



## 2023 RSAI Legislative Priorities Approved at the RSAI Annual Meeting Oct. 25, 2022

**Adequate School Resources:** the increase in SSA provides the resources for Iowa schools to deliver an educational experience for students that meets the expectations of Iowa parents, communities, employers and policy makers. What schools can deliver is dependent on the level of funding provided, which begins with the 2023-24 school year and requires a consistent and sustainable commitment:

- **World Class Education:** An investment of at least 10% SSA (\$741 per pupil, or \$4.12 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 fall \$1,200 short of the national average, which does not meet the standard of Iowa's pride in our foundation of education, as shown on the Iowa state quarter. 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% (\$371 per pupil, or \$2.06 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% (\$185 per pupil, or \$1.03 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 to scale back, provide part-time librarians, counselors and nurses, shift some classes to on-line 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.

Iowa's school foundation formula must maintain balanced state and local resources, be predictable, and assure adequate time for budget planning and staffing.

**Education Staff Shortage:** In addition to sufficient SSA, strategies to rebuild Iowa's education workforce must address two areas during an unprecedented staff shortage:

**Recruitment:** to rebuild the pipeline of interest into education, the Legislature, BOEE and DE must provide additional flexibility for school districts to provide hiring incentives, ongoing investment in CTE programs for high school students to study and experience work in education, provide resources for grow-your-own educators and appropriate certifications, provide means-tested tuition assistance and minimize the economic costs of unpaid student teaching, provide more loan forgiveness, and change the culture of political speech to restore education to a respected profession.

**Retention:** to slow the out-migration of staff from schools to other professions or retirement, the Legislature, BOEE and DE must provide maximum flexibility to hire staff to deliver great instruction; additional flexibility for retention incentives, flexibility to meet offer and teach requirements, opportunities for teaching expanded courses within existing and/or competency



based licensure, institute a special education generalist credential, allow districts to hire retirees without a negative IPERS impact, and maintain the commitment to resources for mentoring, training and supporting staff.

In both the short and long term, legislation, policy, and public support will not only provide improved compensation for educators, but will also foster the respect for the education profession that is well deserved. Only when we are able to do this will Iowa be able to have adequate numbers of quality individuals educating our children.

**Public School Priority:** Public schools must be adequately funded and supported by the state. Investments in education savings accounts, voucher programs, school tuition organizations or home school, whether by tax credit or direct appropriation, remove resources from public schools in three ways;

- 1) Iowa's funding formula is enrollment based. Fewer students results in fewer resources for staff, programs and courses for the vast majority of students remaining in the public school. For rural schools in particular, the loss of students further stresses an already tight economy of scale.
- 2) Carving Iowa's education funding pie into more pieces necessarily means a smaller piece of pie for Iowa's public-school students. Rural school leaders, looking ahead to the implementation of the 2022 historic tax cuts, already fear the inability of the state to adequately fund public schools, let alone, take on the commitment of a second educational delivery system.
- 3) School choice programs typically start small, but quickly expand eligibility criteria (increased income eligibility, support for home school, or even eventual public support of private tuition for any student at any private school that will take them.) Many rural school districts do not have a private school in their community today. In the future, private online academies, the pressure for the state to support home schooling and the profit motive to expand private schools without the corresponding costs of oversight and compliance will create lower economies of scale and the inability for small rural schools to survive increased rigorous state accreditation compliance.

RSAI is opposed to all forms of education savings accounts/voucher programs/additional public funds appropriated for private or home school. Such programs traditionally do not include accountability for tax expenditures, are not required to educate and assess all children or provide special education services, and are hidden from the public oversight that accompanies public funding. With recent expansions to unlimited open enrollment to any public school in Iowa, combined with Iowa's current public investment in private religious schools and home school exceeding \$80 million, even small demonstration programs or pilot projects should be resisted; the camel's nose under the tent is soon followed by the humps.

**Opportunity Equity:** resources based on at-risk need, in addition to enrollment. All school boards should have the opportunity 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 practice 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. Investments in programs for at-risk students prepare them for full participation in the workforce, improve school safety for all students, minimize tax increases to remediate social costs later and improve outcomes for students and families.



**Quality Preschool:** funding of quality statewide voluntary preschool at the 1.0 per pupil cost for full time or prorated proportionally. Formula protections against budget and program impacts of preschool enrollment swings (budget guarantee/on-time spending authority). Full day programming increases the opportunity for parent workforce participation, allows Iowa's limited child care workforce capacity to focus on younger children, prevents later special education consequences, improves literacy and prepares students for learning.

**Sharing Incentives/Efficiencies:** extension of Whole Grade Sharing, Reorganization and Operational Sharing Incentives. Expand the 21-student cap to allow access to new flexibility. Weightings should be sufficient to encourage and support sharing opportunities, with a 3-student weighting at a minimum. The addition of new positions over the last few years, such as the work-based learning coordinator and school resource officer, demonstrates the value of continuing sharing incentives for both efficiency and extended opportunities for students.

**Student Mental Health:** increased access to funded community mental health services for children. Address the shortage of mental health professionals statewide, provide resources for local districts to train school staff in social emotional learning awareness and build community capacity to collaborate for a collective solution to the increasing mental health needs of children.

**Local School Board Authority:** locally elected leaders closest to the community are in the best position to determine the interest 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 statute to effectuate local control.

**Formula and Transportation Equity:** continue investments in formula equity, closing the state and district per pupil gap within ten years and maintain the commitment to transportation equity support without burdensome reporting requirements. General fund directed at transportation is not available to spend on teachers, curriculum and opportunities for students. According to the DE's [2020-21 Annual Transportation Report](#), transportation expenditures per pupil ranged from \$27 per pupil to \$1,012 per pupil. Thanks to the transportation equity funding commitment, all districts with high expenditures were reimbursed down to the state average of \$353 per pupil. Inequities in the formula, based on no longer relevant historical spending over 40 years ago, must be corrected to support resources for all Iowa students.