

RSAI Annual Meeting Minutes

Oct. 15, 2024 4:30 – 7:30 p.m.

FFA Enrichment Center, DMACC Campus
1055 SW Prairie Trail Parkway, Ankeny, Iowa 50023

1. **Call Annual Meeting to Order.** Paul Croghan, RSAI Leadership Group Chair, called the meeting to order at 4:30 pm.
2. **Approval of the Agenda.** *Barb Schwamman, Osage CSD & Riceville CSD, moved approval of the agenda. Chris Fenster, Southeast Valley CSD, seconded. Vote was unanimously approved.*
3. **Introductions of Meeting Attendees.** All meeting attendees introduced themselves, indicated if they were part of the Leadership Group or 2024-25 Legislative Committee, and shared something they loved about rural schools.
4. **Annual Meeting Business:** Scott Williamson, Eddyville-Blakesburg-Fremont CSD, on behalf of Nick Trenkamp, Central CSD, Eastern Allamakee CSD, and Secretary/Treasurer of the RSAI Leadership Group, reviewed the financial reports included in the materials packet including the 2023-24 Financial Report & Annual Audit, the 2024-25 Budget and Professional Advocate Payment, and the 2024-25 RSAI Membership Dues schedule.
5. **Report Results of Election of Region Representatives to the Leadership Group.** Welcome back to Nick Trenkamp, Central CSD and Eastern Allamakee CSD, who was elected at the RSAI NE Regional Meeting this spring to serve as the RSAI Leadership Group NE Regional Director through October 2027.
6. **Election of RSAI At-Large Representative to the Leadership Group.** The position currently held by Caleb Bonjour, Gladbrook-Reinbeck CSD, is up for election at this meeting. Any board member or superintendent in a member district is eligible for the seat. The at-large members also serve on the Legislative Committee in addition to their Leadership Group duties.

Jen Peter, Belmond-Klemme CSD, nominated Caleb Bonjour, Gladbrook Reinbeck CSD, for election as the at-large representative. Seconded by Jay Marley, Tripoli CSD. No other nominations were brought forth.

Rich Schulte, Montezuma CSD, moved to cease nominations. Seconded by Justin Daggett, Manson Northwest Webster CSD. Unanimous approval to close nominations, with the exception of Caleb Bonjour, Gladbrook Reinbeck CSD, who abstained.

Results of the vote were unanimous to elect Caleb Bonjour, Gladbrook Reinbeck CSD, to serve as the RSAI Leadership Group At-Large representative through October 2027, with the exception of Caleb Bonjour, Gladbrook Reinbeck CSD, who abstained.

7. **Presentation on “Midwest Workforce Challenges & Solutions” by Ron Cox of Midwest Workforce Strategies:** Ron Cox shared a presentation on developing a data-based plan

to overcome labor challenges in rural communities, which despite declining population, can adapt their thinking and tap unusual labor markets to fill needed positions. The Presentation recording will be posted for a limited time on the RSAI Annual Meeting webpage at: <https://www.rsaia.org/annual-meeting.html>

A brief break for dinner took place at this time.

8. **2024 Election Update:** Margaret Buckton, RSAI Professional Advocate, and Dave Daughton, RSAI Grassroots Advocate, provided information about the upcoming Nov. 5th election both locally and nationally. The slides of their presentation are posted on the RSAI Annual Meeting webpage at: <https://www.rsaia.org/annual-meeting.html>.
9. **Report of Aug. Legislative Committee Meeting.** Caleb Bonjour, Gladbrook-Reinbeck CSD and Vice-Chair of the 2024-25 RSAI Legislative Committee, on behalf of Ken Kasper, Garner-Hayfield-Ventura CSD & Chair of the 2024-25 RSAI Legislative Committee, acknowledged the work of the Legislative Committee members and discussed the process the Committee went through during their August meeting to prepare the 2025 recommended legislative priorities being presented.
10. **Establish RSAI legislative priorities for the upcoming 2025 Legislative Session**
 - **Adequate School Resources:** the increase in SSA provides resources for Iowa schools to deliver an educational experience for students that meets the expectations of Iowa parents, communities, employers and policymakers. Iowa's school foundation formula must maintain balanced state and local resources, be predictable, at least minimally exceed inflation, allow schools to compete for labor, and assure adequate time for budget planning and staffing.

