Chair of the Senate Education Committee). This bill makes improvements to last year's legislation. It requires the DE, in consultation with the County Attorney's Association, to develop and distribute to county attorneys, school districts and nonpublic schools a model policy that county attorneys may reference when determining whether and to what extent to enforce attendance laws. Adds student absences due to being a military applicant, engaging in military service, and attending a funeral or a wedding to the list of absences which do not apply to the 10% chronic absenteeism count triggering the steps to address chronic absenteeism. *(Please note, these absences still count when DE is calculating chronic absenteeism for purposes of ESSE reporting and compliance.)* The bill also strikes the requirement to notify parents via certified mail and instead allows notice delivered by ordinary mail, e-mail, e-message or in person. Requires the district to keep a copy of the notice in the student's record until the student graduates, turns 21 or is no longer enrolled in the school, whichever happens first. The bill last year required that, if a student is absent from school for 15% of days or hours, that the school official attempt to find the cause for the absences. This bill would only require that the school official initiate and participate in a school engagement meeting if they determine that the child's absences are negatively affecting academic progress. RSAI is registered in support and requested many of these changes. The bill is assigned to the Senate Education Committee.

RSAI Advocacy Resources:

- RSAI Weekly Report and Capitol Recap Video and Bill Tracker posted here: <https://www.rsaia.org/2025-legislative-session.html>
- [2025 RSAI Advocacy Handbook](#) – includes committee membership, contacts and committee assignments. Also has a worksheet to plan your best outreach
- 2024 RSAI Legislative Digest – to review anything that happened last session [2024 RSAI Legislative Digest - Complete Digest](#) and [2024 Legislative Digest - RSAI Legislative Successes](#)
- RSAI Priorities for the 2025 Session are posted on the 2025 Legislative Session webpage [here](#)
- Show & Tell With Legislators (joint effort of RSAI & SAI) includes these resources:
[Show & Tell With Legislators - Planning Resource](#)
 - [Samples](#)
 - [Reporting Form](#)

Contact us with any questions, feedback or suggestions to better prepare your advocacy work.
Thanks to all of you for your energy and voice on behalf of the students in your schools!

This summary of RSAI 2025 Legislative Priorities, approved at the RSAI annual meeting, emphasizes the need for sustainable investment in Iowa's education system to meet rural school challenges of staffing, student needs, and equitable funding:

1. **Adequate Resources:** Increased State Supplemental Aid (SSA) is essential for Iowa schools to provide quality education that meets community expectations. The funding must be predictable, exceed inflation, and support effective budget planning.
 - **World-Class Education:** A 10% SSA increase (\$783 per pupil) is necessary to enhance education quality, reduce class sizes, and support staff retention.
 - **Sustain Current Status:** A 5% increase (\$392 per pupil) would help maintain competitiveness and address inflation.
 - **Continued Erosion:** A 2.5% increase (\$196 per pupil) would only partially cover rising costs, leading to potential cutbacks in services and staffing.
2. **Staff Shortages:** Policies must prioritize trust and improved compensation to attract and retain educators. Strategies include:
 - **Recruitment:** Flexibility for hiring incentives, grow-your-own programs, and continuation of apprenticeship grants which must be easier to administer.
 - **Retention:** Increased funding for salary supplements, flexibility and licensure simplification, continued IPERS improvements and support for mentoring and training.
 - **Competitive Compensation:** Addressing salary compaction issues and TSS inequities to ensure fair pay for all staff.
3. **Public School Prioritization:** Public schools should be adequately funded, and changes to Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) should ensure fair treatment between public and private schools.
4. **Addressing Student Needs:** All districts should be able to access 5% dropout prevention funding, and resources must focus on at-risk needs, with additional support for mental health services and poverty-related educational challenges.
5. **Quality Preschool Funding:** State funding for PK should be increased to 1.0 weighting for full time PK or half-time PK with wrap around services to ensure access and quality for all students, especially low-income families, and to empower parents of young children to enter the workforce.
6. **Incentives for Collaboration:** Extend incentives for whole-grade sharing, reorganization and operational sharing to enhance educational opportunities.
7. **Local Control:** Support local school boards in decision-making and provide flexibility to meet community needs.
8. **Equity in Funding Formula:** Address historical inequities in funding to ensure all students receive adequate resources.
9. **Bond Issue Simplification:** Require a simple majority to approve bond issues, offer additional special election dates, and remove the requirement for two votes to approve the total bond levy.
10. **Area Education Agencies (AEAs):** AEAs play a crucial role in supporting rural schools, and their funding and structure must be adequate to ensure continued support for essential services.