

RURAL SCHOOL ADVOCATES OF IOWA



Our Collective Voices are Stronger Together



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 become 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 like-minded 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.

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



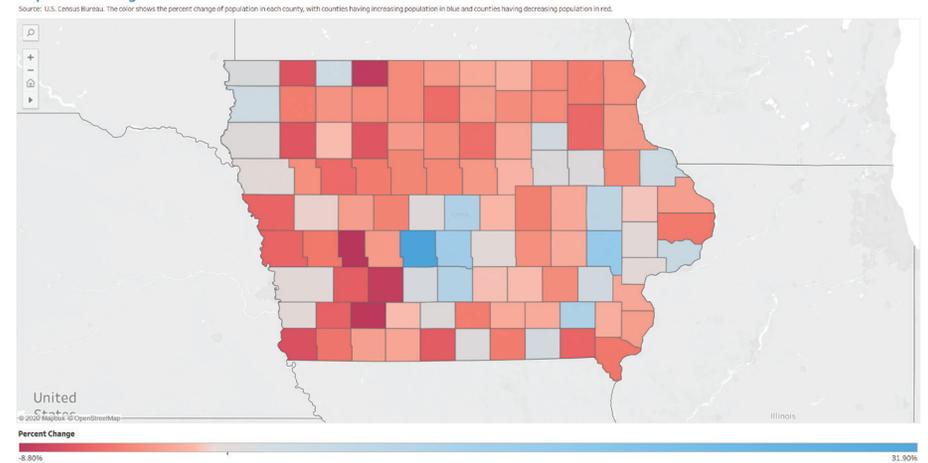
www.nrea.net

**IOWA RURAL
DEVELOPMENT
COUNCIL**

www.iowardc.org

RURAL TRENDS

Population Change in Iowa from 2010 to 2017



- Iowa population grew 4.3% from 2010 to 2018, trailing national growth of 5.5%, with growth primarily occurring in 16 Iowa counties. The remaining 83 counties lost 2.2% or 36,414 people.
- In 1980, only 15 Iowa counties had a population of less than 10,000 people. In 2019, there were 25 counties that fit that category.
- Funding of education is based on enrollment. With rural Iowa population decline, enrollment (and school funding) follows. 47 Iowa school districts in 2003-04 no longer exist. They have been reorganized or dissolved, and they were all districts serving rural communities.



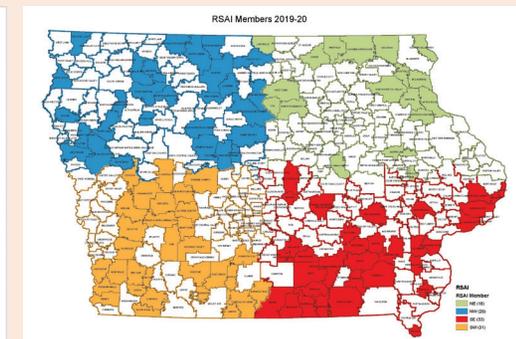
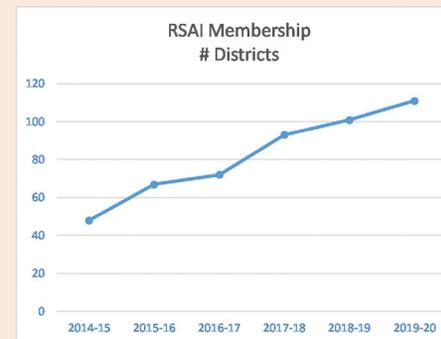
MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

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.
- **Testimony:** RSAI provides written and/or verbal testimony regarding proposed issues, rules and legislation to key legislative and executive branch decision-making bodies.
- **Representation:** RSAI Professional Advocate, Margaret Buckton, represents RSAI member schools at the statehouse during the Legislative Session, and works with the executive branch during the interim. RSAI also recruits participants for policy makers seeking representatives from rural schools.
- **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 needed to be efficient and effective, and the amazing education rural schools deliver to Iowa students.
- **Networking:** RSAI posts media stories about rural schools across the nation and in Iowa on its website, serves as the Iowa state affiliate of the National Rural Education Association (NREA) and is a member of the Iowa Rural Development Council. NREA shares newsletters with federal actions important to rural schools, notices of grants and funding opportunities, and best practice topics of interest.
- **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.
- **ISFIS Support:** Iowa School Finance Information Services (ISFIS) provides RSAI association management and legislative advocate functions, maintains the website and membership database, staffs meetings, and provides communications, school finance, and legislative support services. ISFIS also provides a \$100 reduction to RSAI membership fees if schools use ISFIS Supplemental Policy Services.

RSAI MEMBERS

RSAI membership is divided into four separate regions and continues to grow. Join your voices with other rural schools to strengthen rural education for Iowa students.



RSAI WEBSITE



A plethora of 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.rsai.org

LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

The RSAI legislative priorities are established through a grassroots effort beginning at the RSAI Regional Meetings taking place during the summer. RSAI's Legislative Committee recommends the platform for the upcoming legislative session, based on that member input, for approval by members at their Annual Meeting each October. Recent Legislative Priorities are as follows:

- **Adequate Formula Funding** is critical for rural school survival. The cost per pupil increase must keep up with the economy, balance state and local funds, and be set timely to allow budget planning and staffing. The 2020 priority requested that the SSA rate should be set no lower than 3.75%.
- **Student Mental Health Services** require increased access and funding for children. In addition to funding for AEA services and other providers, an array of services should include telehealth services received at school. Providers should not pass on administrative or billing work to schools and schools should not be providers of mental health services.
- **Educator & Staff Shortage** require maximum flexibility to meet offer & teach requirements. Iowa must allow experience as evidence for Iowa licensure, develop loan forgiveness and promote other solutions to attract and retain school staff to rural Iowa.
- **Formula and Transportation Equity** has progressed, but the \$155 per pupil formula gap should be closed within ten years. Transportation equity support should continue to reimburse high-cost districts so that none pay more than the state average per pupil transportation cost.
- **Opportunity Equity for Low SES** demands resources for at-risk students based on need while addressing the inequity of the dropout prevention cap. The formula must recognize the cost of providing equal opportunities to low income students. School districts should be granted spending authority for students' fees waived due to poverty.
- **Sharing Incentives and Efficiencies** should be extended and expanded to provide services and programs in rural schools and build relationships with other districts.
- **Quality Preschool** should generate a 1.0 weighting.
- **School Safety** depends on additional funding for security personnel and training to protect against active shooter and other emergency situations presenting harm.
- **School Bonds** should be approved by a simple majority of voters, 50% plus 1.

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 local control and funding include:

- **Home Rule:** trust local leaders to understand best what students in their communities need
- **More Board Authority:** through locally-driven dropout prevention plans
- **Transportation equity:** funding is now incorporated in the formula
- **Formula equity:** progress to close the district cost per pupil gap is being made each year
- **State Penny Extension:** extended through 2051
- **Operational Sharing Incentives:** expanded and extended through 2024
- **Staff Flexibility:** for CTE options for hard-to-staff content, waiver and support of new teachers to pass the Praxis test, and local offerings of on-line learning
- **Categorical Funds:** provide options for redirecting funds to needs of students, since one-size does not fit all



CONTACT US



WWW.RSAIA.ORG

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RSAI LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE

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 a representative from each of 4 regions across the state, each serving a 1-year term and includes the 3 at-large Leadership Committee members

See RSAI Website for current leadership, legislative committee members & contact info

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