What schools can deliver is dependent on the level of funding provided, which begins with the 2025-26 school year and requires a consistent and sustainable commitment:

- **World-Class Education:** an investment of at least 10% SSA (\$783 per pupil, or \$4.35 per day of 180 days of instruction) would position Iowa schools and AEAs to deliver a world-class education, lower class sizes, attract and retain qualified staff, increase and individualize internships and other workforce experiences for students, and provide programs to close achievement gaps. Iowa per pupil expenditures fell seven places since 2021, now ranking 36th in the nation in 2022, \$2,374 short of the national average (source: 2022 Annual Survey of School System Finances, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/school-finances.html>). The 10% investment would be a down payment in closing Iowa's lagging funding gap unless other states commit even more to their students' education.
- **Sustain Current Status:** an investment of at least 5% (\$392 per pupil, or \$2.18 per day of 180 days of instruction) would position school districts and AEAs to maintain current status with Iowa's competitive economy, recovering partially from high inflation and increased student needs.
- **Continued Erosion:** an investment of 2.5% (\$196 per pupil, or \$1.09 per day of 180 days of instruction) will partially cover expected increased costs of the next fiscal

- year, including staff salaries and benefits, but will require schools and AEAs to scale back, provide part-time librarians, counselors and nurses, shift some classes to online learning, or take other actions to squeeze more out of the current system in order to set a salary sufficient to retain existing staff (teachers, bus drivers, custodians, paraprofessionals) and provide a rounded course offering and programs.
- **Impact of AEA changes:** rural schools may not be able to afford the services, especially education services (such as crisis support, instructional materials and professional development) and media services (such as software, technical equipment, and virtual libraries), which AEAs used to provide, given changes in economy of scale and AEA staffing challenges. Without sufficient increases in SSA to cover these costs combined with fewer dollars provided to the AEAs, rural school students and staff may not be able to access or afford the support that AEAs have provided in the past.

Darin Jones, AHSTW CSD, moved approval as presented. Bill Watson, Martensdale-St. Marys CSD, seconded. Discussion ensued. Vote was unanimously approved.

- **Staff Shortages:** In both the short and long term, policies based on trust champion teaching as a valued profession, and improved compensation and benefits options for educators are necessary. Iowans, especially our state leaders, must foster respect for the education profession, which is well deserved, to attract more Iowans into teaching and retain more teachers in Iowa.

In addition to sufficient SSA and supportive messages, strategies to rebuild Iowa's education workforce must address these areas during a continuing staff shortage:

- **Recruitment:** to rebuild the pipeline of interest into education, schools need additional flexibility and resources to provide hiring incentives, ongoing investment in CTE and internship programs for high school students to build skill and experience in education fields, resources for grow-your-own educators, tuition assistance and pay for student teaching, and resources to offset student loans. The Governor and Legislature should dedicate resources to continue the Teacher and Paraeducator Registered Apprenticeship Grant Program, TPRA, funded initially by state pandemic funds that are soon to expire.
- **Retention:** to slow the out-migration of staff from schools to other professions or retirement, school districts need maximum flexibility such as use of the Management Fund for recruitment and retention incentives, flexibility to meet offer and teach requirements, opportunities for teaching expanded courses within existing and/or competency-based licensure, social studies and other content generalist credentials, a shorter bona fide retirement period for schools to rehire other retirees (such as bus drivers and paraeducators), increased state funding for teacher salary supplement to avoid salary compaction, and maintaining resources for mentoring, training and supporting staff.

- **Competitive and adequate compensation:** school funding primarily pays for quality staff and employees to provide a great education for students. The investment in higher teacher pay minimums from HF 2612 is a great start, but it must grow to keep up with other states and the Iowa economy. Unfortunately, if funding is not sufficient, the new mandated minimums will further stress the ability of school districts to adequately pay nonteaching staff. **Inadequate funding through Teacher Salary Supplement (TSS) has created salary compaction issues and school leaders are concerned about inequities of funding when not sufficient for all schools to pay staff.** The Legislature is encouraged to provide resources **to address salary compaction while minimizing per pupil inequities in the formula and** for hourly pay through a sufficient and sustainable funding vehicle.

Stan De Zeeuw, Sibley-Ocheyedan CSD, moved approval of the priority language as presented. Caleb Bonjour, Gladbrook-Reinbeck CSD, seconded. Discussion ensued.

