

## **RSAI Legislative Committee Meeting Minutes** **August 10, 2023 (10am – 2pm)**

ISFIS Office, 1201 63<sup>rd</sup> Street, Des Moines, IA 50322 or Via Zoom

### **RSAI Legislative Committee Members & Staff:**

#### Zoom

NE (Central Rivers AEA) - Jay Marley, Tripoli CSD, Superintendent

SE (Grant Wood AEA) - Mark Dohmen, North Cedar CSD and Olin CSD, Superintendent

At-Large - SE (Mississippi Bend AEA) - Dan Peterson, Central DeWitt CSD, Superintendent

At-Large - NW (Northwest AEA) - Brent Jorth, Central Lyon CSD, Superintendent

#### In Person

NE (Keystone AEA) - Barb Schwamman, Osage CSD and Riceville CSD, Superintendent

NW (Central Rivers AEA) - Ken Kasper, Garner Hayfield Venture CSD, Superintendent

SE (Central Rivers AEA) - Rich Schulte, Montezuma CSD, Superintendent

SE (Great Prairie AEA) - Mark Taylor, Centerville CSD, Superintendent

SE (Heartland AEA) - Michelle Havenstrite, PCM CSD, Superintendent

SE (Mississippi Bend AEA) - Mike Van Sickle, Louisa-Muscatine CSD, Superintendent

SW (Green Hills AEA) - Deron Stender, Creston CSD, Superintendent

SW (Heartland AEA) - Sharon Dentlinger, Interstate 35 CSD, Superintendent

At-Large - SE (Great Prairie AEA) - Scott Williamson, Eddyville-Blakesburg-Fremont CSD, Supt

Staff - Margaret Buckton, Dave Daughton, Larry Sigel, Jen Albers

#### Unable to Attend

NW (Prairie Lakes AEA) - Brian Johnson, Southeast Valley CSD, Superintendent

NW (Northwest AEA) - Mike Pardun, Denison CSD and Schleswig CSD, Superintendent

### **1. Introductions, share contact information, discuss key legislative contacts**

*The Legislative Committee was called to order at 10am. Members of the Committee introduced themselves, discussed what excited them about the start of this school year, and shared contact information.*

### **2. Review Legislative Committee Responsibilities**

*Buckton reviewed the responsibilities of members of this Committee.*

### **3. Elect Legislative Committee Chair and Vice Chair/Secretary**

*a. Chair: Sharon Dentlinger nominated Scott Williamson. Mark Taylor seconded. No other nominations. Approved unanimously.*

*b. Vice Chair/Secretary: Scott Williamson nominated Sharon Dentlinger. Mike Van Sickle seconded. No other nominations. Approved unanimously.*

**4. Review RSAI Membership and Organization Essential Values**

*Buckton reviewed the new membership map. Committee members read and discussed the RSAI Essential Values to determine if any needed to be updated. Several updates were suggested by the group by consensus.*

**5. Consider RSAI Bylaws Committee Recommendation**

*Buckton reviewed the recommended bylaws changes presented by the Bylaws Committee’s July 31 meeting. Buckton thanked Scott Williamson, Dan Peterson and Nick Trenkamp for their service on the Committee. Barb Schwamman moved approval of the recommended changes to the bylaws. Michelle Havenstrite seconded. Approved unanimously.*

**6. Legislative Outreach – Share Local Examples & Strategies**

*The group divided into groups and discussed local examples and strategies around legislative outreach, then shared out with the group. Examples included: neighboring districts hosting legislators together, inviting legislators to attend local board meetings or touring individual districts, inviting legislators to community conversations, meeting legislators at the statehouse (going to them), some legislators have standing zoom sessions and welcome conversation, partnering with a local community college for legislative visit, incorporating student voices into visits with legislators, ensuring local newspapers and business leaders are involved in legislator visits. All expressed the desire for more of this to occur and that some legislators were more open to connecting than others.*

**7. Discussion/Report from RSAI Regional Meetings & Legislative Issues Survey**

*Buckton presented and the Committee discussed the priorities from the Regional Meetings and the survey results of members. Survey data showed the consistency of how important members thought each issue was to their district, which is reflected in the following table. The averages of individual, district and total responses are shown, with 1 being Low Priority and 7 being High Priority:*

Priority	Overall Average	Individual Average	District Average
Adequate School Resources/State Supplemental Assistance	6.7	6.7	6.7
Educator/Staff Shortage and Quality Instruction	6.6	6.5	6.7
Student Mental Health	6.0	5.8	6.1
Local School Board Authority Generally (oppose unfunded mandates and explicit state directives)	5.8	5.8	5.9
Public School Priority	5.8	5.6	6.0
Quality Preschool	5.4	5.4	5.4
Sharing Incentives/Efficiencies	5.4	5.4	5.4
Formula and Transportation Equity	5.2	5.3	5.1
Opportunity Equity/Resources based on At-Risk Need	5.1	5.1	5.1
Other - School Safety - Funding for Training & Safety Personnel	5.1	5.2	5.0
Other - Bonding Capacity at Simple Majority Vote	4.9	5.1	4.8

