

Happy New Year to Rural School Advocates! New Year, New Legislative Session.

School Finance Interim Committee met on Dec. 16. Iowa Code requires this Committee meet every five years. The meeting included presentations on ESAs, an Overview of the School Finance Formula, Open Enrollment, PK, Poverty, Dropout Prevention Disparity, Differentials in the DCPD and SCPP, AEA funding, Concurrent Enrollment and Supplementary Weightings, a Community College funding review and a presentation on Categorical Funding. Despite several proposals suggested by Democratic members of the Committee, no recommendations were supported by the majority Republicans. See committee members, links to presentations, agenda and final recommendations of the Committee on the legislative website here: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/committees/committee?endYear=2024&groupID=21383>

Area Education Agency Task Force met on Dec. 9. The committee was requested by HF 2612 and authorized by the Legislative Council. Committee members reviewed their charge and discussed what additional information was required in order to make recommendations. One motion considered was to delay the timeline for changes to special education funding for an additional year, which would have kept the current system in place for the 2026 fiscal year, delaying retainage of 10% of special education funding at the local district level until July 1, 2026. That motion failed. The committee also recommended they continue to meet, as early as February, 2025, before the final funnel deadline in case their recommendation would require legislation in the 2025 Session. The committee approved this recommendation. Additional Public Members are listed on the Committee's [webpage](#). The LSA's legal update of the meeting includes recommendations and the list of information requested, which is found here: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/publications/LU/1518133.pdf>

Lt. Governor Cournoyer: Gov. Reynolds appointed Sen. Chris Cournoyer as Lt. Governor, replacing Adam Gregg who resigned last Fall to accept the position of CEO of the Iowa Bankers Association. Sen. Cournoyer, a former school board member, was an experienced voice in the Senate Republican Caucus in her leadership on the Education Committee, Education Appropriations Subcommittee, and Technology Committee among others. She also served as chair of the AEA Task Force in December. Her departure will likely shuffle some committee assignments in the Senate, so stay tuned for changes. Gov. Reynolds has ordered a special election to fill the Senate District 35 seat on Jan. 28. Senate District 35 includes Clinton County, and parts of Jackson and Scott counties. Iowa Republicans hold a 34-15 majority in the Senate with Cournoyer's resignation of her legislative seat.

RSAI Advocacy Resources:

- 2024 RSAI Legislative Digest – to review anything that happened last session [2024 RSAI Legislative Digest - Complete Digest](#) and [2024 Legislative Digest - RSAI Legislative Successes](#)
- [Sample Questions for Legislators & Candidates](#) - Updated Fall 2024
- 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.