Darin De Zeeuw, AHSTW CSD, offered an amendment to the Competitive and Adequate Compensation paragraph as noted in red. The motion to amend was seconded by Mark Taylor, Centerville CSD. Vote on the amendment was unanimously approved.

There was also discussion on the difficulty of schools, particularly rural school, in administering the TPRA apprenticeship program.

Vote on the priority including the amendment was unanimously approved.

- **Public School Priority:** as Iowa public schools will always be the first choice of most Iowa families, they must be adequately funded and supported by the State.
 1. Since the implementation of Education Savings Accounts, as enacted by HF 68 in 2023, is nearly complete, RSAI supports the following changes.
 - a. Public schools should be relieved of the mandate to reimburse private school parents or provide transportation for private schools.
 - b. Private school students returning to public school after the October enrollment count date should be funded in a timely manner.
 - c. ESA applications should be submitted and approved by the March 1 open enrollment deadline to inform both public and private schools in a timely manner for staff and budget planning.
 2. ESAs should not be expanded to homeschool students or non-accredited private schools. The state should resist a weakened accreditation process, which would encourage new private schools without high standards to come to Iowa.

Equity of expectations and regulations should be applied consistently to both public and private schools under an ESA environment. There should be a level playing field requiring acceptance of all students, consistent reporting, comprehensive services, mandated content and transparency. Private schools receiving payments from ESA's should be open to an audit and financial review to ensure funds are spent appropriately.

Brian Johnson, Southeast Valley CSD and Paton Churdan CSD, moved approval as presented. Seconded by Barb Schwamman, Osage CSD & Riceville CSD. Discussion ensued. Vote was unanimously approved.

- **Increasing Student Needs Including Poverty and Mental Health:** resources should be based on at-risk needs, not just enrollment. All school boards should be able to access up to 5% dropout prevention funding. School districts should be granted spending authority for FRPL-waived fees. Iowa should study the impact of poverty on educational outcomes and best practices of other states in closing associated achievement gaps, leading toward a significant and urgent update to Iowa's School Foundation Formula in funding programs for Iowa's neediest students.

Students in rural areas are often distanced from needed services. Iowa must continue to address improved access to funded community mental health services for children and the shortage of mental health professionals statewide (such as reciprocal licensing and access to out-of-state providers virtually). The State should provide resources for local districts to train school staff in mental health first aid and awareness and build community capacity to address the mental health needs of children.

Caleb Bonjour, Gladbrook-Reinbeck CSD, moved approval as presented. Seconded by Mark Taylor, Centerville CSD. Discussion ensued. Vote was unanimously approved.

- **Quality Preschool:** funding of quality statewide voluntary preschool for three and four-year-olds should be set at the 1.0 per pupil cost for full-time or prorated proportionally. The formula should include PK protections against budget and program impacts of preschool enrollment swings similar to K-12. Districts need access to resources for start-up costs to expand enrollment or increase the number of sections.

Full-day programming increases the opportunity for parent workforce participation, allows Iowa's limited childcare workforce capacity to focus on younger children, prevents later special education consequences, improves literacy and prepares students for learning. Although all students benefit from quality preschool, Iowa's low-income and non-English speaking students face barriers to half-day programs, making them even more at risk of lower long-term achievement.

Additionally, if parents of a 5-year-old who did not attend PK would prefer their student delay kindergarten, and there is no transitional kindergarten option in their district, they should be allowed to enroll their student in PK and that student should be counted for funding purposes.

Barb Schwamman, Osage CSD & Riceville CSD, moved approval as presented. Seconded by Will Dible, Alburnett CSD. Discussion ensued. By consensus, the group requested the RSAI Leadership Group consider adding language on flexibility of options determined locally. Vote was unanimously approved.

- **Whole Grade Sharing and Reorganization incentives,** set to expire at the end of the 2024-25 school year, should be extended. These incentives bring taxpayers and parents to the table in support of expanded opportunities for students, most often in districts without the

economy of scale necessary to provide a broad and varied academic and interscholastic experience for students. These incentives should either be included as an ongoing option for school districts in perpetuity or extended to at least June 30, 2035.

Mark Dohmen, North Cedar CSD and Olin CSD, moved approval as presented. Seconded by William Cline, Van Buren County CSD. Discussion ensued. Vote was unanimously approved.

