FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Rural School Advocates Set 2025 Legislative Agenda**

*FFA Enrichment Center, DMACC Campus, Ankeny, Iowa October 15, 2024*

Member school districts of the Rural School Advocates of Iowa met on Tues., Oct. 15, at 4:30 PM at the FFA Enrichment Center in Ankeny. RSAI advocates on behalf of the students, parents and communities in rural Iowa to ensure all students have access to a great Iowa education, regardless of where they live. RSAI members include nearly 200 Iowa school districts, of all sizes. Eight of the Area Education Agencies (AEAs), Iowa’s Regents’ Universities and DMACC are affiliate members of RSAI.

**Adequate School Resources:** State Supplemental Assistance, or SSA, was a top priority for RSAI members. This funding supports the very survival of rural schools. Despite the state’s fiscal strength, the Legislature set a modest increase of 2.5% per student last year. The legislature also set new teacher pay minimums, funded through increases in teacher salary supplement categorical funds. Rural schools are grateful for this investment in Iowa teachers, but members expressed concern about funding equity and sustainability of the funding. Improvements in teacher pay will be short lived if the SSA rate does not grow adequately in the future. The combined increases in all funds for the 2024-25 school year were 3.6%, close to last year’s inflation rate, but will not make up for prior year funding challenges or help close Iowa’s gap of $2,374 education spending per pupil below the national average. The state’s increases in revenues per student has lagged rural school costs of educating students in 14 of the last 15 years. The SSA rate also funds AEAs and special education services for Iowa’s neediest students. *[Enter quote here: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_]*

**Staff Shortages:** Stan DeZeeuw, Superintendent at Sibley-Ochedan Schools, stated that the question, “How many vacant positions do you have?” has become the new ice breaker for nearly every meeting of school leaders he attends. Rural schools still struggle to recruit and retain great teachers, paraeducators, bus drivers and staff. Although adequate funding makes school employees’ pay competitive with other jobs, it alone is not enough. Attendees discussed the need for Iowans to change the culture of political speech, to restore education to a respected profession, to continue licensure and staff flexibility, and to provide state funds for grow-your-own teacher and para-professional licensure programs. *[Enter quote here: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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RSAI members also affirmed the following issues as priorities for the 2025 Legislative Session:

* Oppose expanding Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) to homeschool or new private schools, plus: relieve public schools from reimbursing private school transportation costs, instate a March 1 ESA deadline, and require funding to follow ESA recipients back to public school.
* Increased Student Needs, Poverty and Mental Health resources.
* Quality Preschool including 1.0 weighting for full-day programs.
* Extension of Whole Grade Sharing and Reorganization Incentives and expansion of Operational Sharing for needed positions, including with AEAs.
* Local School Board Authority rather than state-directed mandates.
* School Foundation Formula Equity to close the $140 per pupil funding gap within 10 years.
* Bond Election date should not be limited (or require supermajority or multiple votes).
* AEA services are critical to rural schools who do not have the economy of scale to provide curriculum, school improvement, mental health, media and special education services to staff and students.

**Resources:**

Position Papers on key issues and a Digest of the 2024 Legislative Session are available on the RSAI legislative website at: <http://www.rsaia.org/legislative.html> or by contacting Margaret Buckton, Professional Advocate, RSAI Margaret.buckton@rsaia.org or 515.201.3755, or Dave Daughton, RSAI Grassroots Advocate, dave.daughton@rsaia.org.

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