

RURAL SCHOOL ADVOCATES OF IOWA



Our Collective Voices are Stronger Together



2022-23

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 join 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 community 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.

**IOWA RURAL
DEVELOPMENT
COUNCIL**

www.nrea.net

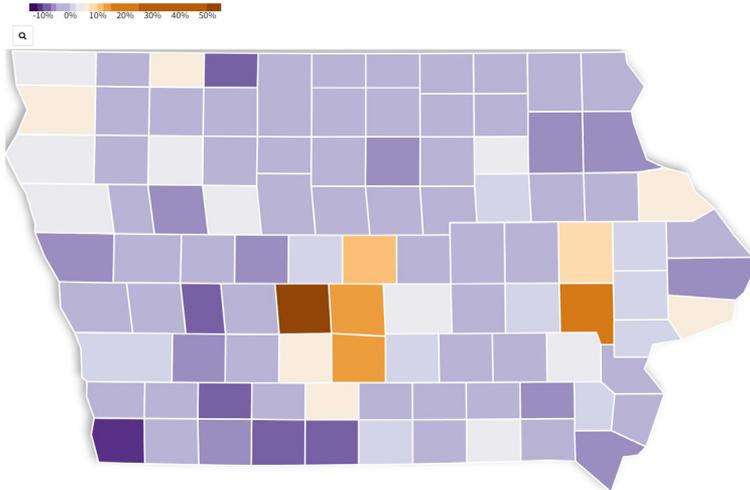
www.iowardc.org

RURAL TRENDS

Iowa county population growth: 2010 to 2020

Iowa's population grew 4.7 percent over the last 10 years, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. But that growth was uneven — most of it happened in the state's four largest counties. An IowaWatch analysis shows that seven of every 10 of the state's 923 towns with fewer than 5,000 people lost population or made no gains since 2010.

Counties in purple lost population.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

This map shows the percentage change in population in Iowa by County from 2010 to 2020, with 68 of Iowa's 99 counties losing population. The scale is from a low of negative 11% (in the darkest purple) to a high of 51% (in the darkest red).

- 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.
- Despite demographic changes, rural school leaders remain hopeful and foster an all-hands-on-deck engagement, ready to innovate, collaborate, and invigorate staff and communities to meet every student's need.



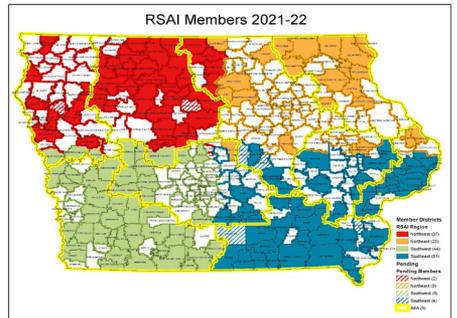
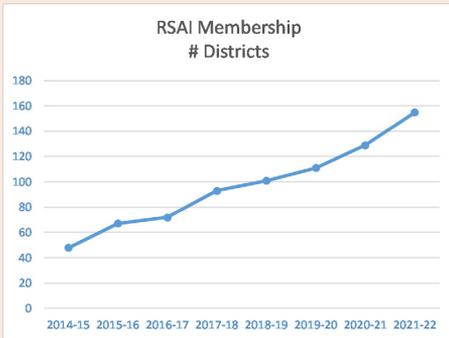
MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

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. Calls to Actions on priorities at key points during the session when advocacy action is required.
- **Testimony:** RSAI provides written and/or verbal testimony regarding proposed issues, rules and legislation to key legislative and executive branch decision-makers.
- **Representation:** RSAI Advocates, Margaret Buckton and Dave Daughton, represent RSAI member schools at the statehouse during the Legislative Session and work with the executive branch during the interim. RSAI also recruits participants for policy makers seeking rural school input.
- **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 improving efficiency and effectiveness, and the amazing education rural schools deliver to students.
- **Networking:** RSAI is a member of the Iowa Rural Development Council, the Iowa affiliate of the National Rural Education Association (NREA) and the National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium (NREAC), which share federal actions important to rural schools, notices of grants and funding opportunities, and best practices.
- **Member-Only Programs:**
 - ***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.
 - ***TPRA Pipeline Grant Consortium:** Submission of a grant on behalf of RSAI member districts for Governor's Teacher Para-educator Registered Apprenticeship funding.
- **ISFIS Support:** Iowa School Finance Information Services (ISFIS) provides RSAI association management and legislative advocacy 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 Board/Policy Hosting Service.

RSAI MEMBERS

RSAI membership is divided into four regions and continues to grow. Join your voices with other rural schools to strengthen rural education for Iowa students. RSAI appreciates our nine Area Education Agency partners who have all pledged support as associate members.



RSAI WEBSITE



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.rsaia.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 member input, for approval by members at their Annual Meeting each October. Top Legislative Priorities from 2022 were:

- **Adequate School Resources** are 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 SSA rate should be set no lower than 3.75% for FY 2023.
- **Educator Shortage & Quality Instruction** require maximum flexibility to hire staff including strategies to attract and retain staff; flexibility to meet offer and teach requirements, loan forgiveness, a special education generalist credential, creation of a Public Service CTE strand, hire retirees without IPERS impact, and elimination of barriers to licensure.
- **Local School Board Authority** means locally elected leaders closest to the community are in the best position to determine the interest of students, staff and stakeholders. District leaders need maximum flexibility to provide a great education to all students. The Legislature, Executive Branch, and Courts should follow Iowa Code 274.3 and liberally construe the statute to effectuate local control.
- **Quality Preschool** requires funding at 1.0 per pupil cost for full-time or prorated proportionally, and formula protections against budget and program impacts of PK enrollment swings (budget guarantee/on-time spending authority).
- **Opportunity Equity for Low SES** demands resources for at-risk students based on need. All school boards should have 5% dropout prevention funding. School districts should be granted spending authority for students' fees waived due to poverty.
- **Sharing Incentives/Efficiencies** requires extension of Whole-Grade Sharing and Reorganization and Operational Sharing incentives. The 21-student cap should be expanded to allow access to new flexibility. Weightings should be sufficient to encourage and support sharing opportunities.

Other Legislative Priorities from 2022 included:

- **Assessing and Addressing Staff/Student Social, Emotional and Behavioral Health**
- **Formula and Transportation Equity**
- **Internet Connectivity and Access**

RSAI opposed Education Savings Accounts/Vouchers during the 2022 Session.

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 and funding include:

- **More Board Authority:** through statutory home rule, locally-driven dropout prevention plans and board authority to redirect funds to needs of students, since one-size does not fit all, adding TLC to the list in 2021.
- **Transportation & Formula Equity:** funding is now incorporated in the formula and will grow by the SSA rate annually. Progress to close the district cost per pupil gap continues.
- **Operational Sharing Incentives:** expanded and extended through 2024.
- **Staff Flexibility:** CTE options for hard-to-staff content, minimize the barrier of praxis testing, local offerings of online learning, and relaxed licensure requirements allowing rural schools to better work with the staff we have to support student learning. Most recently, the increase to compensation limits for IPERS eligible individuals was enacted in 2022.
- **Broadband Expansion:** state and federal investment to connect all areas to high-speed internet supporting education, telehealth, diversity of services, and a workforce that can connect virtually while enjoying a rural quality of life.



CONTACT US



WWW.RSAIA.ORG

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RSAI LEADERSHIP GROUP

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 representatives from each of 4 regions and 9 AEAs across the state, and also includes the 3 at-large Leadership Group members, each serving a 1-year term

See the RSAI Website for current Leadership Group and Legislative Committee members and their contact information.

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