- **Operational Sharing Incentives** should continue and be increased. The 21-student cap should be increased to allow access to new flexibility. Weightings should be sufficient to encourage and support sharing opportunities, with a 3-student weighting at a minimum per position. Reductions in weightings should be restored and/or additional weighting provided for districts to flexibly support critical positions. The addition of new positions over the last few years, such as mental health counselors, work-based learning coordinators and school resource officers, demonstrates the value of continued sharing incentives for both efficiency and student opportunity. With recent significant pressures on schools for technology data protection and cybersecurity, an additional position of technology director should generate supplementary weighting within this program. Some positions, such as those to address mental health or school safety, should be exempted from the cap (following the 2024 precedent, which exempted work-based learning coordinators from the cap).

Will Dible, Alburnett CSD, moved approval as presented. Jeff Privia, Clarinda CSD, seconded. Discussion ensued. By consensus, the group requested the RSAI Leadership Group consider incorporating language on other sharing with AEAs for education services, media services, etc. Vote was unanimously approved.

- **Local School Board Authority:** locally elected leaders closest to the community are in the best position to determine the interests of students, staff, district and stakeholders. District leaders need maximum flexibility to provide a great education to all students. The Legislature, the Executive Branch and the courts should follow Iowa Code 274.3 and liberally construe laws and regulations in deference to local control. Additionally, new state programs or mandates should be given adequate time to study, plan and implement. RSAI supports changes to the school start date which would restore local decision-making to schools and communities.

Mark Taylor, Centerville CSD, moved approval as presented. Mark Dohman, North Cedar CSD and Olin CSD seconded. Discussion ensued. Vote was approved with one in opposition.

- **Formula Equity:** resurrect and continue investments in formula equity, closing the \$140 state and district per pupil gap within ten years. Inequities in the formula, based on no longer relevant historical spending patterns over 40 years ago, must be corrected to support resources for all Iowa students.

Jay Marley, Tripoli, moved approval as presented. Seconded by Barb Schwamman, Osage CSD and Riceville CSD. Discussion ensued. Vote was unanimously approved.

- **Bond Issue Dates:** the restriction of bond elections to one annual date spikes the demand for providers, architects, bonders, and construction labor, while extending the time of

completion, all increasing costs to taxpayers. Since bond issues are approved by a supermajority of voters (60% +1), rather than a simple majority (50% +1), school districts should be given options of multiple election dates yearly.

Bill Watson, Martensdale St. Marys CSD, moved approval as presented. Seconded by Dennis Reinke, Lawton-Bronson CSD. Discussion ensued. By consensus, the group requested the RSAI Leadership Group consider incorporating language on simple majority vote and simplifying the process of threshold votes for bond issues currently at \$2.70 and \$4.05, into just one vote being required. Vote was unanimously approved.

- **Area Education Agencies:** Iowa's rural schools are critically reliant on Iowa's Area Education Agencies (AEAs), not only for special education services to students and training and support to staff, but also for instructional and media services. AEAs have provided rural school specialists to meet student needs or assist staff with the curriculum and materials necessary for student learning that would not otherwise be available or affordable. In addition, the economies of scale of the AEAs provide savings that schools would not otherwise be able to achieve. In addition to their central role of serving students with disabilities, the AEAs provide many needed services for schools, just to name a few: emergency support when a district loses a superintendent or school business official mid-year, virtual learning content, the printing of materials at affordable fees, training when districts undertake new instructional math or literacy initiatives, crisis supports and mental health services, etc. The Legislature should work closely with schools and AEAs in updating expectations and changing the funding or structure of AEA services in order to fully understand the impact on students and schools. Timelines to implement changes must allow for thoughtful planning and reasonable transitions.

Tom Messinger, Newton CSD, moved approval as presented. Seconded by Barb Schwamman, Osage CSD and Riceville CSD. Discussion ensued. Vote was unanimously approved.

