May 10, 2017

Dr. Robert Olson, Chair

Rural School Advocates of Iowa

Superintendent, Clarion-Goldfield-Dows,

319 Third Ave. N.E., Clarion, IA 50525

Honorable Governor Terry Branstad and Lieutenant Governor Kim Reynolds,

Iowa State Capitol

1007 E Grand Ave #101,

Des Moines, IA 50319

**Requesting Approval of HF 573: Home Rule District Authority**

A Home Rule framework for decision-making starts with the assumption that local leaders, closest to students and communities, will make the best decisions for their schools. This is in contrast to Iowa’s current system of Dillon’s Rule, under which schools can only do what is expressly authorized. Dillon’s Rule is based on a court case in 1868. Iowa cities and counties were granted home rule via Iowa constitutional amendment (municipalities in 1968 with the 25th amendment and counties via the 37th amendment in 1978.) Both of those amendments specifically excluded taxing authority, which remains heavily regulated by the State (and is also excluded in HF 573). Such flexibility has not yet been extended to school districts, although for many other purposes of statutory interpretation, school districts are considered to be municipalities.

Although HF 573 Grants Home Rule authority at a statutory level, school districts would still be required to follow laws that prescribe their actions as well as avoid actions prohibited in law. **Why do school leaders support Home Rule?**

* School districts are called upon to deliver results, but often cannot exercise local authority to implement new practices, update processes, or think creatively.
* Recent examples involve the need to change Iowa law to allow districts to make electronic payments rather than “stamp warrants” or the ability to offer hours instead of days of instruction, both of which required legislative approval.
* Transition to home rule need not be cumbersome. The state of Kansas moved to statutory home rule for schools in 2003, without court challenge since.

Decision-makers closest to communities are in the best position to make decisions benefiting students in those communities. What Alexander Hamilton explained 1787 holds true today: “It is a known fact in human nature that its affections are commonly weak in proportion to the distance or diffusiveness of the object. Upon the same principle that a man is more attached to his family than to his neighborhood, to his neighborhood than to the community at large, the people of each State would be apt to feel a stronger bias towards their local governments than towards the government of the Union; “[Federalist, no. 17 Federal v. Consolidated](http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch8s23.html) “, Dec. 5, 1787

**RSAI respectfully requests your approval of HF 573, granting statutory Home Rule to Iowa school districts and school boards.**

Sincerely, on behalf of 71 Iowa school districts,

Bob Olson, Chair, RSAI