**8. Establish 2024 Draft Priorities to recommend to RSAI Leadership Group and Annual Meeting**

*The Committee made recommendations of draft priorities for the 2024 legislative session. See separate doc attached to these minutes for the draft language as discussed by the Legislative Committee. Buckton will continue to edit wording and circulate to the Leadership Group for final recommendation to the Annual Meeting.*

**9. Plans for October 17th RSAI Annual Meeting (select Leadership roles for priorities)**

*Committee discussed the agenda for the RSAI Annual Meeting and selected who would lead discussion of each priority area. Buckton will review for balance and make any adjustments so that all have a role in the Annual Meeting.*

**10. Advocacy Supports**

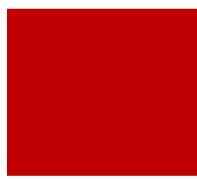
*Buckton highlighted RSAI Comments to the State Board of Education on Implementation of SF 496 and other 2023 Session Laws, the 2023 RSAI Legislative Digest, and other advocacy actions and supports.*

**11. Next Steps/Other Business**

*None were brought forth for discussion.*

**12. Adjourn**

*The Committee meeting adjourned by mutual consent at 2:15pm.*



## 2024 RSAI Legislative Priorities - Draft

**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, 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 2024-25 school year and requires a consistent and sustainable commitment:

- **World-Class Education:** an investment of at least 10% SSA (\$763 per pupil, or \$4.23 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, ranked 29<sup>th</sup> in the nation in 2021, fall \$1,581 short of the national average (*source: NCES Finance Tables, May 2023*), 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% (\$382 per pupil, or \$2.12 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% (\$191 per pupil, or \$1.06 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.

**Staff Shortages:** 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 including expanded intern licenses, 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; 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, institute social studies and other content generalist credentials, define a shorter bona fide retirement period for schools to hire retirees, consider tax incentives for teachers, and maintain the commitment to 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. In 2019-20, Iowa ranked 28<sup>th</sup> in the nation in average teacher pay (including TLC for teacher leaders at the high end) and starting teacher pay was ranked 38<sup>th</sup> (source: *Learning Policy Institute, Understanding Teacher Compensation State by State Analysis*).

In both the short and long term, legislation, policy, and public support provide improved compensation and benefit options for educators. They must also foster respect for the education profession, which is well deserved, to attract more Iowans into teaching and retain more teachers in Iowa. Only when we are able to do this will Iowa be able to have adequate numbers of quality individuals educating and supporting our children.

**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) Education Savings Accounts, as enacted by HF 68 in 2023, require further legislation to minimize the impact on public students and schools.
  - 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 timely (included in the enrollment count and budget for the next year or added to the class action requests for SBRC modified supplemental amount similar to on-time funding spending authority.)
  - c. ESA (and open enrollment) applications should be submitted and approved by an annual deadline to inform both public and private schools timely for staff and budget planning.
- 2) ESAs should not be expanded to homeschool students or a weakened accreditation process expanded to more private schools.
- 3) Equity of expectations and regulations should be applied consistently to both public and private schools under an ESA environment.
- 4) Many rural school districts do not have a private school in their community today. In the future, the expansion of private online academies, the pressure for the State to support homeschooling and the profit motive to expand private schools without the corresponding costs of oversight and compliance will create lower economies of scale, compounding the challenge for small rural schools to survive rigorous State accreditation compliance.

**Opportunity Equity, Increasing Student Needs and Mental Health:** resources should be 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 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. 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. Students in rural areas are often distanced from services. Iowa must continue to address needed access to funded community mental health services for children and the shortage of mental health professionals statewide. The State should provide resources for local districts to train school staff in mental health first aid and awareness and build community capacity to collaborate for a collective solution to the increasing mental health needs of children.

**Quality Preschool:** funding of quality statewide voluntary preschool 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 like they do for K-12 (budget guarantee/on-time spending authority). 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.

**Sharing Incentives/Efficiencies:** Whole Grade Sharing, Reorganization and Operational Sharing Incentives should be extended. 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. 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. Some positions, such as those to address mental health or school safety, should be exempted from the cap.

**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.

**Formula Equity:** continue investments in formula equity, closing the 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.

**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 cost to taxpayers. Bond issues, like other ballot initiatives, should be approved by a simple majority of voters.