- **Other:** No other priorities were raised by the group.
11. **Focus Area Prioritization:** Margaret Buckton, RSAI Professional Advocate, explained a process whereby each attendee was provided 6 stickers and asked to place them on the various priorities according to their importance to their school district. 3 stickers were to be placed on their #1 choice. 2 stickers on their #2 choice and 1 sticker on their #3 choice (although participants were allowed to place all of their stickers on one priority). RSAI Staff will compile the results from the Annual Meeting as well as survey of the overall RSAI membership. This information will inform the Leadership Group's prioritization of priorities and preparation of advocacy materials prior to the 2025 Session.
 12. **Press Release:** Margaret Buckton, RSAI Professional Advocate, encouraged attendees to submit a press release to their local newspaper regarding the RSAI Annual Meeting and 2025 Priorities. A sample will be circulated via email following the meeting.
 13. **Adjourn:** The meeting was concluded by mutual consent at 7:35 p.m.

RSAI Annual Meeting Attendees:*Yellow = Current Leadership Group/Legislative Committee Members;**Gray = Non-Voting Affiliate Members/Non-Member Districts/Guests*

District	First Name	Last Name	RSAI Member 2024-25
Alburnett	Will	Dible	Yes
Atlantic	Beth	Johnsen	Yes
Belmond-Klemme	Jenn	Peter	Yes
Boone	Julie	Trepa	Yes
CAM/Nodaway Valley	Paul	Croghan	Yes/Yes
Carroll	Nicole	McCarville	Yes
Centerville	Mark	Taylor	Yes
Clarinda/ South Page	Jeffrey	Privia	Yes/Yes
Creston	Deron	Stender	Yes
Davis County & Moulton Udell	Dan	Maeder	Yes/Yes
Eddyville Blakesburg Fremont	Scott	Williamson	Yes
Estherville Lincoln Central	Aiddy	Phomvisay	Yes
Gladbrook-Reinbeck	Caleb	Bonjour	Yes
Harlan	Jenny	Barnett	Yes
Interstate 35	Chad	Grandon	Yes
Lawton-Bronson	Chad	Shook	Yes
Lawton-Bronson	Dennis	Reinke	Yes
Lawton-Bronson	Bryan	Mesz	Yes
Manson Northwest Webster	Justin	Daggett	Yes
Marshalltown	Theron	Schutte	Yes
Martensdale-St. Marys	Bill	Watson	Yes
Montezuma	Rich	Schulte	Yes
Nashua-Plainfield & Tripoli	Jay	Marley	No/Yes
Newton	Tom	Messinger	Yes
North Cedar & Olin	Mark	Dohmen	Yes/Yes
North Tama & South Tama	John	Cain	Yes/Yes
Osage and Riceville	Barb	Schwamman	Yes/Yes
Pocahontas Area	Sherre	Johnson	Yes
Pocahontas Area	Joe	Kramer	Yes
Pocahontas Area	Tony	Halligan	Yes
Riverside	Steph	Anderson	Yes
Sibley-Ocheyedan	Stan	De Zeeuw	Yes
Southeast Valley & Paton Churdan	Brian	Johnson	Yes/Yes
Southwest Valley (Corning & Villisca)	Chris	Fenster	Yes/Yes
Van Buren County	Jeremy	Hissem	Yes
Van Buren County	Alisha	Duehn	Yes
Van Buren County	Dan	Smith	Yes
Van Buren County	William	Cline	Yes

District	First Name	Last Name	RSAI Member 2024-25
Waverly-Shell Rock	David	Hill	Yes
Waverly-Shell Rock	Dennis	Epley	Yes
Great Prairie AEA	Nathan	Wood	Affiliate
Heartland AEA	Cindy	Yelick	Affiliate
Prairie Lakes AEA	Dan	Mart	Affiliate
Iowa State University	William Scott	Dryer	Affiliate
University of Iowa	Mark	Hopkins	Affiliate
University of Northern Iowa	Sharon	Dentlinger	Affiliate
Denovo Construction	Patrick	Davis	Sponsor
Denovo Construction	Russ	Reiter	Sponsor
Midwest Workforce Strategies	Ron	Cox	Speaker

RSAI/ISFIS Staff Attendees

RSAI Professional Advocate, Margaret Buckton, margaret@iowaschoolfinance.com

RSAI Grassroots Advocate, Dave Daughton, dave.daughton@rsaia.org

RSAI Accountant, Jen Albers, jen@iowaschoolfinance.com

ISFIS Partner, Larry Sigel, larry@iowaschoolfinance.com

And helpers

Minutes respectfully submitted, Oct. 15, 2024 by RSAI Staff, Margaret Buckton and Jen Albers