**RSAI Position Paper: Rural School Staff Shortage and
Educator Quality 2020**

**Background:** Although rural Iowa schools have traditionally been full of excellent teachers with flexibility and dedication to student success, conditions in rural Iowa are making it difficult to attract and retain great teachers, indeed school employees in many different job roles, and it’s getting worse.

Many content areas are experiencing a shortage, but especially at the secondary level. The Iowa DE compiles a list, which for 2018-19 included physics, family consumer science, agriculture, foreign language, special education, school counselors and teacher librarians. See the complete shortage list on DE’s web site: <https://www.educateiowa.gov/teacher-shortage-areas> Rural school leaders would add math, science, music and even some elementary positions. Almost all districts in Iowa are struggling to find bus drivers, paraprofessionals, office staff, and food service workers.

When there are shortages, the market tends to draw teachers from rural areas lacking social amenities to higher paying urban and suburban districts. Fewer qualified candidates, and sometimes no candidates at all, are applying to fill vacant and mandated positions. Private sector competition is also compelling. Iowa’s 2.5% unemployment rate means employers are looking for a strong work ethic, communication skills, and the ability to get to work on time. The Future Ready Workforce list of High-Demand Jobs includes educators.

**Current Reality:** The qualified worker 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. TLC may also have slowed the pipeline of individuals willing to take on the work of school administration.
* Teachers in rural areas are very likely to have multiple preps. 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 paid rural teachers and nearly unattainable for new teachers given the level of starting pay in a rural area.
* 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 become certified. Some programs in CTE areas have provided avenues to on the job training, which is a good start.
* Educators new to the state must endure licensure challenges, have to take additional coursework rather than getting credit for experience in an area missing on their original transcripts.
* 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 market shortages and amenity deficits.

**Educator Shortage and Quality Instruction:** RSAI supports maximum flexibility to hire staff to provide great instruction and support to all Iowa students. RSAI supports 1) district flexibility to meet offer and teach requirements, 2) teacher or other staff shortage loan forgiveness programs and incentives to encourage staff to work in rural schools, 3) a special education generalist credential to teach special education across all grades, 4) creation of a Public Service strand in Iowa’s CTE system to prepare Iowa’s future teaching workforce, 5) continued state support of Iowa Learning Online (ILO), 6) flexibility to hire retirees without a negative IPERS impact, 7) elimination of barriers to licensure for teachers and administrators, and 8) allow associate degree for substitutes. The BOEE should accept evidence other than strict transcripts to show skill mastery for administrators from other states.

Policy Solutions Rural Schools Support:

1. Set the state supplementary assistance (SSA) rate for FY 2021 no lower than 3.75% but as high as the Revenue Estimating Conference revenue estimate is set if higher than 3.75%.
2. Expansion of temporary licensure to three years for teachers working for shortage area licensure to achieve the necessary credit hours.
3. Flexibility to meet offer and teach requirements – via partnership with another district (28E, Shared Students/teachers or WGS), online, or through access to community college courses. Waivers from DE should be granted for more than one year to minimize administrative work in the following years.
4. Ability to start a school year or semester with a long term substitute if the position is a late vacancy without requiring a waiver from BOEE.
5. Special education general endorsement alternative, allowing teachers an alternative credential to meet special education licensure from PK-12.
6. Direct BOEE to accept other evidence for experienced out of state educators to demonstrate mastery for licensure, including description of relevant experience.
7. Alternative models of licensure for shortage area teaching positions in Iowa (build on the CTE model that allows completion of student teaching on the job, with support from TLC and instructional coaches.)
8. Education Loan Forgiveness to help teachers pay student loan debt if they remain in rural school districts.
9. Define a CTE track for public service, including teaching (but could also include law enforcement, social work, criminal justice, etc.) Allow “internships” with teachers at school and completion of associates degree or other course work to minimize college tuition and living expenses.
10. Use of management fund to pay for certification course requirement costs for teachers working toward licensure in shortage area positions, especially special education. Softening the barriers of IPERs eligible employees returning to the workplace would also be helpful.
11. Allow individuals with an associates’ degree to substitute teach.
12. Finish the job of transportation equity through the formula so rural education dollars may be spent on the classroom, including teachers.

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